

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

Jesus is tempted in the wilderness DIG: Under what circumstances was Yeshua tempted? For each of the three temptations: What was its nature? What potentially might appeal to Jesus? What price would there be if He would to give in to it? How does the Adversary's use of Scripture differ from the way the Lord uses it? How did Christ combat Satan during His temptations? Why were the temptations all directed against the divine Son of God, when this had just been confirmed at Messiah's baptism? Why did ADONAI allow His Son to go through this?

REFLECT: What spiritual wilderness has God sent you into? What has that done for your sense of His love? How did it change you? Notice the tempter attacked Jesus when He was vulnerable. He uses the same tactic with us. If the deceiver had three shots at you, what three temptations would he use? What is your greatest temptation right now? How are we to combat the devil with our temptations (Ephesians 6:10-17)?

The clear relationship between **Christ's** baptism and **His** temptation should not be missed. This connection is seen in two ways. First, at **His** baptism **He** said **He** came to fulfill all righteousness. At the temptations of **Jesus**, this righteousness was tested. Second, at the baptism of **Yeshua** **He** was declared to be **the Son of God** by **God the Father**. At the temptations of **Jesus**, **He** will be **tempted** to prove it.



Both **ADONAI** and **Beelzebub** had a purpose for the three temptations. **Satan's purpose**

was to cause Messiah to sin. The means was to keep **Yeshua** from the cross by offering **Him** a short cut to **His** messianic goal, which was for **Christ** to inherit and rule all the kingdoms of the world. This is exactly what **the evil one** offered **Him**. While **Satan** wanted to have **the Meshiach** killed, **he** did not want **Him** to die at the proper time (Pesach) or in the proper way (crucifixion). That is why throughout the life and ministry of **Jesus** there were numerous attempts to have **Him** killed prematurely in a wrong manner such as by the sword or by stoning. If **the Son of God** had died in at any other time, or in any other way there would have been no atonement (see my commentary on **Exodus**, **to see link click Bz - Redemption**). **God's purpose was to prove the sinlessness of His Son.** **YHVH** did not merely want to prove that **Jesus** was able to restrain **Himself** from sinning, but more importantly, to prove that **Christ** was not even able to **sin** in the first place.²⁷²

In rabbinic literature, the prince of demons is said to be involved in three specific actions - he seduces people, he accuses them before God, and he brings punishment of death (Tractate Bava Batra 16a). The deceiver is also said to have instigated the Golden Calf incident in the wilderness by (see my commentary on Exodus, to see link click Gr - Aaron Made an Idol in the Shape of a Calf), after forty days, stirring up turmoil in Isra'el and casting doubt on the return of Moshe from the mountain (Tractate Shabbat 89a). Since his rebellion before the creation, Lucifer has opposed the plan of ADONAI. Not surprisingly, that ancient Serpent comes to oppose Yeshua, yet God the Father will use it to test and prepare His Son for the messianic mission.²⁷³

As Arnold Fruchtenbaum points out, **Messiah** plays a representative role for two groups of people in the temptations. **First, He was representative of Isra'el in five ways. First,** in the use of the term **the son of God**. Whereas **Isra'el** is **the son of God** nationally, **Jesus** is **the Son of God** individually. This is to show where **Isra'el** was not obedient, **Messiah** was obedient; where **Isra'el** had failed, **Christ** succeeded. **Isra'el** is called **the son of God (Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1)**, and **Jesus** is called **the Son of God**.

The **second** way of seeing this relationship between **Yeshua** and **Isra'el** in these temptations is that both testings occurred in **the wilderness**. **First Corinthians 10:1-13** states that the wilderness was not merely a place for **Isra'el** to pass through between Sinai and the Promise Land; it was also a place where **God** was testing the loyalty and faithfulness of **Isra'el**. **The Meshiach** was also tested in **the wilderness**. **Mark 1:13** states that **Jesus** was in **the wilderness forty days**. **Matthew 4:1** and **Luke 4:1** both make the same point. **He** was taken into the wilderness just as **Isra'el** was, and for the same reason: to be tested.

The **third** way this representative role between **Yeshua** and **Isra'el** is seen is in the figure **forty**. **Isra'el** was **tempted** for **forty** years (**Deuteronomy 8:2**), **Jesus** was **tempted for forty days by the great dragon**. This is an apt translation of the Hebrew word *satan*, as it describes the fallen angel who opposes all that **God** is trying to establish.²⁷⁴ The Hebrew word **tempted** is a present tense participle, and speaks of continuous action. **Satan tempted the Messiah** constantly for **forty days**.

The **fourth** way this relationship between **Jesus** and **Isra'el** is illustrated in these temptations is by the presence of **the Spirit**. **The Ruach Ha'Kodesh** was present with **Isra'el** in **the wilderness (Isaiah 63:7-14)**, and **the Holy Spirit** was present with **Jesus** in **the wilderness**. **Jesus, full of the Spirit, left the Jordan and was immediately driven by the Spirit into the wilderness** of Judea, which consists of desert and foothills (**Mark 1:12**). The word **driven** is a very strong word (from *ekballo*, literally *to throw out from, to drive out*). The first act of the indwelling **Spirit of God** was to bring **the Messiah** to the place of testing and temptation.

The **fifth** way the relationship between **the Son of God** and **Isra'el** is brought out in these temptations is that when **He** resisted **the Enemy of souls** by the by use of Scripture, all three of **Yeshua's** responses came from the book of **Deuteronomy**. Received at the foot of Mt. Sinai before being led through their **wilderness** wanderings, the book of **Deuteronomy** is the covenant book between **ADONAI** and **Isra'el**. The word *deuteronomy* means *second law* because it served as a summary of many of the commandments already found in **Exodus, Leviticus** and **Numbers**. However, the purpose of **Deuteronomy** is not merely to repeat those commandments, but, to put them in a format of an ancient contract or covenant. It was no accident, then, that **Yeshua** quoted from the book of **Deuteronomy** when tempted, because it is **Ha'Shem's** covenant with the nation of **Isra'el**.

In these five ways, **Messiah** played a representative role on behalf of **Isra'el**. The point is that where **Isra'el**, the national **son of God**, failed; **Jesus**, the unique, eternal, individual **Son of God**, succeeded on **Isra'el's** behalf. **He** became **Isra'el's** substitute, not only in these three temptations, but also as the final substitute, the sacrifice for **sin**.

Secondly, Yeshua played a representative role for of all mankind. The Bible teaches that **we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15)**. This does not mean that we are **tempted** in every way that **He** was, or that **He** was **tempted in every single way** that we are. For example, I have never been tempted to turn **stones into bread**. Or **Christ** was never been **tempted to**

spend **His** whole day wasting time surfing the internet. It means that we suffer temptations in the same three categories that **Jesus** suffered temptations: **For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh** (the first temptation), **the lust of the eyes** (the third temptation), **and the pride of life** (the second temptation) - **comes not from the Father but from the world (First John 2:16)**. Consequently, every specific temptation will fall into one of these three categories.²⁷⁵

The First Temptation: After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry and was tempted by **the devil** (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2). The fast for forty days and forty nights would sound familiar to **Mattityahu** readers, as this parallels the experience of both Moses (Exodus 34:28) and of Elijah (First Kings 19:8). After fasting for forty days, both **Matthew** and **Luke** record what seems to be an obvious understatement - that **He was hungry**. In the first hunger pangs of a fast, a person may have an extended period of time during which the body is strong with no ill effects from the lack of food as it draws on the stored excess fat. But, around **forty days** into the fast, there will be some new pangs. These are not merely due to the hunger, but actually indicate that the body is beginning to starve itself. **Jesus** was at a critical point when **the great dragon** came to **Him** with the first of three incredible temptations.



The first test centers on the claim that **Yeshua** is **the Son of God**. **The tempter** came to **Him** and said: **If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread (Matthew 4:3; Luke 4:3)**. **Satan** first suggested what **Christ** ought to do for **Himself**. This first temptation was essentially the same mocking taunt that the crowds made at the crucifixion: **If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross (Mattityahu 27:40-43 NASB)**. It also included the wicked attempt to cause the Second Adam (**First Corinthians 15:45-47**) to fail where the first Adam had failed - in relation to food. **The deceiver** wanted

the Messiah to fail because of **bread**, just as Adam had failed because of **fruit (Genesis 3:1-7)**. Above all, however, **he** wanted to solicit **the Son's** rebellion against **the Father**. This was a test of **Yeshua's** relationship with **God**.

The Adversary tempted **Jesus** with **the lust of the flesh** because the temptation of **bread** after **forty days and forty nights** must have been virtually overwhelming (**First John 2:16a**). We must remember that **the Meshiach** was one-hundred percent **God** and one-hundred percent man. Consequently, in **His** humanity **Yeshua** could feel the full force of the hunger. But, because of **His** divine nature, **He** could not give in to such testing. It would have disqualified **Him** from being the sinless **Redeemer**. **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 (Hebrews 4:15)**.

It was the absolute trust and submission between **God the Father** and **God the Son** that **the ancient Serpent** sought to shatter. To have succeeded would have put an irreparable rift in **the Trinity**. **They** would no longer have been **Three-in-One**, no longer have been of one mind and purpose. In **his** incalculable pride and wickedness, **the prince of demons** tried to fracture the very nature of **God Himself**.²⁷⁶

Jesus responded by quoting **Deuteronomy 8:3** where **Isra'el** was tested with hunger so **she** would learn dependence on **God**. But **she** failed to do so. However, **Yeshua** succeeded by saying: **It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of ADONAI"** (**Mattityahu 4:4; Luke 4:4**). If the Word of **God** was **His** only resource to fight **Satan**, shouldn't we recognize that it should also be ours? The main "food" **ADONAI** has given to strengthen us is the Bible, the Word of **God**.²⁷⁷



The Second Temptation: The evil one had first suggested what **Christ** ought to do for **Himself** (turning stones into bread). Next **he** suggested what **the Father** ought to do for

Yeshua (proving **the Father's** love for **Jesus** by sending **His angels** to rescue **His Son**). Having failed to induce **Messiah** to use **His** divine powers to serve **His** own self-interests and in that way rebel against the will of **His Father**, **the deceiver** continued to tempt **the Son** to put **His** heavenly **Father's** love and power to the test. **Then the devil led Him to the holy city of Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the Temple Mount (Mt 4:5; Lk 4:9a)**. The dizzying vantage point in the southeast corner of **the Temple Mount** was specifically from the Royal Stoa. Both **Matthew** and **Luke** use the same Greek word *pterygion*, which is a diminutive form of *pteryx* or *wing*. In New Covenant times, *pterygion* generally described the outermost part of something. So this expression can be translated tower, apex, peak or extreme point.

Both **Matthew and Luke** have the definite article coming before *pterygion*, which indicates that a specific, well known **highest point** is being dealt with. Not only that, but both authors use the word *hieron* or **Temple Mount**, and not *naos* or Sanctuary, for the expression **the highest point of the Temple**. Once this is understood, the spot is easy to identify. The most imposing vantage **point** in the entire **Temple Mount** is described by the Jewish historian **Josephus**. **He wrote: The Royal Stoa was a structure was more noteworthy than any under the sun. The depth of the ravine [below] was so great, when combined with the height of the Stoa, that no one [would dare] bend over [the ledge] because he would become so dizzy he wouldn't be able to see the end of the measureless depth (paraphrased for readability).**²⁷⁸ **Josephus also reported that the drop to the valley floor was some 450 feet.** According to early tradition, **James**, the brother of **Jesus** and head of the **Jerusalem** congregation, was martyred by being thrown from the Royal Stoa because **he** would not renounce **his** faith.

A midrash, a commentary on the TaNaKh, puts particular emphasis on this exact place, as it states: **Our teachers taught, at the time when the King Messiah will appear, He will come and stand upon the roof of the Temple. He will proclaim to Isra'el and will say to the humble, "The time of your redemption has arrived" (Peshikta Rabbati 36).**²⁷⁹

Still hoping to undermine **the Lord's** relationship with **ADONAI** as **His** divine **Son**, **the ancient Serpent** again introduced **his** temptation with the words: **If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.** In the first temptation a need (the lack of food) already existed; in the second a need was created. To make the temptation more persuasive, **the great dragon** quoted Scripture, as **Jesus** had just done. Quoting **Psalm 91:11-12**, **he** said: **For it is written, "He will command His angels concerning You to guard you carefully; and they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your**

foot against a stone” (Mt 4:6; Lk 4:9b-10).

With that subtle and clever twist of quoting **Psalm 91:11-12**, **the deceiver** thought **he** had backed **Messiah** into a corner. It’s as if **Satan** was saying, “You claim to be **God’s Son** and trust **His** Word, so why don’t you demonstrate your **Sonship** and prove the truth of **His** Word by putting **Him** to a **test** - a scriptural **test**? If you won’t use your own divine power to help yourself, let your **Father** use **His** divine power to help **You**.” For **Jesus** to have followed **the devil’s** suggestion to be saved by heavenly **angels** would have been, in the eyes of many Jews, sure proof that **He** was **the Messiah**.

The miraculous has always appealed to the flesh. Later, **Yeshua Himself** would warn against this when **He** warned that **false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24)**. But, such dramatic signs, even when they are from **God**, do not produce **faith**; they only strengthen the faith of those who already believe. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay. **Yeshua** was the greatest sign ever given by **Ha’Shem** to mankind, yet, as **Isaiah** prophesied hundreds of years earlier: **He was despised and rejected by mankind (Isaiah 53:3; Luke 18:31-33)**.²⁸⁰ Those who would sing **His** praises only because of **His** miracles and impressive words would later turn against **Him**. This temptation was to get **Yeshua** to prove that **He** was really **the Son of God**. Thus, **Satan** again tempted **Him** with **the pride of life**, which was, in reality, a test on **Jesus’** dependence upon **the Father**.

Jesus would have no part of cheap, faithless sensationalism. So **He** responded by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:16** where **Isra’el** was tested with thirst so she would learn dependence on **God** (see my commentary on **Exodus Cu - Strike the Rock and Water Will Come Out of It**). But, where **she** failed to trust **God**, **Jesus** succeeded by answered **the devil** saying: **It is also written: “Do not put ADONAI your God to the test” (Matthew 4:7; Luke 4:12)**. **Jesus** didn’t need to prove to **Himself** that **the Father** loved and protected **Him**. Moreover, **He** knew that **God’s** love and protection could not be proved to others by any means but **faith**. As the writer to the **Hebrews** would say: **Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1)**. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).



The Third Temptation: The Adversary then dropped all pretenses and made one final, desperate effort to corrupt **Jesus**. **He** finally revealed **his** ultimate purpose: to induce **Messiah** to worship **him**. **He** had first suggested what **Christ** ought to do for **Himself** (turning stones into bread). Next **he** suggested what **the Father** ought to do for **Jesus** (proving **the Father's** love for **Yeshua** by sending **His angels** to rescue **His Son**). Now **he** suggested what **the tempter** could do for **Jesus** - in exchange for what **Messiah** could do for **him** - quid-pro-quo you might say.²⁸¹ **Again, the great dragon took the Lord to a very high mountain and, in an instant, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor that Jesus could easily attain if He bypassed the cross (Matthew 4:8; Luke 4:5). Satan, who was, and is, the prince of the kingdoms of the world, had every right to make Yeshua that offer.**

And the devil said to Him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to." (**Mattityahu 4:8; Luke 4:6**). Until **the Lord** returns with the title deed to the earth (see my commentary on **Revelation Ce - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David Has Triumphed**), **the devil** is the god of this age (**Second Corinthians 4:4**). But, by asking **Jesus** to **bow down and worship him**, **Messiah** would be placing **Himself** in submission to, and acknowledging the superiority of, **the Adversary**. This would have the advantage of bypassing the cross and gaining the messianic goal anyway. It was as if **Satan** was saying, "Why should **You** have to wait for what is already **Yours**? **You** deserve it now! Why do **You** submit as a **Servant** when **You** could reign as a **King**? **I** am only offering You what **the Father** has already promised." It will not be **the ancient Serpent's** last attempt to prevent **Yeshua** from dying on the cross. But here, **Christ** could see the power and wealth that would be **His**; thus, this temptation was in the area of **the lust of the eyes**. This was a test of **Jesus'** submission to **God's** program of salvation.

Satan is a liar and the father of lies and there is no truth in him (John 8:44). What **he** really demanded in the wilderness was the soul of **the Messiah**: **If You will bow down**

and worship me, all that **You see will all be Yours (Matthew 4:9; Luke 4:7)**. **The tempter** had rebelled against **God** in the first place because **he** could not tolerate being second to the Trinity. Here, **he** thought, was **his** great opportunity. **He** could bribe **the Son** to worship at **his** feet.²⁸² When you deal with **him**, **he** always takes you further than you want to go, and costs you more than you want to pay. What shortcut on **his** terms has **he** offered you lately?

Jesus responded by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:13** where **Isra'el** was tested to serve **ADONAI** only; however, **she** failed to do so (see my commentary on **Exodus Gr - Aaron Made an Idol in the Shape of a Calf**). But, **Jesus said to the devil: Away from me, Satan! For the TaNaKh says: "Worship ADONAI your God, and serve only Him"** (**Mattityahu 4:10; Luke 4:8 CJB**). Once again **the Lord** quoted **Deuteronomy**, this time from **Deuteronomy 6:13**. The first Adam fell into **sin** in a perfect and harmonious environment in the Garden of Eden, while the last Adam maintained **His** sinlessness in an environment that was hostile.

When **Jesus** resisted these temptations, **He** did not rebuke **the great dragon**, call **him** names, nor did **He** bind **him**. **Christ** merely quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16**. And each time **Satan** either misapplied the Scriptures, or used them in a deceitful way, which is one of **his** favorite tricks. **Yeshua** simply defended **Himself** with **the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17b)**. That's one thing **the devil** can't stand! **The Word of God** defeats **him** every time. Three times **Messiah** quoted **Deuteronomy**. When we encounter spiritual warfare from **the evil one**, this is the way we should resist **him** as well.²⁸³

Both **Matthew** and **Luke** record three temptations, but **Luke** reverses the order of the last two. The adverbs **then** (Greek: *tote*) in **Matthew 4:5** and the **again** (Greek: *palin*) in verse 8 indicates that **Mattityahu** is recording the event chronologically. **Luke**, on the other hand, uses the conjunction and (Greek: *kai*), which does not suggest a sequential order. While **Matthew** records the event chronologically, **Luke** may be listing the temptations topically. For **Luke**, the temptation at **the highest point of the Temple Mount** was the climax of the event.²⁸⁴ In this harmony of the gospels, I use **Matthew's** chronological order.

Beware of enticements that seem to cost little for the present. **The devil** hopes to get you to do things **his** way. And **he** doesn't give up easily. **When the deceiver had finished tempting Yeshua, he left Him until a more opportune time (Luke 4:13)**. **Satan** was still active during all of **Christ's** ministry (**Luke 8:12, 10:17-18, 11:14-22, 13:11-17**). This statement, rather, indicates that a *direct* confrontation with **the ancient Serpent**

(such as we read of here in the three temptations) did not occur again until the arrest, trial and crucifixion.²⁸⁵

Jesus was with the wild animals, and angels came and attended, or ministered to **Him (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13b)**. The word **attended** is in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous action. All during **the forty days, the angels** continually ministered to **Him**. This is a vivid picture of spiritual crisis. The only other time this happens is in the garden of Gethsemane (**Lk 22:43-44**). We are not told what the ministry of **the angels** included, but surely they brought **Jesus** food to satisfy **His** hunger. We know they could not have been in the presence of **God** without offering **Him worship**. And they could not have come from heaven without bringing strengthening words of assurance and love from **the Father**.²⁸⁶

Not only did **Yeshua** pass these crucial tests of **His** messiahship, but **His Word** also provides some vital lessons for us today. **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings (First Peter 5:8-9)**. Consequently, we should not **resist him** by arguing, binding, or debating in some spiritual manner (by the way, whoever is binding **Satan** is doing a pretty poor job. I don't know how it is where you live, but in my neighborhood, **the tempter** is still pretty active). **Jesus** simply quoted Scripture. **The rabbis understood that Isra'el possessed a secret weapon to overcome the evil one: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Isra'el, My children, I have created the evil impulse, and I have created the Torah as an antidote to it; if you occupy yourselves with Torah you will not be delivered into its power (Tractate Kiddushin 30b)**. Should we not do likewise?

*Lord, help me see **the deceiver's** offers for what they are - enticements to sin. Help me to keep my eyes and my heart focused on **You** and **Your** Word, and my ears attentive to **You** in prayer. Amen.*