

## Luke 4:1 – 13 The Temptation

I am skipping the genealogy section from Luke 3:23 – 38. Another genealogy of Jesus appears in Matthew 1:1 – 17. However, I will make a couple of brief observations about them because various commentators have offered some very strange explanations of their differences.

First, despite the popular claim that one of the genealogies is for Joseph and the other for Mary, they are both for Joseph as clearly given in Luke 3:23 and Matthew 1:16. The differences in names are because, in that time, one could count ancestors through heads of clans or through physical parents. Further, generations often were skipped, generally, but not always, keeping the famous ones. Further, most people had a family name, a formal name, and a descriptive name that was applied in adulthood. Think about the people in the Old Testament who had names that described their characters. It was not because the parents just knew that this baby would grow up to be a deceiver (Jacob) or a fool (Nabal), but they acquired those names as their characters were displayed. I suppose some of them were only used when the person was not within earshot.

Finally, their names were recorded in Hebrew in the genealogy books kept in the Temple. These two genealogies are in Greek. Translation can be challenging. Do I translate the meaningful name, or leave it in its original form, just translating the letters, not the words. And, what do I do with Hebrew names when Hebrew has no vowels but Greek does?

Note that there are not enough names to fill up 2000 years from Abraham to Jesus (55 in Luke, 40 in Matthew), so they could not have included everyone. If anyone had a problem with this in the first century when the genealogy documents were still publicly available in the Temple, history has no mention of it. People of that time understood that both genealogies were correct, just named through different customs. Matthew was a Jew; Luke was a Gentile.

Now, back to the temptation scene. Here's the introduction (4:1 – 2):

*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan [after being baptized by John] and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days, He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.*

The idea that Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit” is a bit strange. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Word are all names given to God, depending on which hat he was wearing at the time. So, most likely, this is just to connect with the baptism scene in chapter 3 in which the Spirit descended upon Him as a sign for John to know exactly who the Messiah was. This phrase also was used to describe when someone was given miraculous powers by God. At this point in Luke's narrative, Jesus had not done any miracles yet, so perhaps Luke is giving us a little teaser that some miracles are about to happen, which will begin later in this chapter.

Remember, Jesus had a physical body like ours, and a brain that controlled it, just like we have. And He had a Spirit. Remember Genesis 1:26 when God said, “Let Us make man in Our image.” God was talking to the angels, as told in Job 38:4 and 7, who did most of the work, who are spiritual, non-physical, beings, as is God. To make man in their image, God was saying, “Let's give the man a spirit, a character, that will act as a governor for this brain engine.” The rest of the created living things just got a body and a brain. Adam got a spirit, too. Well, Jesus had a body and a brain, and His Spirit was God. God built the universe to be an incubator for the development of faith. Once that job is complete, there will be no more need for the physical realm and it will be destroyed. The spirits who opted for God (both people and angels) will be part of the family. Those spirits that decided to go their own way will not be so included. 1 Peter 2:4 describes their

destination as Tartarus, the abyss of Greek mythology, in chains of darkness. Jude 6 describes their destination as everlasting chains under darkness.

We damage our characters in life. Jesus managed to avoid that. How He did that is not given in the New Testament. And it is not that we are born defective, as so many teach, rather, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:29, “God made man upright, but they go astray in their schemes.” And Romans 1:18 – 21, people are built with a knowledge of right and wrong and with an understanding that there is a Creator. If people were inclined toward evil from birth, not only could they not be judged, because we are just operating as we were created, but also, Jesus would be nothing like us.

But, Jesus is just like us. He did have the ability to choose badly, or we could not say the He was tempted. As it says in Hebrews 4:15, “He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.” Did He make it through life without sin because God chose a great pair of parents? Was it because He knew as soon as He could understand the stories about His birth and make the connection with the Messianic prophecies He learned in school, that He was the One? The text does not say. We just know that He had no advantages over us in the temptation department.

Also, note that Jesus was not tempted just at the end of the 40 days, but throughout. My impression is that Luke recorded these three as representative of a much larger group of temptations. And, note that He was hungry. He ate nothing, not like Ramadan when Muslims do not eat between sunrise and sunset every day for a month, but eat as much as they want before sunrise and after sunset. Matthew recorded that Jesus did not eat for 40 days and 40 nights. So, Jesus was experiencing a miracle, since not eating for 40 days would be fatal under those conditions.

Moving along to the first temptation recorded by Luke, in verses 3 and 4: Comfort versus priorities.

*And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”*

Each temptation recorded in Matthew and Luke was answered by Jesus with a quotation from Deuteronomy. Not all of the Law described matters of legality. In many places, the reason for a practice in the Law of Moses was given immediately following the description of the practice, the reason being stated in terms of eternal truth, not sentencing recommendations for violators. The full quote of the Deuteronomy passage (8:2 – 5), which Moses spoke to the children of Israel on the Plains of Moab, after the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness:

*And you shall remember that the Lord Your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So, He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.*

In the KJV, the Luke 4:4 includes a little more of Deuteronomy 8:5 than it should, probably because a fifth century copyist in Alexandria, Egypt, wanted to include a little more context.

Remember Michael Jackson’s “We Are the World” which contained, “As God has shown us by turning stones to bread.” No, He declined to do so. A great number of pop singers, 45 to be exact, did not catch that.

Even in this time of extreme hunger, Jesus did not stoop to being manipulated. Several times in His career, Jesus refused to perform a miracle on demand (e.g., Matthew 12:39, 16:4, and Luke

11:29). He repeated several times that they would get only one sign, His resurrection on the third day after His execution.

Although we do not face exactly this same temptation, I think we can learn a valuable lesson from the fact that Jesus turned aside the temptation with a very appropriate quotation of Scripture.

Do we know the Scriptures well enough that key points pop into our heads during a temptation? We need to treat the Scriptures as a novel, a long story, not a collection of one-liners. We are a little challenged by the fact that the Scriptures are neither in chronological order nor covering every period of history. So, we need some background knowledge about when the various people lived and what else was going on in the world. In case you want some convenient summaries, you can find them on our website. We need to be able to visualize the various scenes so that we can store them with a context for easier retrieval.

I have named this temptation, “Comfort versus priorities.” Have you noticed that the temptations that we face that directly challenge right and wrong are fairly easy to overcome. It’s the temptations that come in the side door that we are more likely to miss. Jesus was hungry. He had the power (as noted by Luke with that “filled with the Holy Spirit” line in verse 1). What’s the harm? Jesus recognized the subtlety. Yes, He was hungry, but is it appropriate to use His power to satisfy it? The fact that He was alive in His present situation, and had not died there in that wilderness, was not lost on Him. He was in the midst of a miracle already, not of His own doing. So using His power likely would run counter to the miracle that was already going on. Jesus’ priority was fitting into the nature of God. Comfort came in a distant second. Certainly, in His life, Jesus opted for some comfort now and then. He disappeared from the public scene sometimes just to rest and pray. He commended Mary, Lazarus’ sister, for anointing Him with pure nard despite the fact that the ointment was worth about a year and a half’s wages. Comfort has its place, but the power of God is not something to be trifled with.

So, how do we face similar temptations? We do not manufacture food out of thin air, or bring people back to good health who are suffering from some malady, or raise the dead. We may not perform the same miracles as Jesus, but we do have miraculous power from the indwelling Spirit who is given to all the faithful. The primary task of the indwelling Spirit is character development, so that we can return to the same character that Jesus had. That’s miraculous, and is noted in several places (e.g., 2 Corinthians 4:7) that that change should be clearly visible to outside observers who recognize the miracle. I think a good summary of this temptation should be that we need to focus on letting that power be seen as a means of expanding the Kingdom, rather than for our comfort. The point of my character development is not to make me noteworthy in my time and place, but as a tool to draw others to the gospel. This power is not about me, but about fitting in with all the spiritual beings in the family of God.

Moving along to the second temptation in verses 5 through 8: Worship is reserved for God.

*Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”*

Note that Jesus did not say, “That’s an empty offer. Those kingdoms are not yours to give.” No, Satan really did have that authority at that time. By the way, that authority ended shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, as predicted in Zechariah 13:2 and confirmed in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.

Note that Jesus did not focus on the authority. He did not refuse the offer because He was too humble (after all, He knew that He would receive a Kingdom as predicted by several prophets). He did not refuse the offer because it was not within His purview, His mission. He would be the Lord of all nations as soon as He got back to heaven. No, He focused on the feature that was the most damaging part of the offer, “Worship me!” Satan wanted to be acclaimed as the one in charge of heaven and earth. Satan was not ignorant of the plans of God. He was there before creation. He had conversations with God. He knew about the Messiah. Like those demons who begged Jesus, “Don’t send us to the abyss before the time.” (Matthew 8:28 – 34, Mark 1 – 20, Luke 8:26 – 37) They knew that they would, eventually, lose, but they tried to forestall it as long as possible.

Do we get our worship mixed up? Worship is to declare that someone or something has ultimate power and is absolutely in charge, and, most importantly, worship is declaring that the object of that worship gets to call the shots. God has given hundreds of promises just in the New Testament. Worship of God implies that we will act on those promises, especially when we do not know exactly how God could possibly pull that one off. For a great percentage of church-going people, they swear allegiance to God, but don’t know what they are committing to, or, if they do, they do it their own way because they have more confidence in their own methods than the unknown methods of God.

A few examples in Christianity today: (1) The fact that there are many denominations is just the way things are. We don’t get too upset about it. People have invented lots of excuses why this situation is acceptable and even a good thing. However, Jesus prayed in the Garden in John 17:21 that future believers be united as a proof that Jesus was who He said He was. Several of the letters address unity as an essential characteristic of the church. We can’t see how Jesus’ position could ever work. So we do what we think is best. (2) We can read that the indwelling Spirit is supposed to transform our damaged characters into that of Jesus (e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:18), but we don’t see exact how God can pull that one off, that we can actually have the character of Jesus while still on earth, so we set the bar a little lower, to a level we think we can achieve by our own means. (3) Churches tend to leave the teaching and the evangelism to the professionals, when that was not at all what Jesus had in mind. Everyone builds up everyone; ordinary folks spread a simple message; overhead is negligible.

What do we worship? My observation is that most church goers worship their own preferences.

And the third temptation, in verses 9 through 12: Don’t try to manipulate God

*Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”*

Certainly, Satan was correct that the line he quoted was in the Scriptures, Psalm 91:11 – 12. The problem was how he wanted to use it. Again, this is manipulation, one of the most common and most successful of temptations. Jesus recognized that a promise from God stops working when we try to corner God into doing it our way or on our schedule.

I already talked about not being manipulated into misusing the power of God. This temptation is more subtle. Don’t try to force God to act in the way you think He should act.

This example is almost comical. Satan takes Jesus to the top of the Temple and challenges Him to step off because of a promise in Psalm 91 that really does promise protection for the Messiah. Jesus answered, “There’s a big difference between trusting God to execute His promises

and trying to manipulate God into carrying out that promise on your timetable and using your methods.

Every year, there are people from one particular denomination who die because they will not use modern medicines, like antibiotics, because they are convinced that God will heal that infection. Some handle poisonous snakes (Mark 16:18), trying to manipulate God into protecting them at the time and place of their choosing. I get appeals from overseas about every day from people who are absolutely convinced that God has called them to spread the gospel, so they set out to do that but do not work at anything that makes money, so they are being evicted and their children cannot go to school for lack of fees, and they are malnourished. They expect God to provide for them, and failing that, they expect me to do so. Of course, there are plenty of con men out there, but I am just talking about the sincere ones. They are tempting God.

Those are extremes, but how does this play out in ways we might consider? We tend to pray for things and offer suggestions on how we want it to happen, like asking that the doctors be successful in treating someone. Why not leave the method open and give God more space in which to operate? I think that we all agree that God is a lot smarter than all of us put together, and He has a lot more information to use in making His decisions. Perhaps we should leave the methods and the timing up to God and limit ourselves to the general result we desire. It's fine to ask for results, like in Philippians 4:6, "Let your requests be made known to God." Just don't tell God how to do it.

Many church-goers want evangelism to happen, just not by them. We want God to send someone, just not me. Many church-goers want the church to be one big family, but don't spend time to get to know the others. Obviously, we do not have the skills that God has. But, things that are doable by humans God leaves for us to do. God only operates in the realm of the miraculous – stuff people cannot do. So, we need to take responsibility for those things that are within our reach, and not leave it for God to pick up my part, too.

The last verse of the paragraph is an interesting postscript to the scene:

*Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.*

This was not the only time Satan tempted Jesus. It is just the only time that Matthew and Luke included in their narratives.

How does that impact us? Well, Zechariah predicted the end of evil spirits shortly after the death of the Messiah (13:2). Peter and Jude recorded that the prediction happened in their time (2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6). Yet, people blame Satan for all sorts of bad outcomes, even though the New Testament says the Satan cannot do that any more, and, they have no proof that anyone other than a person made the bad outcome happen. We need to put blame where it belongs. People make lots of bad decisions, and the results ripple out and affect everyone. Just remember 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*" We are promised the indwelling Spirit that enables us to overcome ourselves and the world. As Peter said to the crowd in Acts 2:40, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Later, in 2 Peter 1:4, Peter describes his readers as those who have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We are protected from temptation if we will just believe this miraculous promise.