

# Bible Study 2022-2023

## Class #16

1/24/23

# Matthew 4

- The Testing of Jesus in the Desert

# Matthew 4

- **Matthew 4:1-2** *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry”*
  - Father pointed out that the RSV has “tempted” rather than “tested” here
  - That was fine when using Old English, but in modern English, tempted implies the idea of someone falling into temptation (tempted by chocolate cake)
  - “Tested” would be a better word here as a translation from the Greek *peirazo*

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- This means that Jesus was being “put to the test” by the devil
- Also, as discussed earlier, Jesus’ fasting for 40 days and 40 nights was **typologically** related to the 40 years in the wilderness
- This is related to **Psalm 114** <sup>1</sup>

# The Main Points of the Temptations of Jesus Presentation

- The three temptations (tests) of Christ are presented in all three of the Synoptic Gospels
- Being led by the “spirit” can be seen as a reflection of the “glory cloud” of the Old Testament leading Israel to the Promised Land
- There is a direct relationship between Jesus’ temptations and the temptations of the Israelites during the Exodus
- Jesus succeeds in overcoming his temptations while Israel failed in responding to their temptations

# Prelude to Jesus' Public Ministry

## The Temptations of Jesus

- The Temptations of Jesus are found in:
  - Matthew 4:1-11
  - Mark 1:12-13
  - Luke 4:1-13

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- According to Matthew:
  - The first thing Jesus did as the Messiah-king (before the miracles, etc.) was to confront the devil in the desert:
    - This confused the Israelis for in the past, Israel's king fought their mortal enemies (David versus Goliath, and the Philistines)
    - The Israelis understood that the **Psalms** and **Prophets** indicated that the Messiah would defeat Israel's enemies
    - This belief fueled their hope for a Davidic monarchy to rule over the pagan nations
    - But Jesus came to start a revolution inside the hearts and minds of God's people, freeing them from the bondage of sin

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- Jesus going into the desert in obedience to the spirit caused some scholars (because of ignorance of the Scripture) to incorrectly believe that:
  - Jesus was not divine (The Arian heresy discussed earlier)
  - He was led into the desert so he could go on a retreat and:
    - find himself
    - discover who he was
    - find his mission
    - pray with God to find what He wanted him to do



# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- The concept of Jesus being “led by the Spirit” was almost a direct quotation from the OT
  - Moses and Israel were **led by the spirit** (Glory Cloud) in the wilderness for 40 years (Jesus spends 40 days in the desert):
    - Ex 40:34 – Glory Cloud
    - Num 10:11- Israel in the wilderness of Sinai
    - Num 22:1 – The Israelis were camped out in the plains of Moab
  - Saint Paul calls the followers of Jesus to:
    - Be in the Spirit (Rom 8:9)
    - Live and **walk by the Spirit** (Gal 5:25)

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- In Exodus God directs Moses to tell Pharaoh that He wants Israel, His first born son, to go into the desert so that they may serve Him (**Ex 5:1**)
- When God **led Israel** out of Egypt, the most affluent nation of the world, the Israelis complained (murmured) and wanted to return to luxury in Egypt (**Num 11:1-6**)
- God responded by leaving them for 40 years in the desert to live on his “manna” to show them that worldly things are not important
- As a loving Father, God **tested his children** by making them rely on Him and doing without the goods they desired (**Deut 8:4-5**)

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- The Book of Deuteronomy was given to Moses as a way of **looking back** at the lessons learned at the end of Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness where God had provided water from the rocks and *Manna* as their daily bread
- Moses gave this last book of the Law to the Israelites just before they crossed the Jordan to enter the "Promised Land"
- **Deuteronomy 6 & 8** reflect the commandments, statutes and ordinances of God



# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- Jesus can be seen in this passage from Matthew as being the new Israel
- Matthew teaches us “Christology” by teaching about Israel – what was said in the past about Israel is now fulfilled in Jesus
- Jesus, like Israel was tested/tempted three times

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- Each test that had been experienced by Israel when she was in the wilderness for 40 years was failed
- By living 40 days in the desert Jesus symbolically relived Israel's wilderness story
- Matthew, the good Jew, is demonstrating how Jesus is taking upon himself the traditions of Israel

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- Matthew is showing, in this story, that Jesus is the “true” first born son of the Father, the true Israelite, who will succeed where the earlier people had failed
- The key to understanding this passage is to understand that in each of the three tests Jesus counters the devil with a reply from the book of Deuteronomy

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- So, at the end of his 40 days/nights in the desert, Jesus quotes the words of Moses from passages in Deuteronomy (chapters 6 and 8)
- Matthew says that Jesus, while in the wilderness, was contemplating and praying about Israel's wilderness experiences and ways to use these to combat Satan
- The **three tests Israel failed** were:



# Israel's Tests

- **Hunger in the desert**

- Rather than trust in God, they constantly complained (murmured) to Moses and wanted to return to Egypt (Ex 15:24; 16:2)

- **Putting God to the test**

- Although after being given quail and Manna as their daily bread (Ex 16:13-21), the Israelis doubted God as they feared that they would not again find water to drink in the desert (Ex 17:1-7)
- They accused Moses of bringing them to the desert to die of thirst (Ex 17:3)

- **Worshiping a false god**

- They assumed that Moses was dead after 40 days and returned to worshiping the Egyptian pagan deity, the golden calf (Ex 32:1-6)

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- In the **first** test/temptation (Mt 4:3-4):
  - The devil challenges Jesus (after Jesus had spent 40 days in the wilderness): to turn stones into bread
  - Jesus replies **“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’”**
  - Jesus' reply is based on **Deut 8:1-3**

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:3** *“And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”*
  - Father reminded us that when we hear “son of God,” it does not mean the second person of the Trinity
  - In the Old Testament, “son of God” was a title for the *Messiah*
  - Unfortunately, there is a chapter break here (but not in the original text) which *produces a loss of continuity*
  - **Matthew 3:17** says: *“this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased”*

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- This should remind us of **Psalm 27**<sub>2</sub> (the most important messianic Psalm), which is about the son of David
- We may also think back to the “Suffering Servant” psalm in **Isaiah 42:1-7**<sub>3</sub>
- Father explained what “Son of God” meant in the context of the Old Testament
- In **Job**, it meant an “angel”
- In the rest of the Old Testament, it was a reference to someone who was related to God in a special way (within a covenant)
- “Son” was a *Semitic* way for speaking of a “follower of” or “imitator of” someone

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- When we look at Jesus' debate with the Pharisees about casting out demons: *"if I cast them out by the power of Beelzebub, then by whom do your sons cast them out, you Pharisees?"* we are talking about the disciples of the Pharisees, those who followed or imitated them
- Those who followed the Parasitical way of life
- With this, we can see how "son of the Father" works here
- A child is supposed to imitate and be obedient to their parents
- Israel was a "son of God"
- The individual Israelites were "sons of God"

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- The title “Son of God” was often used in this context, and it is obvious that this is what it means for Jesus as the New Israel
- We are seeing two images in this narrative:
  - The messianic anointing by the spirit in the form of the dove descending
  - The image of Jesus having come out of Egypt and going into the wilderness
- Both images are implied by the devil when he says: *“So, if you are the son of God, if you are the new Israel, or if you are the Messiah command these stones to become loaves of bread”*

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:4** *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”*
  - In **Deuteronomy**, Moses said that: *“you were tested Israel”*
  - This is saying that Israel was tested by God in the same way as a father tests his son
  - Israel was being tested by God when they were wandering in the wilderness for forty years, to see if they would be obedient

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- God also taught them not to live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God
- This means (as discussed earlier) that Jesus was again quoting **Deuteronomy** to the devil



# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- In the **second** test/temptation (Mt 4:5-7):
  - The devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and challenged him to prove he was the son of God by throwing himself down
  - Jesus replies: **“Again it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”**
  - Jesus’ reply is based on **Deut 6:16**

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:5** *“then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple”*
  - In this passage, the devil is quoting from **Psalm 91:10-13**  
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  - This psalm is about Israel wandering through the wilderness and how God took care of them
  - This is a wonderful example of **Deuteronomy 8** (Father pointed to the importance of knowing the context)
  - These quotations are like little bombs that go off to remind us of entire passages and their context from the Old Testament

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- At this point, in **Deuteronomy 8**, Israel had left Egypt, Mt. Sinai, 40 years in the wilderness, and were now in the *Plains of Moab*, looking across the Jordan at Jericho as they were about to enter the Promised Land
- Moses, however, could not enter, so he gave them one long last homily, called the **Book of Deuteronomy**
- In this, he recounted everything he had dealt with, from the moment he led them from Egypt to the present moment, including how they had failed God's testing over and over

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:6** *“and said to him ‘If you are the son of God throw yourself down; for it is written, he will give his angels charge of you and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike you foot against a stone’”*
  - **Psalm 91** promised that God would take care of Israel while they were in the wilderness, in the same way a father would take care of the needs of his son
  - Father pointed out the “punchline” in **Psalm 91** (Matthew hopes we will understand) is in the next line from the Psalm (read 91:1-10)

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Psalm 91:11** *“For he who gives his angels charge of you...the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot”*
  - Satan is testing Jesus by quoting from **Psalm 91**, but he stops just short of the “punchline”
  - He does not quote from the line which describes Jesus as the Son of God stomping on the head of the serpent (**Genesis 3:15**)<sub>5</sub>
  - Thus, every time Jesus quotes from the Old Testament and passes the test from the devil, He is trampling the serpent under foot!

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:7** *“Jesus said to him, again it is written you shall not tempt the Lord your God”*
  - Again, this is from **Deuteronomy 6:16** which is where Moses was recounting the testing of Israel in the wilderness and how they failed over and over
  - Father referred us to **Matthew 4:9** where Jesus was saying, you have it backwards devil, for you shall be worshiping Yahweh, the Lord your God and him alone shall you worship
  - These statements of Jesus give us the identity of Jesus for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- In the **third** test/temptation (Mt 4:8-10):
  - The devil took Jesus to a high mountain and promised that if he would worship him he would give him all the nations of the world
  - Jesus replies: **“Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’”**
  - Jesus’ reply is based on **Deut 6:13**

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- **Matthew 4:8-11** *“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain,...Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him”*
  - This is another direct quote from **Deuteronomy**
  - Father suggested that we also look at what is happening here in the same way we heard **Psalm 114** (with the eyes of faith) at the Baptism of Jesus, *“Oh sea, why do you flee, oh Jordan why do you turn back, tremble at the presence of Yahweh”*
  - Matthew is demonstrating the parallelism of the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, and hoping we will hear the words of **Psalm 114**



# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- If we do this, we will know that Jesus is not simply the Messiah, but here there is something else going on
- What sort of man is this that caused the sea and wind to obey him?
- Over and over, we will hear these little bursts of light to the divinity of Jesus
- This will particularly happen if you know the Old Testament (**Psalm 114** and the quotes from Deuteronomy)
- Jesus is the “Word of God”

# Matthew 4 (Cont)

- Here (in Matthew), we are witnessing Jesus as the new Israel completing (passing) each of these tests
- Matthew is hoping that this will remind us of the testing of Israel in **Deuteronomy 8**

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- Jesus victory over the devil sets the tone for the rest of His public ministry
- All of his subsequent actions can be seen as repercussions of His initial triumph over the devil
- Jesus takes this victory over the devil to all whose lives he touches in his travels

# The Temptations of Jesus (Cont)

- These acts point to His work on the cross where He finally conquers the devil and wins salvation for all humanity
- The Church celebrates this victory during the 40 days of Lent as we experience Jesus' 40 days in the desert in preparation for His trial with the devil who then left him (**Matthew 4:11**)
- **Deuteronomy 8** is a good chapter to read during Lent