

Jesus is in the wilderness, led by the Spirit and fasting for forty days. Just before this, He was standing in the Jordan River, with the Father declaring from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.” Now, He’s isolated, weak and hungry, with the devil in his ear, tempting Him.

What is Jesus doing out there in the wilderness, far beyond the city walls? He’s going about saving the people of God.

Speaking of the people of God; they have experience in the wilderness. When the Lord led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land, they spent forty years in the wilderness. Their record of faithfulness during those years was far from perfect.

Remember, so quickly after crossing the Red Sea, the people grumbled about food. They missed the bread and the meat they had in Egypt. God responded by providing them manna, bread from heaven. There was also the grumbling about water in Exodus 17. They demanded to know, “Is the Lord among us or not?” God responded faithfully again: He directed Moses to strike a rock with his staff, and water flowed for all the people.

Then there was the golden calf in Exodus 32. When Moses had been away on Mt. Sinai for forty days, the people decided that he had been gone too long and it was time to give up hope. They demanded that Aaron make a new set of gods to deliver them to the Promised Land, and thus the golden calf was forged. After only forty days of camping in the wilderness around Mt. Sinai, the people were ready to believe that God wasn’t looking out for them anymore.

When the people of God were in the wilderness, they did a terrible job of trusting the Lord and resisting temptation. They couldn’t make it forty days without looking for another god to worship. So Jesus goes into the wilderness for forty days, without any food, to take the place of sinners, to do what they could not, namely: resist their own worst impulses and the temptation of the Evil One.

There, in the wilderness, the battle begins. Satan thinks he has an opening. Just days before, the Father said to Jesus from heaven, “You are My beloved Son.” The devil immediately calls that Word into question: “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” In other words, “Are You really the Son of God? Then why are You so hungry? Why would Your Father bring You out into the wilderness to die?” That had worked well on the Israelites in Exodus 16: in no time, they were saying, “Hey, yeah. Why has God brought us out into this wilderness to die?” But there’s no “Hey, yeah” with Jesus.

He quotes Scripture, from the time of the Exodus in Deuteronomy 8:3: “Man shall not live by bread alone.” And how does that verse continue? “Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every Word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” It’s a fantastic comeback. Jesus says to Satan, “I don’t judge My Father’s love by my circumstances. I know my Father’s love because of His Word; and I’ve heard Him say to Me, “You are My beloved Son.””

Next, the devil tempts Jesus to entitlement. He shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and says, “To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to

me, and I give it to whom I will. If You, then, will worship me, it will all be Yours.” It’s as if he says to Jesus, “Doesn’t the Son of God deserve better than what you’re getting? You can opt out; worship me, and I will give You all the wealth, none of the suffering. You deserve better than God’s way.”

Jesus responds with the Word of God again and says, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.” He’s quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, originally spoken to the people of Israel in the wilderness; verse 12, just before it, says, “Take care, lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” The people of Israel too easily forgot the Lord when they were confronted with temptation: they grumbled that they deserved better than manna and wanted cucumbers and melons—even if it meant slavery again. But Jesus doesn’t give in. He trusts that His Father’s plan is right. Even when it means forty days in the wilderness without food. Even when it means the cross.

Satan is 0 for 2, so he tempts Jesus to demand a sign. He takes Jesus to Jerusalem and sets Him on the pinnacle of the temple; and this time, the devil even quotes Scripture as part of the temptation: “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command His angels concerning You, to guard You,” and “On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.” Satan wants Jesus to ask “Is God really with Me or not?” to the point that He throws Himself off the temple to make His Father prove it. He wants Jesus to demand a sign rather than trust in the Word He has heard. Jesus responds, “You shall not put the Lord Your God to the test.”

Guess what? He’s quoting Deuteronomy 6 again; this time verse 16. How does the rest of the verse go? “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.” At Massah, thirsty and unhappy with God’s plan, the people doubted and said, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Jesus knows there’s no need to doubt His Father or demand proof.

The devil strikes out and leaves, but he’ll be back. He’ll be whispering in Jesus’ ear as He prays in Gethsemane. He’ll provoke sinners at Calvary to cry out, “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Do you see what Jesus is up to in the wilderness? He’s doing what we could not do. He resists every temptation perfectly, and that perfect record will cover every sinner who believes in Him. If you believe it, His perfection belongs to you and you belong to Him. That is a beautiful thing.

And...because you are the Lord’s own, you can be sure that the devil will tempt you, even as he tempted Christ in the wilderness. He’ll tempt you to doubt God’s love, to feel like you deserve better than He provides, and to demand proof of His approval beyond what He has said in His Word.

When that happens, it’s time to remember Jesus fought this battle for you already. The test has been taken. The grade has been earned. The verdict is in. And still, Satan tries to damage your faith. No matter what, you have God’s Word to tell you what Jesus has done and how nothing can separate you from His love. Truly, we live by every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

