

Jesus: A Life: Week 3

Jesus' Temptation

Big Idea: Where sinners fall into temptation, Jesus stands firm.

Read the Bible:

Luke 4:1-12

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

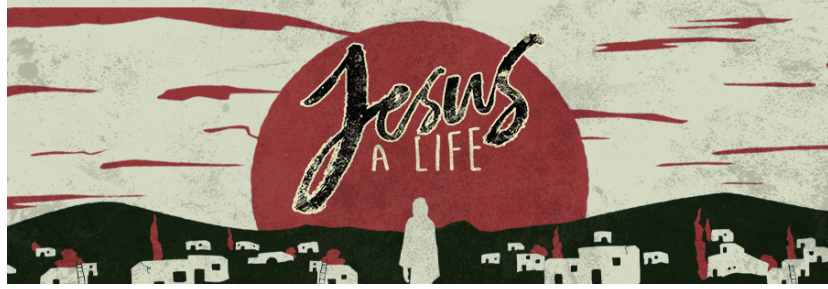
H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



Summary

“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” These words came from heaven and signified the start of Jesus’ ministry. So, what comes next? Massive crowds? Miracles? Nope. Instead, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted.

There in the wilderness Jesus fasted for forty days. At the end of the time scripture tells us the obvious: he was hungry. Talk about an understatement. In telling us the obvious, Luke is reminding us that Jesus is a human being. Christ was hungry because he was a man and men get hungry. It’s almost as if Luke is telling us not to think that these temptations are easier on Jesus as the Son of God. He is still fully man, and these temptations will be difficult. This human being is about to be tempted to shortcut God’s plan.

Satan comes to a hungry Jesus and says, “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread.” This is harmless enough on the face of the temptation, but the sin at stake here is beyond just hunger. Satan is tempting Jesus to doubt God. “IF” you are the son of God. God has just spoken from heaven and said that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Moreover, Satan is tempting Jesus to doubt God’s plan. After all, remember that Jesus is here, hungry in the wilderness because of God. Satan was in effect saying, “Is God’s plan really good? It looks like things could be better if you did things your way.”

What does Christ do?

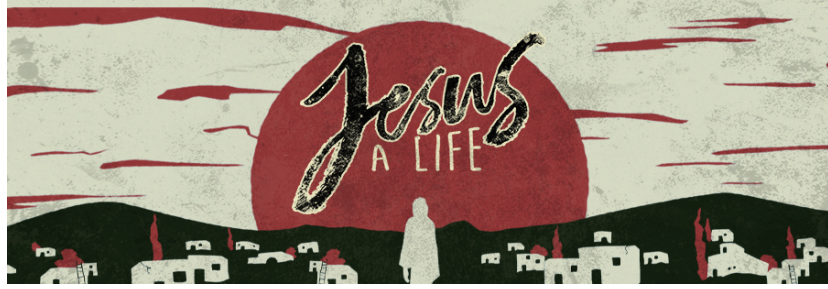
Jesus withstands. Jesus resists. Jesus stands firm.

Next, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and makes him an offer. “Worship me and I will give you all of them.” Now, this seems like a sweet offer. Jesus is already going to have all the kingdoms of the earth one day, but he knows that he must go through the cross first. Satan is offering the glory without the pain. He can have the throne without the cross. All he has to do is bow. The one who humbled himself and took on the form of a servant has the chance to exalt himself and take on a throne.

What does Christ do?

Jesus withstands. Jesus resists. Jesus stands firm.

One final try. Satan takes Jesus to the top of the temple. “Jump and prove that you are the Son of God” The temptation here is to prize proof over faith. You don’t have to trust God. Ask God to prove himself. Now this hits close to home. This is the sin we commit when we ask God to “just give us a sign.”



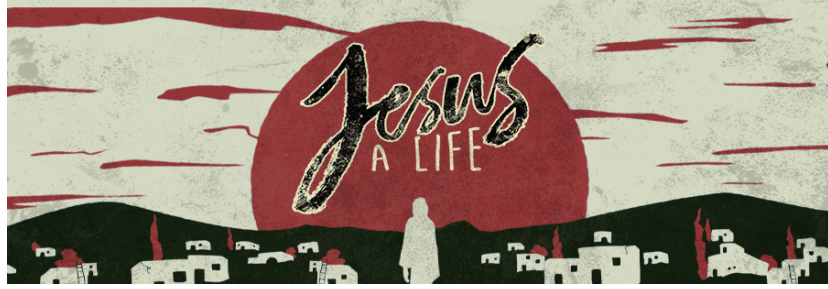
What does Jesus do?

Jesus withstands. Jesus resists. Jesus stands firm.

Where sinners fail, Jesus stands.

We've seen this story before. Satan came to Adam in the Garden and said, "Did God really say?" Now, Satan comes to Jesus in the wilderness and said, "If you are the Son of God." Adam failed. Jesus stood firm.

Jesus alone faces temptation and never fails. This is good news for sinners like us because Jesus stands in our place.



Leading Your Group

Community Time – Start group by asking for Prayer requests and checking in on everyone.

Bible Study

Have everyone in your group read assigned scripture before meeting.

Start Group by Reading Luke 4:1-12 (Split the Reading among the Group)

Major Lessons – (These are the “Lesson Points” in Class)

- 1. Sin always starts with doubting God.**

We saw it in the garden. The serpent said to Adam and Eve, “Did God really say?” We see it again here. “If you are the Son of God.”

The thing is God had just said that Jesus was his beloved son.

When Satan tempts people, he always comes questioning what God said.

- 2. When faced with temptation we fight back with the Word of God.**

Jesus faces every temptation and responds by quoting scripture.

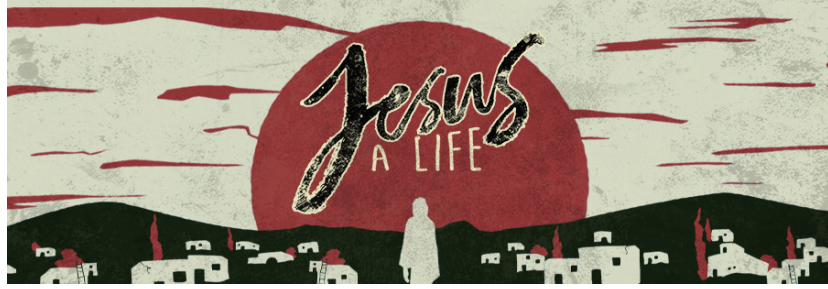
When Satan questions God and says, “Did God really say?” We must answer, “Yes. God did say.”

- 3. Where sinners have fallen, Jesus stands in our place.**

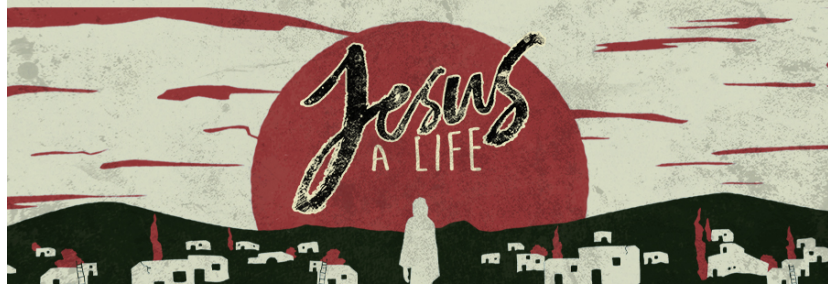
The point of the temptation narrative is that Jesus stands. Jesus stood firm. He refused to give way. We had fallen and were subject to punishment as sinners, but because Jesus stood firm now we can be righteous.

Discuss (The following questions are meant as suggested questions to guide conversation.)

- 1. Why do you think Luke emphasizes Jesus’ hunger?**



2. Which temptation do you think was most severe to Christ?
3. How have you been tempted to circumvent God's plan like Satan offered Jesus?
4. How have you been tempted to doubt God's word in the past?
5. How do you fight temptation?



Resources

Expositor's Bible Commentary

D. *The Temptation of Jesus* (4:1–13)

This vivid narrative (vv. 1–13) contains an important blend of theological themes—the divine sonship and messiahship of Jesus, the warfare between Christ and Satan, OT theology, and principles of obedience to the divine Word.

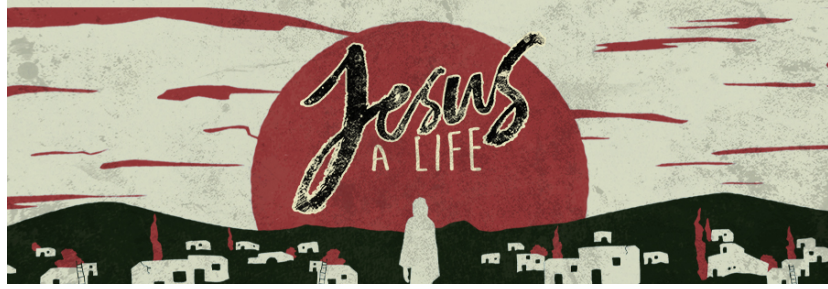
1–2 These two verses shed light on the significance of the episode. Jesus is in the “desert” (v. 1) for a period of “forty days” (v. 2). This probably relates to Israel’s experience in the desert after the Exodus. It may also allude to Moses’ forty days without food on the mountain (Deut 9:9). The parallel with Israel becomes stronger if it is meant as a comparison between Israel as God’s ‘son (Exod 4:22–23; Hos 11:1) who failed when tested and Jesus as his unique Son who conquered temptation. God led Israel into the desert; likewise the Spirit led Jesus. In the former case, God tested his people. Now God allows the devil to tempt his Son.

It is important here to distinguish between three kinds of tempting (*peirasmos*, “testing”).

1. Satan tempts people, i.e., lures them to do evil. God never does this nor can he himself be tempted in this way (James 1:13). Further, not all temptation comes directly from Satan; often it comes from our own lower nature (James 1:14–15).

2. People may tempt (test) God in the sense of provoking him through unreasonable demands contrary to faith. This is what Israel did in the desert and what is probably referred to in Jesus’ quotation of Deuteronomy 6:16 (cf. v. 12).

3. God tests (but does not tempt) his people, as he did in the desert (Deut 8:2). All three kinds of testing are involved in the parallels between the desert experiences of Israel and Jesus. (On this theme, see B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son*, Coniectanea Biblica NT Series 2:1 [Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1966].)



Although God already knows all about us, he reveals the thoughts and intents of our hearts through our response to him in times of trial. Thus he tested Israel in the desert to “see” whether the people would obey (Exod 16:4).

In this temptation by the devil, the Lord Jesus shows the validity of what God had just said of him: “With you I am well pleased” (3:22).

In this section we see several contrasts. One—between Israel and Jesus—has just been discussed. Another is the absolute contrast between Jesus, who is both filled and led by the Spirit (note Luke’s emphasis on the Spirit), and the devil, who opposes both Christ and the Spirit. (The unpardonable sin is called blasphemy against the Spirit [12:10; cf. Matt 12:31–32].) Another contrast is the one implied between Jesus as “hungry,” i.e., physically empty, and yet as “full of the Spirit.” Our own experience is usually the reverse.

3–4 The “devil” (*diabolos*, v. 3) has several names in biblical and other Jewish literature, notably the OT name “Satan,” which is used often in the NT (*Satanas*; cf., e.g., 4:8; 10:18; 11:18). He opposes God and God’s servants (1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; Zech 3:1–2). He may seem to be ubiquitous but is not omnipresent. Sometimes he works indirectly through the evil spirits who form his domain (cf. 11:14–20). Here the devil’s statement “If you are the Son of God” picks up the declaration of Jesus’ sonship in 3:22. The conditional construction does not imply doubt but is a logical assumption in the dialogue.

The reference to bread is conceivably an allusion to God’s provision of manna for Israel during the Exodus. Apparently some of Jesus’ contemporaries expected that the coming Messiah would perform some such miracle of provision for them (cf. John 6:30). Consequently this temptation may have been an appeal for Jesus to do a work of messianic significance. Alternately, and more probably his temptation may have been to satisfy his own need and gratify himself. Bread, however, is necessary, not evil, and hardly an object of “the cravings of sinful man” (1 John 2:16). Further, Jesus’ temptation is not the same as the self-engendered lust described in James 1:14–15—a fact to keep in mind when we question how Jesus could have been perfect and yet truly tempted. The issue, therefore, is not one of allurements to perverted self-gratification but a challenge to act apart from faithful dependence on God.

Jesus’ reply is brief, a partial quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 (found more fully in Matt 4:4). In Deuteronomy Moses was reminding Israel that during the forty years in the desert God had led them “to humble you [i.e., Israel] and to test you in order to know what was in your heart,



whether or not you would keep his commandments” (Deut 8:2). The next verse (Deut 8:3) specifically refers to hunger and the provision of manna, which the Lord gave Israel so that the people might know that man needs not merely bread but the sustaining word of God.

Thus while he is being “tempted” by the devil, Jesus is also proving faithful to God in contrast to Israel’s response when “tested” by him. Jesus proves by his response that his heart is not divided but that he is dependent on God and obedient to his word (v. 4). So he becomes our example in temptation (Heb 4:14–16; 5:8).

5–8 The second temptation, though of a different nature, involves similar issues. The devil takes Jesus to a “high place” (v. 5; cf. “mountain” in Matt 4:8, where a parallel with Moses on Mount Nebo may be implied [Deut 32:49; 34:1–3]). “In an instant” probably shows that this part of the Temptation involved a vision. It was not necessary for Jesus to see every part of the world physically for this to be an actual temptation. Once again, what the devil offered was legitimate in itself. The Messiah would one day rule all the world, possessing all “authority and splendor” (v. 6). In this temptation the devil claims to possess the world. Jesus does not challenge the claim (of John 12:31); neither does he acknowledge it. To worship the devil in order to recapture the world, even for its good, would have meant “casting out devils by Beelzebub” (Morris, *Luke*, p. 103).

Had Jesus accepted the devil’s offer, our salvation would have been impossible. First, Jesus would have sinned by giving worship to the devil and thus could not have offered himself a perfect sacrifice for our sins. (The same thing applies to all three temptations.) Second, Scripture teaches that the Messiah should first suffer and only then “enter his glory” (24:26). Third, since the devil tried to prevent Christ’s voluntary death for our sins, the implication of this second temptation was that accepting an immediate kingdom would avoid the Cross.

The temptations deal with both the divine sonship and messiahship of Jesus—related concepts in biblical thought. But the temptations also tested his perfect manhood. This aspect of them especially interested Luke. Moreover, they show us Jesus as our example. By quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, he responded as the perfect man—the obedient last Adam (Rom 5:19)—should respond, worshiping and serving his only God (v. 8). Both the OT texts Jesus quoted so far (vv. 4, 8) are more than weapons against the devil; they apply to Jesus himself:

9–12 Luke records this temptation in the last rather than second place (cf. Matt 4:5–7). It may be that Matthew preferred to conclude with a kingdom reference. Possibly Luke wants to



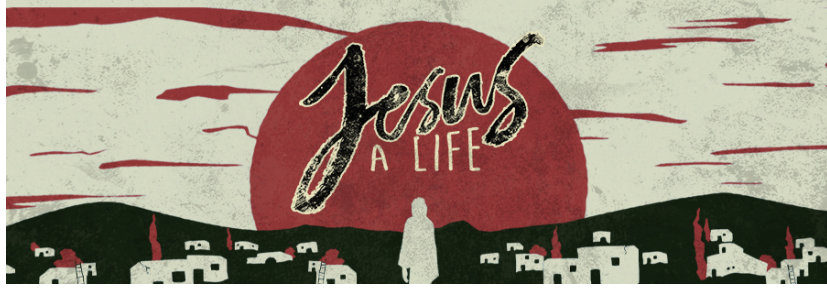
center on the city of Jerusalem (v. 9), which Matthew does not mention by name, because of his theme of the progression of the gospel from Jerusalem to the Gentile nations. The essence of this temptation is that of presuming on God (v. 12) and displaying before others one's special favor with him. In this instance the devil quotes a passage of Scripture (Ps 91:11–12) out of context—notice that the mere use of Bible words does not necessarily convey the will of God (v. 10). Further, Satan omits the words “in all your ways” (Ps 91:11), possibly to facilitate application to an act inconsistent with the normal “ways” of the godly person. Gerhardtsson (“Testing God’s Son,” pp. 54ff.) sees here a theme of protection (cf. Deut 1:31 with the context of Ps 91, from which the devil quotes). He sees the temple as a place of protection and finds a play on words between “wings” (Ps 91:4 [90:4 LXX], *pterygas*) and “highest point” or “pinnacle” (*pterygion*). But it is doubtful whether Luke intended this parallel. The rabbinic tradition that the Messiah would appear on top of the temple (SBK, 1:151) may provide a background that accounts for the form of this temptation: even though the idea of jumping down is absent.

Again Jesus responds with Scripture (v. 12), this time by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. This quotation could be understood as applying to the devil, who “tempted” Jesus in the first sense of the word (cf. comments on temptation, v. 2). More probably it is applied to Jesus, who thus refuses to “tempt” God in the second sense of the word. That is, he will not repeat the sin that Israel committed in the desert by putting God to the test. To do that would be to provoke God by making inappropriate demands for a divine sign to be used for display. This request for a sign would actually be an act of unbelief, masquerading as extraordinary faith.

13 This verse may be considered the conclusion of this section rather than the beginning of the next (so NIV 1978 ed.). The devil leaves only temporarily—“until an opportune time.”

Notes

- 9** Τὸ πτερύγιον (*to pterygion*, “the highest point”) may be the corner of the walls that encompassed the temple area. The southeastern corner was directly above a cliff, making a terrifying drop down to the Kidron Valley possible.
- 13** Conzelmann’s view (*Theology of Luke*, p. 38) that Luke thought Satan was inactive during Jesus’ ministry imposes an artificial scheme on this Gospel. Conzelmann reads too much into the first half of this verse and holds that the “opportune time” does not come till Luke 22:3. Schuyler Broaden (*Apostasy and Perseverance*, in loc.) counters this concept. He maintains that Satan is active



throughout Luke's Gospel, a conclusion based on a view of the nature of temptation in Luke that differs from Conzelmann's.¹

Teacher's Bible Commentary

The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (Luke 4:1–44)

The passage.—In his baptism Jesus accepted his role as God's Messiah. In the temptation he had to decide what kind of messiah he would be. Great pressures were exerted on him during his ministry to force him to become a popular messiah, appealing to the baser, more hostile elements of his people. The temptations are presented in dramatic, vivid form. This must not obscure the fact that Jesus was tempted in the same way that we are (Heb. 4:15).

Luke makes the rejection in Nazareth the first major incident in Jesus' Galilean ministry (cf. Mark 6:1ff.). The rejection of Jesus by his own hometown is the first step in the ultimate rejection of Jesus by his own people, the Jews.

Capernaum became the headquarters for Jesus' activities in Galilee. His ministry began there with a series of mighty works. These indicated that the power of God was breaking into history in the person of Jesus. His victory over the forces of evil and disease that held men captive demonstrated his messianic authority.

Special points.—The clash between Jesus and the devil (v. 3) was a power struggle between the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil. Actually it was a clash between God's purpose and prevailing popular expectations and desires. Some people expected the Messiah to reproduce the miracle of Moses' day when manna was supplied in the desert. In the

¹ Liefeld, W. L. (1984). [Luke](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, pp. 862–865). Zondervan Publishing House.



first temptation (vv. 2–4), Jesus refused to base either his faith in God or the demonstration of his messianic power on the ability to produce bread in the desert.

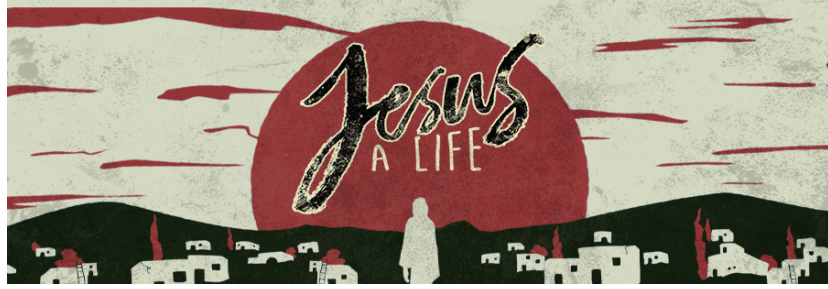
In the second temptation (vv. 5–8) Jesus was confronted with the possibility of establishing a world power by worshiping the devil. To worship the devil means to use the devil’s methods to gain one’s purposes. Many people advocated the liberation of Israel by force of arms. If Jesus had followed this path he would have been worshiping the devil. Jesus rejected sensational methods to capture public support in the third temptation (vv. 9–12).

In a synagogue service any visitor might be invited to read a Scripture passage or to bring a sermon (v. 16 ff.). The passages read by Jesus from Isaiah (vv. 18–19) set forth the mission of the Messiah in characteristic Lukan terms. The gospel is for the oppressed and afflicted. The anger of the congregation (v. 28) arose from the references to incidents which showed Gentiles receiving blessings denied to Israelites. In his writings Luke teaches that Israel excluded itself from the gospel. One of the main problems was its failure to understand that the gospel recognized no racial boundaries.

In the ancient world mental illness was explained in terms of demon possession (5:33). The gospel was a power that liberated men from the dark, hostile forces that oppressed them. One of the greatest demonstrations of Jesus’ power was his ability to make emotionally disturbed people whole.

Truth for today.—The fact that a person has dedicated his life to God does not mean that he has won the battle over evil. A person may decide to follow God’s call to be a preacher or a missionary. But he must always struggle with the question: What kind of preacher? What kind of missionary? The desire for popularity, for success, for acceptance are strong pressures that may operate against God’s purposes for our lives. The decision to be true to God often means that the believer must face misunderstanding, contempt, and rejection. It was certainly true with Jesus.

The gospel is for everybody, especially the excluded, oppressed elements of society. This kind of gospel inflames prejudiced people. This was one of the reasons that Jesus was crucified. Church members who exclude people from their fellowship on the basis of race or class considerations are playing the role of Jesus’ enemies.



The gospel still meets human need today. It is the power that liberates men from that which enslaves them in the twentieth century as it did in the first.²

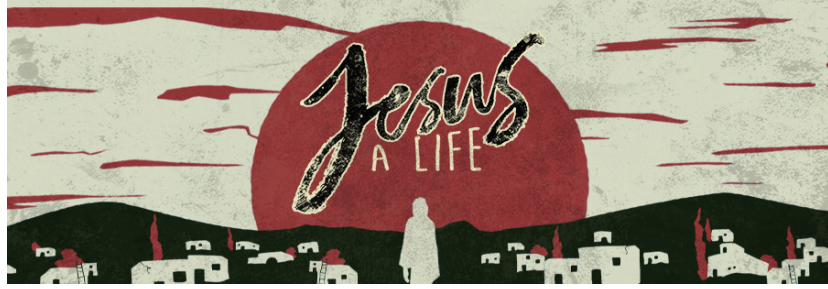
Reading The New Testament

The Temptation of Jesus (4:1-13)

It is no accident then that Luke moves directly from God's declaration of Jesus as the beloved Son of God at the baptism (3:22) to Jesus' genealogy that refers to Adam as a son or descendant of God (3:38) and finally to Jesus' temptation in which the devil tempts Jesus to act more like the disobedient Adam than the Son in whom God is well pleased (Tannehill, *Luke*, 85-87). For instance, the devil quotes God's own words to Jesus in the wilderness just as the serpent twists God's words in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-7). Notice that the devil begins the first and third temptation by saying, "If you are the Son of God" (4:3, 9), thereby questioning the validity of God's declaration at the baptism. In addition, after Jesus quotes Scripture to refute the devil's first two temptations in 4:4 and 4:8, the devil himself quotes Ps 91:11-12 out of context in an attempt to mislead Jesus (4:10-11). Many ancient and modern scholars have believed that Ps 91 expresses trust in God's protection against demonic forces. Psalm 91 was part of a four-psalm Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) collection that was read during exorcisms in the first century (Craig Evans, "Jesus and Evil Spirits," 43-58). As a result, the devil, who is deemed to be synonymous with "the serpent," "the dragon," "the enemy," and Satan in first-century Jewish and Christian texts, misuses a passage of Scripture that chronicles God's protection against evil forces. Instead of citing Ps 91 to fend off the demonic realm, the devil astonishingly quotes it while hoping to persuade Jesus to pledge allegiance to him.

Even more than the contrast between Adam and Jesus, Luke primarily contrasts the experiences of the Hebrew people with those of Jesus. Here, Luke first accentuates the way in which Jesus' time in the wilderness resembles the experiences of the Hebrew people as they journeyed through the Sinai wilderness. For instance, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus first endures

² Tolbert, M. O. (1972). [Luke](#). In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The teacher's Bible commentary* (pp. 639-640). Broadman and Holman Publishers.



forty days in the wilderness without food. Jesus' temptation then takes place at the conclusion of that time period, perhaps over the course of one day (Matt 4:1–11). Luke, however, paints a vastly different picture. The devil tempts Jesus over the entirety of the forty days in the wilderness (4:1–2). In addition, these wilderness temptations of Jesus are akin to the wilderness temptations the Hebrews faced (Deut 8:2). The Hebrews sinned when they grumbled about the lack of food (Exod 16:1–12), worshipped idols (Exod 32:1–35), and tested God (Deut 6:16). Similarly, the devil tempts Jesus with hunger (4:3), false worship (4:7), and testing God (4:13). Even more clearly, when Jesus quotes Scripture, he quotes passages from Deuteronomy that portray Moses as entreating the Hebrew people to avoid temptation once they arrive in Canaan. Jesus quotes Deut 8:3; 6:13, and 6:16 in response to the devil's three temptations (4:4, 8, 12).

The comparison between the Hebraic people and Jesus primarily aims to create a sharp distinction between the two. Whereas the Hebrews submitted to temptations in the wilderness, Jesus resists them. Whereas the Israelites were unable to remain faithful to God, Jesus' allegiance to God never wavers. Luke signals this victorious outcome from the outset when he refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit (4:1–2).

Luke has already highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life from the beginning of his Gospel. Jesus was conceived of by the Spirit (1:35). Those who prophesied about Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit (1:67; 2:25, 27). John claims that Jesus will one day "baptize you with the Holy Spirit," and at Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus as an act of anointing and empowerment (3:22; Acts 10:38). So it is not surprising that Luke accentuates the role of the Holy Spirit again in the temptation narrative in 4:1 and 4:14. Luke informs his readers that Jesus is full of and led by the Holy Spirit before he even ventures into the wilderness (4:1). Furthermore, Luke again mentions that Jesus is "filled with the power of the Spirit" as Jesus leaves the wilderness and returns to Galilee (4:14).

By emphasizing the presence of the Spirit at the beginning and end of the temptation narrative, Luke thereby implies that Jesus remained full of and empowered by the Holy Spirit throughout the entirety of the forty-day ordeal. As a result, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness unfolds in a manner different from the experience of the Hebrews in the Sinai wilderness. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds due to the presence and power of the Spirit. The devil desires to shape Jesus' fundamental identity and use of power, yet Jesus refuses to yield to the devil's direction. Instead, the Spirit of God defines Jesus' role and directs his actions.



Matthew concludes Jesus' temptation by saying in part, "Then the devil left him" (Matt 4:11). Luke likewise says that the devil left him, but then Luke adds a temporal qualifier: "until an opportune time" (4:13). Rather than the devil's finale, Luke indicates that the devil has only departed temporarily. In the process, Luke portrays the devil as even more determined, cunning, and perhaps powerful than Mark or Matthew do. Luke's qualification about the devil's departure prepares his readers for what comes next. They must be on the lookout, waiting for the devil to resurface.

While Jesus relays his futuristic vision of Satan falling from heaven in 10:17–20, Luke does not speak of Satan's active intervention again until Luke 22:3 when Satan enters Judas. Shortly thereafter, Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper that Satan has demanded to sift them all like wheat (22:31–34). As a result, although Jesus' refusal to yield to the devil in 4:1–13 provides a final, definitive answer about Jesus' loyalties, a larger cosmic battle still exists in Luke's writings. In particular, Jesus' disciples will remain vulnerable to Satan's attacks throughout this Gospel. Whereas Jesus is full of the Spirit (3:22; 4:1), Judas opts in the end to be filled with Satan (22:3). In Luke's anthropology, a person must choose which power will enliven him or her. Jesus has already made his decision, but others have not.³

³ Arterbury, A. E. (2019). [*Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*](#) (pp. 29–31). Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated.