

Matthew Chapters 3-4 – Pre-Ministry Testimony of Jesus – Part 3

Review

Matthew begins with the genealogy and birth of Jesus the Messiah focusing upon the line of Joseph and how Jesus' birth was foretold in Scripture. Matthew 2 is about the early life of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is still not on the words or actions of Jesus Himself but on the circumstances and actions of others that demonstrate that He is the Messiah.

In Matthew 3:1-12, we are introduced to John the Baptizer. The baptism of John was to prepare Israel for their Messiah King. The imploration for Israel was to reconsider, change their mind, realize their error, and prepare for their Messiah.

The Messiah's objective was to come unto His own, be accepted as the suffering servant, raise from the dead in His glory, be accepted as the King, then the Messiah would judge (destroy the enemies of God and Israel) and save the righteous into the kingdom of heaven.

The preparation of Israel for the kingdom of heaven is for a real, earth-bound kingdom. This is not a referent to a spiritual kingdom. This is a promise to restore Israel to full prominence and have all the kingdoms be subject to Israel.

Jesus was baptized for many reasons as identified in Scripture:

1. Identification – Jesus identified with both Israel and the sin of Israel. Israel needed to change their mind and fix their behavior to prepare themselves for their Messiah and the kingdom of heaven. The leaders of Israel, especially the King, interceded for and dealt with the sin of the people.
2. Identification of the Messiah by John
3. Identification of the Son by God the Father
4. Confirmation of the prophetic promises of the Hebrew Scripture (The Anointed One)
5. The Holy Spirit overtly and publicly anointing Jesus and remaining upon Jesus
 - a. Marker of Jesus' public ministry and being empowered by the Holy Spirit
 - b. From this point forward, Jesus was led by Spirit

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-4:11 (Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-23, 4:1-13). The temptation of Jesus is directly tied to the His baptism in all the Synoptics. John does not record the temptation of Jesus.

We can see both grammatically and contextually.

Grammatically, the *then* (tote) denotes a time marker that indicates the next action in a sequence. Luke separates the baptism from the temptation with Jesus' genealogy, but the first action is that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. Mark uses the word "euthus," which is not the deciding factor since Mark uses the word *immediately* frequently, but it is consistent with Matthew and Luke.

In 3:17, the Father announces, "This is my beloved Son..." then the devil tempts Jesus saying, "If you are the Son of God..." The devil is permitted to tempt Jesus as these are His first acts, though not public, in His Holy Spirit-empowered life.

Once the Spirit comes upon Him, Satan is permitted to test Him.

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A couple of grammatical points in this section:

ἀνάγω *anagō* – *led*. This is the only time this word is used in Matthew. It means to bring or lead. It is used in Luke 2:22 and Luke 4:5. The word is not a spiritual nudge but a physical leading or bringing. This could have been the Holy Spirit transporting Jesus, or it could have been that the Holy Spirit was leading Jesus, having Jesus walk to the location He was to go. The point is that Jesus did not feel His way but was physically moved (spiritually, not mystically).

πειράζω *peirazō* – *tempted*. Test, attempt, make proof through trial. The purpose of the trial is not to see if Jesus would succumb to the temptation, but to demonstrate what the Father knew would happen. It provides proof to Israel that Jesus is the Messiah and is an example for believers when they fall into temptation (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 2:14-18; 1 Peter 2:20-22).

διάβολος *diabolos* – *devil*. One who slanders, false accuser. When used with the definite article, this always refers to Satan. This adjective is used as a substantive. “False accuser” is a description that became a moniker.

If – Each statement made by the devil is a first-class conditional statement. The temptation was not to prove that Jesus was the Son, as if He needed any validation. Rather the temptation was to demonstrate it. Satan wanted Jesus to function in His deity and not in His humanity. The prompting to use His divine nature was not by the Holy Spirit but by the devil. If Jesus were to fall for the temptation, it would demonstrate that Jesus was led by the devil and not by the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus fast for forty days/nights?

Forty is a number that indicates judgment, trial, or a period of extreme importance.

It stormed for 40 days/nights during the flood

40 days was the customarily period of mourning for a ruler

Moses was with the Lord on the mountain 40 days/nights

Moses' life is divided into 3 parts of 40 years

Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years as a judgment

Israel was oppressed by the Philistines for 40 years

Goliath stood against Israel for 40 days

Saul, David, and Solomon reigned for 40 years

Elijah ate, drank, and then traveled to Horeb, and that meal sustained him for 40 days (1 Kings 19)

Jonah warned Nineveh that the city would be destroyed in 40 days

After His resurrection, Jesus kept appearing to many people over 40 days (Acts 1)

Other than a number that would resonate as being important, Jesus identified with Israel being in the wilderness and completely dependent upon the Father. Jesus also identified with the prophet Elijah and Moses in being dependent upon God for sustenance. 40 days and nights is beyond the natural ability of not eating. The implication is that Jesus was supernaturally sustained although still hungry.

There is a question about the order of the temptations in Matthew versus Luke. Matthew's account seems to increase in both height and in intensity, where Luke probably depicts the temptations in chronological order.

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The purpose of Matthew's recording involves the continuing evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Both His resistance to the test and how He resists the test are vital for the Jews to understand that their King is truly righteous and a God-honoring example to the people.

In what way was Jesus tempted?

We can read about each temptation and make observations, but we can also categorize the temptations. This allows us to see the bigger picture and understand that, even though we are not tempted exactly as Jesus was, He still provides the example for every type of temptation.

1 John 2:15-17 – *Lust* is a word that simply means to greatly desire. The word itself does not depict a sinful act. It is what is greatly desired or what is the source that causes the great desire.

The three items here are not about what the desire is but about its source. All that is in the world is:

1. The desire of the flesh
2. The desire of the eyes
3. The arrogance/pride of life

Now categorize the three temptations of Jesus:

1. Stones to bread – Desire of the flesh
2. Throw yourself to the ground – Pride of life
3. Shown all the kingdoms – Desire of the eyes

How did Jesus combat these temptations?

1. Verse 4 (Deuteronomy 8:3) - The flesh is not what is eternal; that which is spiritual is eternal. Therefore, life is more than food, and we need to depend upon the Word of God for our decision-making. We cannot be driven by our impulses or even our fleshly needs.
2. Verse 7 (Deuteronomy 6:16) – Who we are is not captured in the spectacle of our achievements. Even if we are guaranteed certain promises, we do not put this to the test by putting ourselves in difficulty. Pride is thinking too highly of yourself or thinking that who you are in Jesus is self-made. Do not mock God by being self-willed, rather do what we are supposed to do in the present, knowing that our promises are waiting for us in the future (hope).
3. Verse 10 – No matter what we see and desire, even if it is obtainable, it must not be loved. The system of the world is created by Satan. If the goals and achievements in this life are what we value, we might achieve it, but then we place a higher value on Satan's system. Instead, we are to honor, love, and glorify God alone.

For us, temptations are not like what Jesus experienced, since He had no sin nature. It is plausible to think of the devil as a stand-in for the sin nature. Our temptations are not sourced in the devil but are driven from within (James 1:12-15). True, the devil's schemes and systems are involved, but the temptation is from within. Regardless of the temptation, God gives us means for escape. The Bible has every principle we need to overcome every temptation, and since we are in Christ, we can use the Word of God for our decision making and persevere under temptation.