

*Commentary for Lesson 4*

*March 22, 2020*

## **Jesus in the Wilderness**

**Focal Passage: Matthew 4:1-11**

**Background Text: Same**

**Purpose: To claim the power of Scripture to combat temptation in our lives**

**Note:** For those readers who use supplementary commentaries to prepare for each week's lesson, we will post downloadable commentary on AdultBibleStudies.com through the summer quarter. We will publish an annual commentary for purchase for Fall 2020–Summer 2021.

### **Jesus' Temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)**

The key to understanding why God's Spirit should lead Jesus to be tempted by the devil lies in the word *temptation*. This is not an enticement or a seduction to do evil, as we customarily use the word, but a "testing," a "trial," of his fidelity. Immediately, when Jesus was baptized, or anointed for his ministry, he had to be tested to see if he was capable of faithful obedience.

The devil is sometimes called Satan in the New Testament (Mark 1:13). Satan is the lord of the kingdom of evil, at war with the power of God. The battle in this Judean wilderness was fought for high stakes within Jesus' soul, the soul of him who had just been called God's beloved Son.

The first test was to see how Jesus would use the power of the Spirit that had been given to him: for material things or for the word of God. Jesus' answer does not imply that we need no bread. Rather, Jesus is called to speak God's word, which is a word about more than bread.

The second test was to see if he would perform some sign affording proof of God's faithfulness. In his answer, Jesus offered not proof or signs, but faith. One cannot put God to the test.

The third test (in Luke's Gospel, the second; Luke 4:5-8) was for Jesus to conquer the kingdoms of the world by worshiping the devil. In his dismissal of Satan, Jesus appealed to the first commandment (Deuteronomy 5:7). Satan offered a shortcut based on the deception that the ends justify the means. Jesus refused the tempting offer, choosing rather the way of suffering love.

The temptations were a trial to show what kind of messiah Jesus would be. Through the temptations, he demonstrated that the devil would not call the tune of his ministry and that he would submit only to

God's Spirit (4:4). He also refused to put God to the test (4:7), and he chose not to compromise in those days whom he would serve.

### **Conclusion**

John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The message is a proclamation and a prescription. There is a maxim by which authentic Christian preaching can be identified: The imperative is in the indicative. In other words, because God has sent Jesus the Christ among us to be the way, the truth, and the life (indicative), we ought to turn around and follow him (imperative). Repentance is not only necessary, but possible, on account of what God has done.

In John's indictment of the Pharisees and Sadducees, we would not expect to find much of a word for Christians today. The setting and the dynamics seem poles apart. But by our very assumption that we are not like the Pharisees, do we not give ourselves away?

Sometimes we think we have the best family ties, we keep the commandments, we are members of the church in good standing, and we pray faithfully. Put all that boasting together, and it comes out sounding like, "We have Abraham as our Father." Self-righteousness may be the most dangerous of sins; it blinds us to our real need of a new heart.

We live in an age that understands and responds to endorsements. Advertisers know the value of finding a "big name" to endorse the products they sell. Matthew knew how important it was that Jesus the Christ have unquestioned credentials. None could appeal to a higher credential than a voice from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son." The truth to which that voice bore witness remains for us today.

From *Basic Bible Commentary: Matthew*, by Robert E. Luccock © Graded Press/Cokesbury.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com). The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations noted NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org/>.

Copyright © Graded Press/Cokesbury. Permission given to copy for local church use.