

TUTORIAL
1.39

Jesus resisted Satan's temptations

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Matthew 4:1-11, Deuteronomy 6:13, 8:3, Psalm 91:11,12.**

Last time

People from Jerusalem and all over Palestine came to where John was living and preaching in an uninhabited area by the Jordan river. He was preparing the way for the coming Messiah by pointing out people's sin and true standing before God. Many accepted his message, repented and were baptised by John. A notable exception were the religious elite, and John was brutally honest in exposing their hypocrisy. After Jesus was baptized by John, God's Spirit came to Him, demonstrating that He was to be the dominant, guiding force in Jesus' life and ministry. God declared that Jesus is his Son and that He is entirely pleased with Him.

Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness

Matthew's account now moves on to another amazing incident from Jesus' life that reveals a great deal about who He is; who God is. (Matthew 4:1-11) After His baptism, Jesus is directed by God's Spirit to go off on His own into an uninhabited area. After 40 days - nearly 6 weeks - without food there He's naturally very hungry.

No doubt hoping Jesus will be made spiritually vulnerable through physical weakness, Satan takes the opportunity to try to lure Him into saying or doing something that is against God's will. (Actually, Matthew uses the other common name for this fallen powerful Spirit being, the Devil). The special relationship between the Father and Son that God has recently testified to on the bank of the Jordan river is going to be put to the test. We're reminded of another such test of a man's willingness for God to be his absolute guide, rather than himself. In that case, of course, Adam failed; and the results for the human race were catastrophic. What will happen now? The stakes are just as high as they were then, in fact more so. If Jesus falls for Satan's deception, if in any way He resists God's guiding hand, or if He fails to live up to God's perfection, the entire plan to rescue the human race will fail. Like Adam, He will have given

allegiance to God's Enemy. Only a perfect man can be God's special, chosen Prophet, Priest and King. Mankind will be lost, forever slaves to Satan, sin and death.

Test 1: Will He prioritise His own needs above God's will?

So Jesus is hungry, and alone in the wilderness – at least in terms of human companions. We don't know in what form exactly, but Satan begins to communicate with Him. Not only do we learn about God's character in this encounter, but we also gain insights into how His Enemy works. He prods and pushes in subtle, devious ways...looking for points of vulnerability, to twist and destroy. Clearly he would love nothing more than to drive a wedge between the Son and His Father. He starts out with something seemingly benign, neutral: food.

Jesus is obviously very hungry. Well, there's nothing wrong with food, is there? As the Son of the Creator it would certainly be easy to turn some of these stones lying around into bread. Where's the harm in that? Surely God wouldn't be unreasonable enough to not want His Son to eat? But Jesus sees the rotten core at the heart of this suggestion. There are more important things at stake here than His hunger, His needs. He won't be tempted to use His creative power to fulfill His own desires, no matter how real they are. Certainly He won't be guided by God's Enemy. He quotes from Scripture where Moses recalls how God took the Israelites into the wilderness for 40 years. (Deuteronomy 8:3) One of the important lessons they were supposed to learn there was that life is not ultimately sustained by food. Physical needs are transient, secondary. The important thing is Truth. It is allowing God to be our Story Writer and Teller. To put His will above our own concerns. That is the purpose and the essence of life.

Test 2: Will He try to force God to prove His faithfulness?

Next Satan insidiously brings into question how much God the Father really cares for His Son, and whether Jesus will manipulate God to find out. Okay, say you're standing at the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem (and there they are, Jesus and Satan, on a ledge or rooftop, looking down into the void)... Then with incredible insolence, Satan quotes God's Word to Jesus but, typically, he tries to make it serve his own devious purposes. God says He'll protect people who trust Him for refuge, even sending His angels to make sure they don't come to harm, right? (Psalm 91:11,12) Well then, Satan implies, given this special relationship you're supposed to have as His Son, what have you got to worry about? Go ahead, jump. Find out if God really does care for you...see if the relationship is what God says it is.

But Jesus is having none of it. His confidence in God's care and faithfulness is rock solid. He has no intention of trying to force the Father to prove it. He quotes again from Moses' review of the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness...when they demanded that God provide water for them. It's wrong to put God to the test like that, to try to dictate what He does. The mantra of many people in modern society is that they'd believe in God if He'd do this or that...But they insist on setting the terms for belief in Him. This is a reversal of the order of things. He is God. He's the one who sets the terms. He reveals Himself to us in the ways that He knows are best. Humans are in no position to force God's hand. The only appropriate posture is one of humble dependence and trust. And Jesus, the sinless Son of God, Himself the Creator of all things, chooses to take that very posture.

Test 3: Will He be seduced by a thirst for power?

Satan plays his final card. They are standing together looking at all the earth's kingdoms, thrones, and empires. The sum total of human power and glory, perhaps for all of history.

Satan, the great usurper, the counterfeit ruler of earth since man's fall, offers it to Jesus. He can have it all, right now. All the power, all the adulation. Even be a benevolent, humane ruler if He chooses. He could do some good. And best of all, there's no cost, no sacrifice, no pain. What was it again that God is offering? Being a sacrificial Lamb? Saving people from their sin? No, no, no. There's an easier road than that. Much less extreme, more reasonable, and realistic in a human sense. And only one small requirement. All He has to do is kneel down and worship Satan. What harm can there be in that?

Jesus is dismissive. He's had enough. He's not seduced by the power without sacrifice, the authority without cost, that Satan offers. That's not the road He's on. Not what He came to earth for. He concludes the conversation with a curt dismissal of Satan and one final quote from the same part of the Old Testament Narrative as before. "You must worship the LORD your God and serve only Him" (Deuteronomy 6:13) This of course is what Satan rebelled against, wanting for Himself the worship and servitude of everyone else. It is also what Adam and all his race fail to do, preferring on the whole to tell their own story and serve themselves first. But putting God first and serving only Him is what Jesus has chosen to do, no matter what the cost. And this is the very thing that qualifies Him, and only Him, to be God's Lamb, to save people from their sins, to be the Great Deliverer of mankind.

God's battle with His Enemy Satan, the battle with evil in fact, is not a struggle for supremacy between two well-matched opponents. Nor is it anything like the dualism of some religions - two sides that make up a whole: light/darkness, good/evil. Satan's power is real enough. As humans we are no match for his cunning. But God is in no way threatened by him. His supremacy is never in

doubt. He writes the Story of reality from beginning to end, including, ultimately, Satan's destiny.

Matthew's narrative records that Satan leaves. Jesus has triumphed. His weapons have been truth, faith and obedience to God. A final intriguing footnote from Matthew adds that God's messengers, His angels, come and take care of Jesus.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Jesus resisted Satan's temptations

1. Taking each of the 3 temptations in turn, consider the following:
 - Do you see any parallel here with Satan's original temptation of Adam and Eve?
 - Is the underlying essence of the temptation something that our culture struggles with?
 - As God's children, are we vulnerable to this area of temptation as well? If so, how does it potentially damage our relationship with Him?