

Matthew 4—Commentary Notes*

A. Introduction

After the baptism of Jesus, God testified that He is indeed the beloved Son of God and the anointed Messiah. But Jesus still had to be tempted by Satan in order to prove that He is the heavenly King, who is victorious over the enemy. There are close connections between Jesus's temptation and subsequent triumph, and Adam's temptation and subsequent failure in Genesis 3. Adam "is a pattern of the one to come" (Rom 5:14), which is a type of Christ, while Christ is the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:44-45). Jesus's triumph over Satan's temptation in the wilderness became the basis for His continual victories thereafter until His death on the cross—His ultimate victory.¹

Satan's purpose in tempting Jesus was to entice Him to act against God's will for Him. If He sinned, He would not be able to bear the sins of man and accomplish the work of redemption for them. Only the sinless can be a substitute for the sinful. Another goal of Satan's temptation was for Jesus to compromise, so that instead of taking the way of the cross, He would use worldly means to accomplish the same goal and plan. However, even under the greatest of pressures, Jesus did not yield to temptation. He trusted God completely and gave no regard to the cost of His willing acceptance of God's way for salvation. The Lord Jesus triumphed completely in this spiritual battle, proving that He is worthy to be our Savior and the pioneer of our salvation (Heb 2:10). He is also our great High Priest (Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-15). Since the Lord Jesus endured the suffering of temptation, He is able to sympathize with our pain in temptation. He will therefore rescue us, and we may trust Him and experience His victory. This victory over temptation solidified the Lord Jesus's public ministry going forward.²

B. Outline

- I. 4:1-11 After baptism, the Lord Jesus overcame Satan's three temptations in the wilderness with the Word of God.
- II. 4:12-25 The victorious Lord Jesus called the disciples, preached the Word, healed the sick, and began His public ministry.

C. Content

I. 4:1-11 After baptism, the Lord Jesus overcame Satan's three temptations in the wilderness with the Word of God.

After the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit publicly descended on Him, testifying to the fact that the Son of God had been given the authority to carry out the work of the Messiah. At this time, the Lord Jesus already held great power, and Satan wanted to seize the opportunity to entice Him to exercise His power according to His own will and not according to God's will. The malicious intent and purpose of alienating man from God is always deeply rooted and hidden in the temptations of the devil. Therefore, by allowing Jesus to be tempted, God wanted to make plain to us the truth

^{*} Translator Note: These Commentary Notes were originally compiled in Chinese and translated into English for use by Chinese Christian Fellowship International's (CCF International's) English classes. All sources listed in the table (only listed in English when applicable) at the end of these notes were used and consulted in the original Chinese compilation. Please refer to the table for the references of each numbered annotation. For more information on the sources consulted, please contact CCF International. All biblical references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

about the devil's tactics and schemes in temptation, and at the same time, reveal to us the secret of overcoming him (1 Cor 10:13).³

4:1 – "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Moved by the Holy Spirit, Matthew recorded this event in its entirety to show us the reality of Satan (the devil) and his schemes.⁴ When God created Adam, He gave him the authority to manage and subdue the earth. But when sin entered the world, the devil became the "prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), also known as the "god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph 2:2). He is "Lucifer" who is "the power of this dark world" (Eph 6:12) and "the morning star." Satan fell from the high status of an archangel (Isa 14:12-14) and became the ruler of the dark force. Led by the Holy Spirit, Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This was a part of God's intent and plan. The devil usually hides behind his agent of temptation, but there and then, he confronted Jesus face to face. After being led to the wilderness and fasting for forty days and nights, the devil came forward to tempt Jesus. Throughout the entire process, we see that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus, who resisted the temptations not with His divinity but with His full humanity.⁵

4:2 – "After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry." Why must Jesus fast in order to overcome temptation? His fasting was for prayer and overcoming temptation. The Lord Jesus once told His disciples that "this kind [of demon] can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29). In the Bible, prayer and fasting often go hand in hand (Neh 1:4; Acts 13:3; 14:23). We see this in this passage as well. The fact that the Lord Jesus needed to fast for forty days and forty nights in order to face the devil's temptation demonstrates that it must have been a battle of great scale, with results that are extraordinary and of unique significance. The Lord Jesus's ability to fast for forty days before beginning His ministry on earth demonstrates that God must have been with Him.⁶ The three temptations which the Lord encountered after fasting, were perhaps the climax of all the temptations He faced in the wilderness. Only these three were recorded in the Scriptures.

1. First Temptation: Gratifying Selfish Desires.

- 1) The Tactics of Temptation. "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (4:3). The focus of Satan's first temptation was for Jesus to rebel against God's will and to satisfy Himself by His own measures. It was meant for Jesus to seek independence from God. This level of temptation focuses on physical needs (1 John 2:16—the lust of the flesh). It is very reasonable for one to satisfy one's hunger with food. Jesus was hungry. So why could He not perform a miracle to satisfy His needs by turning stones into bread? On the surface, there seems to be nothing wrong with this temptation until we consider whether the entire situation was in line with God's will. We can then discern the enemy's tactics.7 It was God's will for Jesus to be tempted in the wilderness by Satan. Therefore, Jesus's hunger was also part of the plan since God permitted it. God had not yet met Jesus's need because God had His own timing. Therefore, Jesus needed to wait. Satan wanted Jesus to act against God's will and use His own power to gratify His need. The devil said, "If you are the Son of God." This means that he wanted to entice Jesus to exercise His authority as the Son of God. Even though Jesus was fully human, He also possessed God-given divine authority. He had the power to turn those stones into bread. But if He had done so, He would have acted outside of God's plan for Him. It was God's plan for Jesus to be tempted in the wilderness while He was hungry.8
- 2) The Secret of Overcoming. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"" (4:4) This is a quote of Deuteronomy 8:3b. "It is written" expresses a truth, that is, the Lord Jesus overcame the temptation because He believed God's promise in Deuteronomy 8:3. At that time, God supplied the Israelites with manna when they had no food in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus declared to the enemy that He trusted God and was willing to wait for God's means and His timing. This is unlike Eve, who did not hold fast to God's Word, and buckled before the devil's temptation

(Gen 3:6). Jesus overcame temptation with the Word of God. Through this temptation, the Lord Jesus demonstrated His perfect obedience and trust in God the Father. He held fast to the will of God. Whatever was the Father's will, He willingly carried out, and whatever was not, He did not do. The Lord Jesus willingly chose obedience to the will of God (the Word of God) rather than gratifying His own needs.

We have discovered that God's Word enables us to overcome temptation and to endure its suffering while waiting for God's help. God's Word is full of power because God is faithful and His Word will not return to Him void. God's Word is our spiritual food. Will we set aside a time each day to pray and read God's Word so that when temptation comes, we may be able to use it to overcome our own needs?

Satan often tempts us when we are at our weakest, and when our body and spirit are under tremendous pressure—when we feel exhausted or lonely, when we need to make an important choice, or when our future is uncertain. In those moments, we might be tempted to employ improper means in order to satisfy a normal need or do so at an inappropriate time. Today, from this passage, we see that while many needs are normal and reasonable, they must be met by proper means and at the proper time.¹⁰

What is your current need? Is it a "hunger" in finance, lust of the flesh, emotion, friendship, or are you facing empty nest years when you are no longer needed by your children? How can you be alert to the temptations of the evil one? Do not to resolve the "hunger" in your own way but trust God and wait for Him to open a way for you.

2. Second Temptation: Personal Superiority and Fame

- 1) The Tactics of Temptation. "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. '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"" (4:5-6). This temptation was for Jesus to test God with a false faith that was not in line with God's will by presupposing that God will protect the outcome of His deliberate action. It tempted Jesus to have an "unreasonable or inappropriate dependence and demand" on God the Father. It was to say: "This is what I am going to do and You must protect me!" This is spiritual pride that boasts of one's own ability. Satan led Jesus to the highest point of the temple, which stood more than 500 feet tall (152.4 meters). He quoted Psalm 91:11-12, which promised God's protection for those who belong to Him. "If you are the Son of God...throw yourself down! See if God will protect you!"11 The truth is, if Jesus is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, then nothing can harm Him. Satan tempted Jesus the Messiah with this cunning suggestion. He was challenging Jesus with Malachi 3:1, which prophesied that the Messiah will suddenly come to His temple. In other words, Satan was actually saying: "Why don't you do something that people hope for? Why don't you exalt yourself so that they may accept that you are indeed the Messiah?" Such was also the pride of life—attempting to do the work of God with signs and miracles (1 John 2:16). Even though Satan again used God's Word, his intention was not pure, and he did not accurately quote the Scriptures, but rather purposely omitted a line: "in all your ways." According to Psalm 91:11, "For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." This means that when one loves God wholeheartedly and with his whole life (Ps 91:14), and walks in His will by trusting Him fully, he will receive God's protection. This promised protection is not for those who "jump" rashly. Jesus would have acted outside the will of God if He had dramatically and boastfully jumped from the top of the temple in order to please people. 12
- 2) The Secret of Overcoming. "Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"" (4:7). Once again, Jesus responded with God's Word (Deut 6:16). He refused to tempt God. He refused to use any means outside the will of God or use false faith

to do God's work. Our Lord was not willing to persuade others to accept Him with acts of boasting or self-exaltation. Instead, He chose the way of the cross. He believed that when He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all people to Himself (John 12:32). Our enemy constantly entices Christians to use big and unusual means to bring about the revival of the church and the gospel message or to show off one's faith. However, God's will is for us to usher others to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through preaching the message of the cross of Christ, which the world regards as foolishness.¹³

Jesus faced spiritual warfare head on with the Word of God (Eph 6:17). Only when we are familiar with God's Word and obey its teachings can it help us to resist the attack of Satan. Satan used God's Word in coercing Jesus to sin. Some would also use the Scripture to support their own viewpoints and attempt to persuade us to purposely engage in something that we know is against God's command. Therefore, we must study the Bible with much due diligence and discernment.

- 1) Interpret Scripture with Scripture. If we want to cite a biblical passage, we must consider its background, its context, and whether our interpretation posts a direct conflict with another passage of Scripture. One of Satan's most wicked schemes is to twist the Bible and take things out of context, or only adopt certain teachings of the Bible. Such gives rise to many cults and heresies that confuse biblical truth. These tactics of Satan seem to be very effective when we look into church history and the condition of the church today.
- 2) Correctly Exercise Faith. The devil tempts man with promises from the Bible, causing them to believe that they are acting upon faith. Yet more often than not, these kind of suggestions from the devil are nothing but "tempting God." It is obvious that "faith" and "testing God" sometimes seem so similar that it may be confusing. How do we discern between the two then? In fact, from the response of the Lord Jesus, we already have a very clear principle to guide us: when we say we are trusting God yet at the same time we purposely disobey God's command and stubbornly believe that God would bless us, then we are in this case tempting God.¹⁵

3. Third Temptation: Gaining Power and Glory by Compromising

1) The Tactics of Temptation. Vss. 8-9 "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me." The last temptation of Satan was for Jesus to lean closer to the evil one and compromise (disobeying the first of the Ten Commandments), in an attempt that Jesus would fulfill God's promise to Him by a measure that was not in line with God's will. God had promised Jesus that He would rule over all (Ps 2:6-9; Isa 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14). Therefore, Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendors. Such was an example of tempting with the "lust of the eyes." Where could Jesus actually see all the splendor of the world? It was very possible that not one mountain was high enough for one to see all the kingdoms and their splendors from its peak. Therefore, there must be two interpretations here: one was that the devil had brought Jesus to the highest mountain top locally. From there, Jesus could look around and see all the towns at the foot of the mountain and try to imagine the richness of the world (Gen 13:10). Another possibility was that the devil had used his supernatural power to reveal all the earthly kingdoms and their splendors in a vision, and showed it to Jesus. Originally, God had given the authority of ruling over the earth to Adam and Eve. But because they compromised in temptation, Satan or the enemy became the prince of the world and all kingdoms at that time belonged to Satan. At that moment, Satan deceived Jesus that as long as Jesus was willing to worship him, he would give Him all of it. Satan wanted to entice Jesus to obtain the authority of ruling over all nations through His own way rather than God's means. He wanted Jesus to compromise and not take the way of the cross so that God's redemptive plan would not be accomplished and that the sinners today would continue to be bound by sin. 18 God's way has no shortcuts. Suffering must be the way to glory (John 2:23-24; 1 Pet 5:10). Jesus knew that there was unmeasurable darkness and unspeakable pain waiting for Him in the way of the will of God. He also knew what the fierce enemy suggested was for Him to receive all these glorious inheritance without going through shame, trials, and death.

2) The Secret of Overcoming. Vs. 10 "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."" The meaning of the name of Satan is "adversary, one who resists." It is another name for which the devil is known for. "Away from me, Satan" was the Lord Jesus's response to Satan's suggestion of compromise. The Lord Jesus is to receive all kingdoms, but in God's way, and it will have nothing to do with the devil who shall take no part in its fulfillment. Not only the Lord is in no need of any help from Satan, He will engage in battle with him to obtain His kingdom. Through His death on the cross and His resurrection, the Lord demolished Satan's power and took over the kingdom and set free those whom Satan had kept captive.²⁰ Once again, Jesus showed His perfect loyalty to God and rejected any and all means that were outside the will of God. When He said: "For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (4:10; Deut.6:13; 10:20), He used the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to defeat the enemy.²¹ Satan has always hungered for man's worship. He wanted to usurp the throne from God and be the god himself (Isa 14:12-14).²² But the Word of God instructs us that we ought to worship and serve our Lord and God only.

Jesus overcame all the temptations and did not sin against God in all these matters. Jesus complied with the will of God and fully cooperated with the plan of the Father, and thus showed that He was worthy to be the Son of God.

4:11 – "Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended Him." Luke 4:13 records: "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time." There is a time frame allowed by God as He permits temptations to come. "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1 Cor 10:13). The Lord Jesus resisted the devil with all His might and he fled from Him (Jas 4:7). Since the Scripture says, "left...until an opportune time," what it means is he would be back later. Such was what we observed throughout the ministry of Jesus that the devil continued to tempt Him. For example: the Jews wanted to make Him king by force after He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish (John 6:15)²³ and Peter tried to forbid Him from going to the cross (Matt 16:23). We see also in this verse that the angels (plural) came and attended to Him and prepared food for Him. Such is the evidence that God would provide for His needs in a timely manner, and it would be so much better than the bread turned from stones!

Many Christians, even preachers, encounter this cunning suggestion from the enemy in their ministries: "Just lower your standard a little bit, and compromise just a little bite (e.g., not publicly taking a stand that homosexuality is a sin, or only speaking of God's love in your messages and not so much of sin and judgment). Then your congregation will increase in numbers!" This is a very attractive offer, and many believers do fall into such temptation. However, if we refuse to compromise, we may experience the pain of rejection just like Jesus did. Yet be assured that as long as we walk in God's will, we will be blessed with the abundance of fruit in the end.

God does not tempt anyone (Jas 1:13-15), but He does allow temptation to come upon us to try us. Only when one is tested can one know if his faith will stand. The table below compares and contrasts the devil's temptation of Adam and Eve in Genesis with that of Jesus using 1 John 2:15-16 as a reference.

Compare and Contrast Satan's Temptations of Adam and Eve with that of Jesus

| Tactics of Temptation (1 John 2:15-16 | Genesis 3 | Matthew 4 | What was Destroyed |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Physical appetite (lust of | You may eat all the fruit from | You can tell these stones | Trust in God |
| the flesh) | any tree in the garden (3:1) | to become bread (4:3) | |
| Personal Gain (pride of | You will not certainly die | You will not strike your | Faith in God |
| life) | (3:4) | foot (4:6) | |
| Power and glory (lust of | You will be like God (3:5) | You will have all these in | Obedience to God |
| the eye) | , , | the world (4:8-9) | |

In these two seemingly different temptations, Satan used similar tactics to tempt Adam, Eve, and Jesus. As a result, Adam and Even bowed before lust because they doubted God's Word, bringing sin into the world. Humankind lost freedom and became slaves to sin ever since. Jesus, on the other hand, held steadfastly to the will of God in the entire process. He was not even slightly enticed by Satan's temptation. He overcame Satan victoriously and became the hope and strength of those who trust in Him to overcome sin themselves (Heb 2:16-18).²⁵

II. 4:12-25 The victorious Lord Jesus called the disciples, preached the Word, healed the sick, and thus began His public ministry.

4:12-16 – The Beginning of Jesus's Public Ministry. After His victory over Satan, Jesus Christ was ready to begin His ministry publicly. During this time, John the Baptist continued his work (John 3:22-30) until he rebuked Herod for marrying his brother's wife, Herodias, and was then imprisoned by Herod (Luke 3:19-20).²⁶ Matthew recorded that it was not until John the Baptist was put into prison that Jesus returned to Galilee and publicly began His preaching ministry. When Jesus learned that John was in prison and when He Himself was cast out after identifying Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus left Nazareth and went to Capernaum and lived there (Luke 4:16-30). After Joshua's conquest of Canaan, that area of land belonged to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Isaiah 9:1-2 prophesied that a great light would dawn in that region. Seeing what Jesus did, Matthew knew that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled (4:14-16). One of the tasks of the Messiah was to bring light to the darkness, for He was the Light of this world (John 1:9; 8:12).

4:17 – "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" When the forerunner of the king was imprisoned, Jesus began to preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt 3:2). This was the message of John the Baptist as he paved the way for the Messiah and now the Messiah declared it Himself. If one wishes to become a member of this kingdom, he must repent. Repentance is essential if one wishes to restore his relationship with God.

4:18-22 – The Lord Jesus's Call to the Disciples. Since Jesus was the promised Messiah, He had the authority to call others to follow Him. Some of these first four disciples had already met Jesus earlier (John 1:35-42). Yet this time, Jesus called them to lay down their profession as fishermen, to follow Him, and to become His disciples. He promised them that they would become fishers of men. What a blessed investment that was! The spread of the message of the kingdom of heaven for more to hear, repent, and become citizens of the kingdom of heaven requires the participation of many. However, one must pay the price for answering such a call.

James and his brother John, Peter, and Andrew were the first group of disciples Jesus called to labor together with Him. Some of them were relatives and some were even brothers. Whether in biblical times or now, it is often most difficult for family members to believe in God through the testimony of their own. The call of Jesus to them must have been quite effective! This also proves that unless the Holy Spirit works, it is very difficult to lead a family member to the Lord. When Jesus called these four disciples, they did not reject Him with any excuses, nor said that it was not a good time.²⁸ They also di not question the challenges that they might encounter later on nor did they doubt whether they could do the work that the Lord called them to do. When they heard the Lord is

calling, they immediately obeyed and followed Him. How is God moving in you currently? Has God called you to be a fisher of men? How will you respond to Him?

4:23-25 – The Mighty Work of the Lord Jesus. "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). This passage, which is similar to Matthew 9:35, is a summary of Jesus's public ministry. It includes:

- 1) Jesus went through Galilee and taught in their synagogues. This Jesus, who was declared as the King of the Jews, began His work among the Jews. He came to their synagogues where they gathered for worship and prepared their hearts for repentance and to receive the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Some say that there were more than two hundred cities in the region of Galilee at that time and that Jesus walked through most of them. He humbly sought people to be reconciled to God. The Lord Jesus is truly an example for preachers. He preached with all His might anytime and anywhere.
- 2) The work of Jesus also included "teaching" and "proclaiming." Therefore, His ministry was also a prophetic ministry for He was "that prophet" whom Moses foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.
- 3) Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. His message was: God was realizing His covenant with the Israelites and establishing His kingdom.
- 4) Jesus healed every disease and sickness among the people. He proved that He was the Messiah from God with what He did (Luke 4:18-19; Isa 35:1-6). He spoke with authority, and signs and wonders followed Him. This differed from all the prophets and from even John the Baptist before Him. Matthew gives more detailed accounts of these signs and wonders in chapters 8–9.

Many who heard about the work of Jesus began to gather towards Him, and His fame spread everywhere. When people came to Jesus, they brought many whom the physicians at that time could not heal. Filled with love and patience, Jesus healed them all one by one. It is no wonder that large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis (the Ten Cities, including the region east and south of the Sea of Galilee), Jerusalem, Judea, and across the Jordan River came to follow Him.³⁰

D. Conclusion

The three temptations of the devil, which the Lord Jesus endured, are also the three temptations Satan uses in our lives: 1) lust of the flesh, 2) personal gains, and 3) shortcuts to glory. The Lord Jesus did not face these temptations with His divinity. Rather, for our sake, He endured its suffering with His complete humanity. He used the weapons, which we can also depend on, in our own temptations today: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and a perfect trust in God the Father. In addition, the Lord Jesus overcame because He was certain of God's will for His life. Are you clear on God's will for your life? This will is to walk the way of the cross. Even though it is uneasy, the way of the cross leads to victory and the crown of glory (Jas 1:12).

In Matthew 1–3, the author provided evidence—His genealogy, His birth, the worship given Him, the testimony of the forerunner, and the testimonies of the Holy Spirit and God the Father at His baptism—these proved that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. In chapter 4, He continues to provide evidence through His victory over Satan's temptation, His authoritative calling of the disciples, and His powerful ministry to prove that He is also the Son of God, the King. In chapters 5–7, Matthew will prove that Jesus is King through His teachings.

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