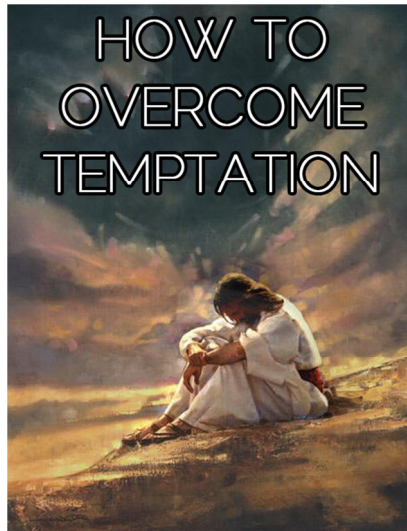


## Matthew 4:1-2 How to Overcome Temptation “The Source and the Causes”

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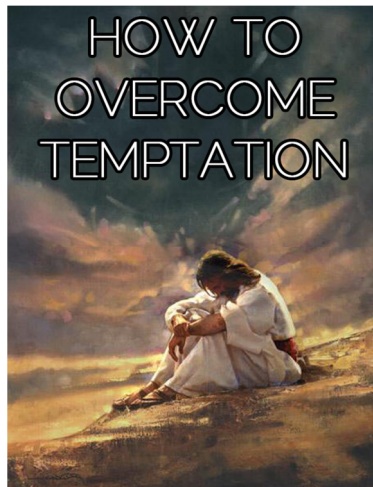
I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 4 this morning as we begin a new series: “How to Overcome Temptation.”



This will be a four-part series and we begin today by look at temptation: “The Source and the Causes.” Next week, we’ll talk about “The Lust of the Eyes.” I hope you’ll try your best to be here each week, because each message will build on the last.

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As we move to chapter 4 of Matthew’s gospel account of Jesus we are going to see how Jesus handled temptation and I’m so thankful that He told Matthew about this because we know that Jesus was alone when He was tempted. Take a look at the picture we’re using for our series again...



There was no one with Jesus when He went through His 40 days of fasting and temptation. Thankfully, Jesus told Matthew and we have this account as well as Mark and Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptation.

If Jesus hadn’t shared this occurrence, we would be the poorer for it...because it’s in this account we get some of the most profound instruction on how to overcome that which we all suffer with: **TEMPTATION.**

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You will remember from our time last week that Jesus answered the call after having lived in obscurity for 30 years of His life, He heads south to the Jordan River to be baptized by His cousin John the Baptist.



It was His baptism that started His three-year ministry with the blessing of His Father, who said, "This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased."

What a triumphant moment! The Spirit of God descends upon Jesus like a dove and all is well. Now Jesus can go start healing people and performing miracles proving that He is the Son of God.

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Wait a minute! Not so fast. Matthew records...

**Matthew 4:1**

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

Mark records in his Gospel these words...

**Mark 1:12**

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

Do you see who led this process? The Spirit of God did. Why?

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Listen carefully, Jesus had to be prepared and ready for all that He would face in the next 3 years and these next 40 days would finish that preparation.

You might say, "Wait a minute! Are you saying God led His Son to be tempted?" No. That's not what the text says. Look at it again.

**Matthew 4:1**

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

Do you see that word "tempted?" We've studied this word before back when we were in the series in 2 Thessalonians. It's the Greek word: **pie-rod-zo**:

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**Definition for the Greek Word: Peirazo:**

#1 In a good sense, it is trial or test for the purpose of ascertaining the quality of something (used by God)

#2 In a bad sense, it is a temptation or enticement to sin that arises from lustful desires (used by Satan) (source: blueletterbible.org)

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Let me say it to you this way:

God allows **tests** to our *faith* to grow us  
Satan uses **temptations** to our *lust* to defeat us

Church, God doesn't tempt us. God doesn't entice us to sin. That's impossible. It would go totally against His character and James tells us so...

**James 1:13-15**

**13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

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Do you remember our example of this? Remember the \$20 bill fall out of someone's purse in the parking lot at Wal-Mart?



What would you do? Would you take it?

Would you rationalize that "nobody would ever know after all... I could really use that money." If you pick it up and put it in your pocket (knowing it's not yours), then you have fallen TEMPTATION.

However, on the other hand... if you take the \$20 inside and find the lady and give it back... Then you passed the test. It's like a quarter... a quarter has a heads and tails side to the same quarter.

You see in that example, it's a test and a temptation at the same time. We don't really know how to define the **peirazo (pie-rod-zo)** until we see the end result. It can be used for good or for evil. If we do the right thing, then we can say we passed the TEST. However, if we fail...then we can say that we succumbed to the TEMPTATION.

In the temptation of Jesus, from Satan's viewpoint it was a way that he could try and tempt Jesus to go against the Father. Yet, God the Father was going to allow the test to prove that Jesus was

worthy to be the Savior of the world. God was allowing the test to prove the righteousness of His Son and complete His preparation for ministry. But, Satan sought to use it to tempt and bring down.

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Church family, can I say something that struck me in all of this?

What had just happened in Jesus' life? Triumph! He had been baptized and His Father had said, how well pleased He was! What a blessing! What a spiritual high!

Hey watch out! I've learned that so often right after a great victory or moment of spiritual success is when we're the most vulnerable and susceptible to defeat. Listen, one of the greatest enemies of the Christian is spiritual unpreparedness. That's what happened to David with Bathsheba. He had won so many military battles, but then instead of going back to the battlefield with his men, he took down his guard on the rooftop of his palace and it got him! Don't ever forget: Pride goes before a fall.

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So, the Spirit of God leads Jesus into what is called the wilderness...

**Matthew 4:1**

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

Let me show you where this area was. See this map...



See the Dead Sea (bottom right). There is desert wilderness between the Dead Sea and the towns of Jericho and south and east of Bethany. This was a desolate area. Dry, barren...nothing there... Remember the picture of that area I showed you when I went there in 2007?



Jesus was alone and I believe He needed to be alone. It's interesting the wording of verse 2 to give us insight as to why...

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### **Matthew 4:2**

**2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**

The Bible says, "after fasting" 40 days and nights... I am convinced that the temptations came after the 40 day and it was during those 40 days, PRIOR TO the temptation, that Jesus was praying to His Father in solitude and in preparation for what was to come.

Folks, we all need times where we get away and get alone with the Lord. Moses did in Deut. 9:9 before he got the 10 Commandments. He fasted 40 Days and nights and so did Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8 right before he passed off his mantle to Elisha.

Listen, do you need some time alone with the Lord? What's going on in your life right now? Listen, before you attempt to make a major decision or a major "life change"...please, please spend concerted time in prayer (and even fasting) before the Lord. Because, if you don't, you could make a mistake in your haste.

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Now...have you ever WONDERED HOW THIS TEMPTATION HAPPENED? Was it all in Jesus' mind or did Satan actually show up in the wilderness?

If you look at the first part of verse 3, Matthew records:

### **Matthew 4:3a**

**3 And the tempter came and said to him...**

The word "came" in the Greek means: "**to come to, approach**" or "**draw near to.**" Folks... that's a face-to-face meeting happening here...without question...

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Listen, you understand some people want to say that Satan isn't real. He's just conjured up in the

figments of man's imagination. Let me tell you something. Satan is as real as you and me. Don't you ever doubt that Satan is real! He approached Jesus visibly. This was a face-to-face encounter.

The word used for Satan in verse 2 is "Diabolos," and it means "Slanderer or Accuser." The Devil was an angel in heaven. He was a Guardian Cherub who was literally at the throne of God. But, he decided he wanted to be God and so, according to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, he was given a choice. Submit or leave. He chose to leave and he convinced 1/3 of the angels to go with him.

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Where did God send him and the other fallen angels (now called demons)? Don't say hell. No. They were cast to the earth. Peter tells us...

### **1 Peter 5:8**

**8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**

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Satan is also described as the "god of this world."

### **2 Corinthians 4:4**

**4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

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Some of you here today are blinded by Satan. You think you can get to heaven because you are a good person or because you come to church. You are blind. Some of you believe you've got all the time in the world and you can just keep putting it off and keep putting it off. Well, you are blind...you aren't promised tomorrow and you could die tonight.

You might say, "Are you trying to scare me?" No! I'm trying to wake you up and tell you the truth! Satan wants to blind you and take your soul to hell with him and I don't want that to happen! Please, please wake up and come out of the darkness before it's too late!

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You see, if you are here today and you have never surrendered your life to Christ, then you are part of Satan's family. You are on his team. I know you don't see it that way...but, it's the truth. The apostle John tells us so...

### **1 John 3:8**

**8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.**

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Do you see why Jesus came? He came to destroy the works of the devil and that's exactly what He did in that wilderness. Yet, Satan's aim in all three of the temptations he's offered up to Jesus was to seek to bring Jesus down and fall to temptation.

And you know what? If that had happened and Jesus fallen to a single temptation, then He would have been incapable of being the perfect sacrifice for our sins. But, that didn't happen and it couldn't happen and I'm going to show you why. But, first I want to ask you this...

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Have you ever wondered why God cast Satan to earth? Why didn't He put him on Saturn or Jupiter? Listen carefully Satan is pawn. He doesn't think he is, but he is. Satan can do nothing, unless it's allowed by God. Satan is nothing but a pawn in the hand of God, which God uses to

show that He is the all-powerful, all mighty God and His sovereign plan will not be thwarted, on heaven or on earth.

You see, God permits Satan to exist on this earth as a part of His plan to show the universe that love conquers evil. Love wins in the end because greater is He that's in us than he that's in the world!

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Maybe you're here today and you are thinking to yourself, "Could Jesus have really sinned? Did He have the capacity to fail and give in to Satan's temptation?" Well, those are questions that are worth investigating. And this is where it's going to get deep. So buckle up for the dive.

### **Could Jesus HAVE SINNED?**

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Well, we need to qualify that question before we can answer it.

We know that Jesus is God in the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus claimed to be God and ultimately it was that claim that would get Him killed.

**So, if Jesus is God, can God sin? The answer is unequivocally NO!**

But wait a minute... The Bible is clear that Jesus was tempted. We saw that last week...

#### **Hebrews 4:15**

**15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

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Listen carefully, **in His humanity** Jesus was most definitely tempted. The writer of Hebrews tells us so and we know that Scripture interprets Scripture...that's a fundamental law of sound hermeneutics (Bible Study).

BUT, **in His deity** He could not sin. Remember, Jesus was not born as offspring of man. He was placed in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. We are all born into sin from sin, going all the way back to Adam, but Jesus wasn't. Yet, from the moment of His conception, He was 100% God and 100% man. Both His human nature and His divine nature existed in one person. And there's the rub. We are trying to understand Jesus' deity and Jesus' humanity simultaneously and that's like trying to explain the Trinity...we're ants crawling across the computer keyboard again. An ant is almost oblivious to the power of that computer.

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We know in Jesus' humanity that He felt hunger. He felt thirst. He was weary. He felt pain and He would weep. Yet, we know that He was God in the flesh who came to dwell among us. So, how can we resolve this tension of His humanity and His deity?

Let's go a bit deeper and I think we'll see. Think with me... if Jesus, as a person, had sinned that would have involved both the human and the divine nature. That being the case, then God himself would have sinned, and if that were true, then God would have ceased to be God. God can't sin and continue to be God. It's incongruent with His Deity.

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Therefore, if we're asking if it was actually possible for Jesus to have sinned, the answer would have to be NO. His Divine nature would trump His humanity. But, in His humanity, we know that He

was still tempted. Remember our Scripture from Hebrews moments ago?

### **Hebrews 4:15**

**15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

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You see, when the Jesus put on flesh, He was still God (John 10:30,33; 20:28). But, he willingly “humbled Himself” and “did not count equality with God something to grasped” (Phil 2:6-8) so that as a man He could be tempted, and thus pass the test, thereby making Him the perfect Man. Philippians 2 describes this powerful truth:

### **Philippians 2:6-8**

**6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

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So, we see that Jesus was God, and He emptied Himself of His glory (only to be seen on the Mt. of Transfiguration), but, He didn't empty Himself of His deity, thus He WAS INCAPABLE OF SINNING.

But, I know what you are thinking... Some of you are thinking: **“Well then, Kevin, if Jesus could not have sinned, how can you say that His temptations were real? How can you say that Jesus was really tempted if He was incapable of sinning?”**

Well, I'll do like Jesus often did and I'll answer the question with a question...

### ***When you are tempted, do you sin every time?***

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I hope you don't. Surely you don't give in to every single temptation placed before you. Now, if that's the case, then the times when you don't sin, you wouldn't say that you weren't tempted and the temptation wasn't real. Of course not. Certainly the temptation was real, you simply chose not to give into the temptation.

The same was true of Jesus, except that He never gave in to the temptation like we do. But, He still felt them and endured them in all ways like us in HIS HUMANITY.

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Church family, grasp this... Jesus was definitely tempted and He was tempted to the absolute limit of the capacity that Satan could possibly tempt Him. Every temptation Satan would throw at Jesus would be to the limit of what Satan could offer in his evilness...the very maximum...up to the very limit!

This is powerful! I want you to see this. You see, if you were to rank temptation on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the worst...heaviest temptation you could possibly bear... Most of us give in at about a 3 or 4. We might on occasion hold out up to a 7 or 8. But, this is what we would look like if we tried to take what Jesus took. We would look like this guy...





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But Jesus...He took it all! He took a 10 every time! Every temptation was pounded at Jesus at the fullest maximum Satan could muster. Jesus felt the maximum full force of all the weight of temptation possible and he conquered it. It would look like this ...



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Yes, Jesus was tempted in that Judean wilderness, AND TO THE MAX...yet, He never gave in. He took full the force of Satan's weight...He took the maximum...to the full extent... and He never dropped it...He was without sin.

Oh what a Savior!

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Church family, listen carefully... Satan played right into the hands of Jesus. Jesus was indeed tempted and in so doing...He showed He could defeat the Deceiver. He was tempted to show that He is the Conqueror. Jesus could not be broken. He proved that He was up to the test!

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**Well, you know how all this ends up don't you?** Jesus conquers all these temptations. He passes the test in that Judean wilderness and you know what...about 3 years later...He will pass another test in a Garden when Satan would come at Him again.



He would sweat drops of blood as Satan whispered...don't go through with it!

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As I thought about that garden, I was reminded of another garden and Adam and Eve. They would succumb to Satan's temptation in a garden (Eden). But, Jesus would pass the test in His garden (Gethsemane). He would pass that test, because He was thinking of you.

Adam fell by eating in his garden, but Jesus overcame in a wilderness by not eating and ultimately by sweating blood in another garden...He would make the decision to go all the way and lift the weight of sin over His head...all by Himself.

And thus, Adam lost the battle and plunged mankind into sin, while Jesus won the battle and opened the door that mankind might walk through the doorway of forgiveness of sin...right back into the presence of the Father, God.

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So, if you are here today and you are lost in your sins and you don't know Jesus...you are blind...and I pray that you will see the light of Jesus. You see, you can never overcome the greatest enemy in your life if you don't.

That enemy...Death. The only way to escape death and be delivered out of the hands of Satan is to receive Jesus by faith...confessing and repenting of your sins.

Please, please as a lost person today, the greatest peirazo of your life is happening right now.

**You will have to decide if you want to pass the test and come to the Father, or if want to continue believing the lies of Satan.**

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Yes, you can pass the test (peirazo) or you can give in to the temptation. And oh...one more thing...passing the test means heaven. Failing in temptation means hell.

The choice is yours. I pray you will listen to the voice of Jesus today. For He paid the price... He showed Himself worthy and up to the test in that wilderness. The work is done... Salvation is at hand... He's done the work...don't be a fool...pass the test and receive Him today!