

February 2 Lesson 10 (NIV)

SINGLE-MINDED OBEDIENCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 91

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:1–11

MATTHEW 4:1–11

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

KEY VERSE

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ” —Matthew 4:10

HONORING GOD

Unit 3: Jesus Teaches About True Worship

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Conquering Our Appetites
- B. Lesson Context
- I. In the Wilderness (MATTHEW 4:1–4)
 - A. Tempted by Bread (vv. 1–3)
 - B. More than Bread (v. 4)
- II. At the Temple (MATTHEW 4:5–7)
 - A. Tempted to Prove Love (vv. 5, 6)
“It Can’t Happen to Me”
 - B. Trusting the Lord (v. 7)
- III. On a Mountain (MATTHEW 4:8–11)
 - A. Tempted by Power (vv. 8, 9)
Seeing Is Possessing
 - B. The End Requires the Means (vv. 10, 11)

Conclusion

- A. Triumph over Temptation
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.*

Elijah *Ee-lye-juh.*

Horeb *Ho-reb.*

Gethsemane *Geth-sem-uh-nee (G as in get).*

Isaiah *Eye-zay-uh.*

Kidron *Kid-ron.*

Massah *Mass-uh.*

Messiah *Meh-sigh-uh.*

Nehemiah *Nee-huh-my-uh.*

Sinai *Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.*

Introduction

A. Conquering Our Appetites

Churches with a liturgical heritage have long observed the “fast of Lent.” Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a 40-day period of self-denial loosely patterned on Jesus’ 40-day fast before his temptation. Traditionally, Lent has involved denying oneself certain foods.

However, many churches now promote fasting as a self-discipline during that 40-day period since many people are given to consuming large quantities of food. Other disciplines encouraged are those of Bible study and prayer as replacements for unhealthy practices involving body and/or spirit. The hope, of course, is that the 40 days will shape the rest of one’s year.

Proverbs 25:28 likens the lack of self-control to a city whose walls are broken down and therefore defenseless. How Jesus maintained his self-discipline when his defenses seemed at their lowest is still a model for us some 20 centuries later.

B. Lesson Context

The time of preparation for Jesus’ ministry was almost over but not quite. By the point where today’s lesson begins, Matthew has told us of the work of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah (Matthew 3:1–12). John’s ministry intersected with that of the Messiah himself at the baptism of Jesus. Done “to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15), Jesus’ baptism was a kind of anointing. It showed that he had accepted the task given to him and that he had the approval of both the Holy Spirit and the Father (3:16, 17).

The account of Jesus’ temptation as recorded in Matthew 4 gives far more detail than the summary in Mark 1:12, 13. The parallel account in Luke 4:1–13 offers additional insights. The most obvious difference between the accounts in Matthew and Luke is the order in which the temptations are recorded. Luke reverses the second and third from Matthew’s order, which is usually understood to be the original. Luke’s reason for this change is not immediately apparent. Otherwise, the three accounts agree regarding the historical fact of Jesus’ temptations.

Use of the term “the holy city” to refer to Jerusalem in today’s text reveals that Matthew was rooted in the Jewish faith (compare Matthew 4:5; 27:53 with Nehemiah 11:1; Isaiah 52:1). By contrast, Luke, of Gentile background (implied in Colossians 4:11, 14), never uses that term (contrast Matthew 4:5 with Luke 4:9).

I. In the Wilderness

(MATTHEW 4:1–4)

A. Tempted by Bread (vv. 1–3)

1. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matthew presents the temptations of *Jesus* as part of God’s plan, a leading of *the Spirit* (compare Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1, 2). The word translated *tempted* can refer to a kind of test (compare the word’s translations as “test” or “tested” in John 6:6; Hebrews 11:17; Revelation 2:2, 10; and “examine” in 2 Corinthians 13:5). To come through a test successfully means that one has proven oneself (compare Hebrews 4:15).

Similarities are found between Jesus’ temptations and the trials Israel faced in *the wilderness* (compare Exodus 16; 32; Numbers 13:17–33). Though the events are not exactly parallel, the similarities set a challenge for Jesus. Israel was tempted repeatedly in the wilderness and failed the tests. Can the Messiah succeed as God’s Son where the Israelites as God’s children failed?

he devil, the agent of this temptation (compare Matthew 4:5, 8, 11), is also known as “Satan” (4:10). We are familiar with these designations as referring to the adversary of humankind. He is the one who seeks our downfall. The word *devil* means “accuser”; the word *Satan* means “adversary” (compare Satan’s role in Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7). Matthew also calls him “the tempter” (Matthew 4:3), a title that reminds us of the temptations of Eve and Adam in the garden (Genesis 3:1–7).

2. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

The wilderness experiences of Jesus and the nation of Israel find a point of similarity here. The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness to be prepared to enter the promised land (Joshua 5:6), and Jesus spends *forty days and forty nights* in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

Comparisons also can be drawn between Jesus’ 40 days and Moses’ time on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28) and Elijah’s time traveling to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Like Moses, Jesus has been fasting. Like Elijah, Jesus’ ministry will be marked by faithfulness to the Lord, even though much of Israel will reject Jesus as the Messiah and even kill him (1 Kings 19:10, 14; Luke 4:24–30; 23:33). Jesus’ connection with those two historical figures is presented powerfully at his transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1–3).

3. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

At Jesus’ point of greatest weakness, *the tempter* makes his appearance (compare 1 Thessalonians 3:5). His attack is intended to exploit Jesus’ extraordinary hunger. A 40-day fast necessarily results in weakness, sometimes even disorientation.

The temptation here is not that of interrupting the fast, for it has run its course. Rather, the temptation is that of using divine power inappropriately to exchange the less important for the more important.

We should note in passing that the statement *If you are the Son of God* does not reflect doubt on Satan’s part regarding Jesus’ identity; demonic forces recognize Jesus for who he really is throughout the Gospels (Matthew 8:28–34; Luke 4:31–35, 40, 41). No ordinary person can turn *stones to bread*. The Son of God, however, is no ordinary person, as the next verse reveals.

B. More than Bread (v. 4)

4. Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

Jesus is not insecure. He knows he has the power to feed himself and alleviate his great hunger. We will see Jesus make bread and affirm in doing so that there is nothing inherently sinful in that action (see Matthew 14:13–21). Jesus’ feeding miracles will reveal not only his divine status but also his compassion.

But yielding to the current temptation would mark Jesus as someone who is willing to recreate his God-given role as physical needs dictate. Jesus’ response to Satan’s suggestion comes directly from Deuteronomy 8:3, words spoken first by Moses. That verse reveals a lesson that Israel should have learned in the wilderness: the manna provided by the Lord wasn’t just to feed them physically. More importantly, it was to feed them spiritually by pointing them to God as their provider (Exodus 16:15, 16).

Bread in and of itself cannot feed one’s spirit. It sustains only one’s body—and that only for a limited length of time. Sadly, the wrong attitude in this regard will make a return appearance after one of Jesus’ feeding miracles (see John 6:25–27; compare 6:63).

Jesus' answer reveals how Scripture can be recalled in times of temptation. A deep knowledge of Scripture prepares us to recognize both the Spirit's leading and Satan's distractions. When we are in tune with God's Spirit and serious in our Bible study, it is amazing what godly truths will come to mind when needed.

II. At the Temple (MATTHEW 4:5–7)

A. Tempted to Prove Love (vv. 5, 6)

5. Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

The holy city is Jerusalem (see Lesson Context), the site of the temple. This temptation comes not in the privacy of the wilderness but in the busiest, most populated place in Judea.

The location of *the highest point of the temple* is uncertain. But it likely refers to the highest elevation on the temple's walls. Many students suggest this to be the southeast corner of the wall, which overlooks the Kidron Valley below. A drop from this spot would certainly be lethal.

6. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

The tempter now changes his tactics in two ways. First, he attempts his own use of Scripture as he quotes Psalm 91:11, 12 to frame the temptation. But his use of Scripture is immediately seen as insincere when we consider the historical context that Satan conveniently leaves out: that God's protection is linked to obedient faithfulness (91:9, 14).

The tempter's second tactical change is to appeal to Jesus' relationship with the Father. All Jesus has to do to validate that relationship is jump from the pinnacle. This should be an act of sure death, preventable only by a miraculous intervention of the Lord. Satan quotes Scripture to give the impression that God has promised to protect his Messiah from danger by guarding his life with powerful angels (compare Matthew 26:39–42; 27:40). *Lift you up* even suggests rescue by means of a midair intervention.

We must not think that all who quote Scripture do so properly or with godly motives (compare 2 Corinthians 11:14). Sincere believers may misuse Scripture unintentionally at times. Liars and charlatans do so knowingly and deviously (1 Timothy 1:3–8, 11; 2 Peter 2:1–3). When someone uses selected phrases from the Bible to justify sketchy actions, we have the responsibility to measure this by considering Scripture as a whole, not by cherry-picked proof texts divorced from context.

B. Trusting the Lord (v. 7)

7. Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

Jesus immediately sees that the temptation goes beyond pinnacle-jumping. It has to do with testing *the Lord your God* (see on Matthew 4:1, above). God invites tests in some circumstances (example: Malachi 3:10). But performing the kind of test we see here would reveal that Jesus doubts the Father. Satan intends to plant that seed of doubt in Jesus: *Does the Father love me enough to save me from my folly?* Of course, not being saved from foolishness does not indicate lack of love on God's part. We often face the consequences of our actions.

Jesus does not need such a test. He knows his relationship with the Father is secure without any doubt; it was affirmed several weeks earlier at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13–17). In resisting Satan, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16. When Moses spoke these words originally, he was warning the Israelites not to tempt God as they had when they asked for water at Massah (Exodus 17:2–7; compare Psalm 95:9).

III. On a Mountain (MATTHEW 4:8–11)

A. Tempted by Power (vv. 8, 9)

8. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

We are not told where the *very high mountain* is. No mountain in the world can make visible *all the kingdoms*, anyway. What is suggested, rather, is a visionary experience (compare 2 Corinthians 12:2). Whether a physical location or spiritual experience, it is very real for Jesus. Being shown the *splendor* of all the kingdoms means he sees their power and wealth (compare Revelation 21:24, 26).

9a. “All this I will give you,” he said,

Satan is a liar (John 8:44), and he has misused Scripture already. Does he really presume to have the authority to give Jesus *all this*?

There is a sense in which Satan does indeed rule this world (see John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). But his influence is temporary and limited (Revelation 12:9; 20:2, 7–10). Ultimately, Satan has no authority and will be destroyed. He offers a promise that he cannot keep, even if he wanted to do so.

9b. “if you will bow down and worship me.”

To gain absolute power over the human realm, Jesus is to give allegiance to Satan. That allegiance is to take the form of *worship*. To *bow down* in that regard is to assume a prostrate position (compare Daniel 3).

Such an act would have at least two implications. First, Jesus would be turning his back on the glories of Heaven and its perfection for the pleasures of and power over the corrupt earth. It wouldn't be *both/and*; it is *either/or*.

Second, this reward would come at an unimaginable price: placing Jesus' authority under that of the devil rather than God. Yielding to this temptation would mean rejecting God's timing concerning when the Messiah is to receive authority (Matthew 28:18). The shortcut to prestige Satan offers may be appealing by sidestepping the pain and humiliation of death on a Roman cross. But the offer is a fiction and a mirage.

B. The End Requires the Means (vv. 10, 11)

10. Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ ”

When Peter later denies that Jesus will be killed, Jesus' rebuke is sharp: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me” (Matthew 16:23). Thus the idea that the Messiah does not need to die is confronted more than once.

Jesus' response in the case at hand comes from Deuteronomy 6:13. That chapter is packed with short axioms that define Israel's relationship with the Lord (examples: Deuteronomy 6:4, 14). Only God is worthy of *worship*. For this reason, the ancient Israelites were constantly reminded to *serve* the Lord *only* (Exodus 20:3, 4; Joshua 24:14; Nehemiah 9:6; etc.). The same challenge confronts Christians (Revelation 22:8, 9; etc.). For Jesus to worship Satan would be not only a cardinal sin but also a repudiation of his nature as the Son of God—an impossibility.

What is the key for us to have victory over the temptations that come our way? Paul points out that one of the deficiencies in our lives is lack of self-control, which Satan exploits (Titus 2:12; compare Galatians 5:22–26). In the lesson's account of Jesus' temptations, we see superlative self-control. Jesus maintains a fast for 40 days. He resists three tantalizing temptations, each targeting a potential weakness in his self-control.

11a. Then the devil left him,

The fact that *the devil* leaves at Jesus' command shows who's really in charge here (compare Romans 16:20). The authority of Jesus prevails (compare Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 1:21–34; Luke 11:14–26).

11b. and angels came and attended him.

The angelic ministry that follows likely involves tending to both Jesus' physical and spiritual fatigue. This quick appearance of angels is also instructive for us. To experience temptation does not mean that God has forsaken us. Times of temptation can indeed test us to our limits. But the Bible promises that God will not allow us to be tried beyond our strength (1 Corinthians 10:13). God will always give us a way out. When we fortify our hearts with Scripture and earnestly seek the Lord, we will be prepared for the Holy Spirit to guide us through great tests without us betraying our faith in Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:13–15).

The righteous way that Jesus chose led him all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. In that garden, he again resisted temptation, yielding obediently to death to atone for the sins of the world (Mark 14:32–42). His strength can be ours.

Conclusion

A. Triumph over Temptation

Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the man who did not yield to temptation was confirmed during the three years Matthew lived closely with Jesus. Therefore, with full confidence that it was true, Matthew was able to write today's account of Jesus' successfully resisting temptations.

Jesus' wilderness experience involved genuine temptations, offering him the opportunity to sin. God was surely looking on this episode with a great desire and confidence that Jesus would not succumb. Even so, the Father probably still saw this as an important test of Jesus' character.

This is true for us as well. God knows we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15). Some situations may even function as needed tests of our faith (1 Corinthians 11:19; James 1:1–3). God may test us (Exodus 16:4; etc.), but he never tempts us to sin (James 1:13–15). Successfully overcoming temptation builds character (1:2–4) and results in eternal life (1:12). Winning interim battles against everyday temptations prepares us for the great testing of faith that comes with life crises.

How do we gain such triumphant self-control? This lesson gives us a pathway in that regard. First, self-control builds confidence as it is exercised. Second, self-control must be guided by Scripture. Third, we are never to forget that God is with us in our times of trial. Self-control is

more successful when we know others are watching and supporting us. May we cooperate with God in allowing him to strengthen our self-control!

. Prayer

Heavenly Father, be merciful to us, for we often give in to temptation. May we draw on your strength when we are weak. May our willingness to grow spiritually in self-control reap a harvest of eternal life among those who follow our example. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God gives us the resources to overcome temptation. Use them!¹
