

## Title: “Jesus and Israel”

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Matthew 4:1-11

3/9/2022

**Service Readings:** Deuteronomy 8:1-10, Matthew 4:1-11

*This is a reminder of our reliance on Jesus for our salvation. Just as Israel relied on God to deliver them to the promised land, even though they never deserved or earned that gift, we rely on Jesus to deliver us to the promised land – an eternity in the presence of God.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our midweek sermon series is called “Beyond the Walls.” In the series we journey to the cross through the outskirts of the various towns as we highlight the critical events that take place with Jesus. Last week, on Ash Wednesday, we focused on John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus. This week we pick up immediately after that event as the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days.

If you were with us this past Sunday, our gospel reading might sound very familiar: the temptation of Jesus. We read this account as recorded by Matthew but tonight it is from Luke. And because I have already focused on the first temptation, tonight I am going to focus all three of them wholistically and view it from the perspective of God’s master story. And to do that we must start with Moses, and Israel, and Egypt. You are familiar with that history – the people were enslaved, Moses was called by God to free them, there are the plagues, and then there is the Exodus. I skim over all of this because of time constraints, not because the details are unimportant. OK, we pick up where God’s freed people walk through the waters of the Red Sea and into the wilderness. The people struggle with trusting God and even forge idols to worship. At the cusp of entering the promised land, they fail in their obedience to God and are thus turned back into the wilderness where they wander for 40 years. They eventually do cross over, but not without first experiencing great struggle. Got all that? Good.

Now, line these events up in parallel with the passage that we just read, and the baptism that comes before it and you can see the similarities. Is it coincidence? Of course not! It is an example of the miraculous orchestration of God’s plan. But the question is not *if* it is a coincidence but *why* it is one. What is the point of the parallel? Well, it all comes down to who, exactly Jesus is and what, exactly he entered into his creation to accomplish.

Place yourself at the point of history where Jesus was walking on Earth. You could look back and see these parallels and they would confirm his claims that he is God. Let’s look at the first temptation to see what I mean:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written,

“‘Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Israel wandered in the desert for years but could never remain obedient to God during that time. Jesus, on the other hand, remained full obedient to him. In this temptation, Satan attempts to persuade Jesus to use his power to serve his needs (he was hungry, after all). But where Israel grumbled and questioned God’s will for them, Jesus does not. He remains obedient and completely trusting in his Father.

Let’s look at the second temptation:

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,  
“‘He will command his angels concerning you,’  
and  
“‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”  
Do the Israelites trust in God’s power and protection for them? No. They fail almost immediately. On the cusp of entering the land God promised, this is how they reacted:

**14** That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. <sup>2</sup> All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” <sup>4</sup> And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

But, once again, where Israel fails, Jesus succeeds. He doesn’t question his Father’s power and protection and trusts in his promise.

OK, let’s move to the third and final temptation:

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“‘You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.’”

This temptation is interesting because Satan assumes that Jesus will worship and serve *someone* and so Satan tries to get Jesus to worship him. The parallel to Israel is obvious here as well, and where they fail, Jesus succeeds.

So, back to the question of motivation. Why this parallel? Well, we can take a step back and see a journey from Israel, and actually all the way back to Adam and Eve if we wanted, to Jesus. This portion of the path shows that mankind has sinned and fallen short of God's expectations. Sin has corrupted them and they are unable to obey God as he demands. But, we find someone who *is able* to completely trust and obey God, and since no human can do that, Jesus *must* be more than just human. He is fully human but he is also fully God. But the path doesn't end there, it continues to cross where Jesus suffers and dies for our sins. And then he is restored to life as a sign of victory over sin and Satan.

And the path doesn't end there, either but extends to us today. So it is worth talking about what this means to us. Often times when I hear sermons or read commentaries on this passage the message positions Jesus as a model or great example of how we should respond to temptation. There is some truth to that message, but that is more of a minor detail, an aside of sorts. It doesn't seem to be the main message at all. You see, when we think of ourselves as wandering in the desert of life, we know that we face temptations, daily. Some are from external sources like Satan but others come from within ourselves – the sinful desires of our hearts. Can we *really* think that the lesson here is that we need to try harder to overcome these temptations? Is that *really* what God wants us to take away from this message? That we can overcome sin on our own? I don't think that is what he expects and there is an entire nation's history to support my claim. I think that what this shows is that God *demands* that we are perfect but, just like Israel, we are not, and we cannot be. We can't will our way out of sinning, or work our way out of falling into temptation. Try as we might, we can't do it ourselves. And that is the point. We *can't* do it ourselves and so *that is why* Jesus came – because *he can*. He is the one that can do what we cannot.

This message isn't about teaching us to remember some special bible verse or how to speak to Satan. Instead, it is a reminder of our reliance on Jesus for our salvation. Just as Israel relied on God to deliver them to the promised land, even though they never deserved or earned that gift, we rely on Jesus to deliver us to the promised land – an eternity in the presence of God. And we will come to experience that, not because of anything that we deserved or because we have earned it, but because Jesus has walked a path that we could not – he walked a path in our place so that we could experience life everlasting.

So tonight we stand on the path that Jesus walked and we look back to Israel, to the temptation, to the cross, and to our salvation and we bow down and worship the one who traveled it on our behalf.

Please pray with me.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand:  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Amen.