

## 15. Matthew 4:1–11 – The Temptation of Jesus

### Overview

This passage reveals Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasts for forty days and is tempted by the devil. The story emphasizes Jesus' identity, His mission, and the nature of temptation itself. It also reminds us that scripture can be used for good or for evil—Satan himself uses scripture to tempt Jesus. Discernment is key.

### Key Themes

- **Jesus is led by the Spirit:** Testing is not always punishment—sometimes it's preparation.
- **The wilderness:** A place of transformation, where identities are clarified and purified.
- **The number 40:** Echoes Israel's 40 years in the desert; Jesus fulfills and perfects what Israel could not.
- **Temptation:** Jesus is tempted in three key ways that echo human struggles.

### The Three Temptations and Their Deeper Meaning

#### 1. Turn Stones into Bread (Matthew 4:3–4)

- **Temptation:** To focus solely on your own needs and desires—doing whatever it takes to fulfill them. Don't wait for God; just take what you need.
- **Deeper Meaning:** Will Jesus trust God to provide for Him, or will He act on His own?
- **Connection to the Old Testament:** Adam and Eve took the fruit for themselves; Cain took Abel's life; David took Bathsheba. Humanity has a long pattern of grasping for what it wants. Jesus breaks that pattern by choosing obedience and trust.
- **Jesus' Response:** "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
- **Our Takeaway:** When are you tempted to take matters into your own hands instead of trusting God to provide? Can you think of examples in your own life?

#### 2. Throw Yourself Down from the Temple (Matthew 4:5–7)

- **Temptation:** To manipulate God into proving His love, care, or power—to demand a sign instead of simply trusting. The devil dares Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, quoting Scripture to suggest that God must save Him. It's the temptation to control the relationship and force God to act.
- **Deeper Meaning:** Will Jesus trust that He is the beloved Son—even when nothing visible supports that belief—or will He try to *make God prove it*? This temptation isn't about testing false spirits; it's about testing God Himself—**trying to control God rather than surrender to Him**. This is a very subtle and difficult to understand temptation.
  - We all face this temptation when we say things like:  
    *"God, if You really love me, show me."*  
    *"If You're real, do this one thing."*  
    Or even, *"If You don't fix this, I can't believe anymore."*

- It's a deeply human response, often rooted in **fear, pain, or disappointment**. But Jesus shows us a better way: trusting in God's love and presence even when He is silent.
- **Testing Spirits vs. Testing God:**
  - **Testing spirits** (1 John 4:1) is an act of discernment. It's wise and necessary—to figure out whether something is from God or not.
  - **Testing God** (Deuteronomy 6:16) is very different. It's about **putting God on trial**, demanding He prove Himself on *our* terms, rather than letting Him be God. Testing spirits = asking, *"Is this true?"*  
Testing God = saying, *"You'd better prove You're real—or else."*

This is the most difficult temptation to understand, so let's spend a little more time on it.

### More subtle forms of this temptation:

#### 1. **"If I do everything right, nothing bad should happen to me."**

This one is huge. It's not *spoken* like a test, but it's lived like one.

We think: *"If I follow God, if I serve, if I pray... then God will keep me safe."*

But when suffering comes, it shakes our faith, because deep down we expected God to prevent it.

That's a quiet version of the temple temptation:

*"I leapt with faith—why didn't you catch me?"*

#### 2. **Spiritual bargaining:**

*"If I give God everything—my time, my service, my trust—then He owes me some kind of outcome."*

We may never say it out loud, but this idea creeps into our hearts. It's a transactional view of faith, and when life doesn't go our way, it can lead to disillusionment or even bitterness.

That's the subtle voice saying:

*"You said You'd protect me—where's the safety net?"*

#### 3. **Demanding clarity or certainty before trusting:**

This is one I see in seekers, intellectuals, and even clergy:

*"I need God to prove this one thing—then I'll commit."*

Or: *"I can't move forward unless I understand why this is happening."*

That's not about leaping off a temple. That's about **refusing to walk without full visibility**. But faith, as you know, is often about walking in shadow, trusting the One who sees.

#### 4. **Testing God through performance spirituality:**

This one hits closer to the heart of ministry:

*"If I give everything to this church, this mission, this calling—then God will bless it, right?"*

We tie our identity to outcomes. We say we trust God, but we're watching to see if He shows up the way we expect.

When He doesn't, we feel abandoned, or question if we were called at all.

- **Connection to the Old Testament:** In Exodus 17, the Israelites grumbled and tested God at Massah, saying, *"Is the Lord among us or not?"* They had just been freed from slavery, but they demanded water as proof of God's care. It wasn't about need—it was about **control**. Jesus, in contrast, refuses to demand a sign. He chooses to trust.
- **Jesus' Response:** "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."
- **Our Takeaway:**  
Have you ever tried to bargain with God, demanded proof of His presence, or doubted His love because He didn't act the way you expected?  
This temptation shows us that **faith isn't about controlling God—it's about trusting Him**, even in silence, even in pain, even in the wilderness.  
Ask yourself:
  - When do I try to force God's hand instead of listening for His voice?
  - Can I let go of needing proof and rest in God's love as Jesus did?

### **3. Bow Down and Worship Me (Matthew 4:8–10)**

- **Temptation:** To take a shortcut to power, glory, or success—even if it means compromising your values or bargaining with evil. The devil offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for one small act of worship.
- **Deeper Meaning:** Will Jesus remain loyal to God's way, even if it leads through suffering? Or will He stoop to using the enemy's tactics to bring about a seemingly good result? This is the temptation to do the right thing the wrong way.
- **Connection to the Old Testament:** Israel often turned to false gods and political alliances for security or prosperity, betraying their covenant with God. In contrast, Jesus refuses to compromise—even for the promise of global power.
- **Jesus' Response:** "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve."
- **Our Takeaway:** Have you ever been tempted to justify a questionable choice because it leads to something good? What does it look like to remain faithful to God's way, even when it's harder or slower?

### **Satan Uses Scripture, Too**

In the second temptation, Satan quotes Psalm 91 to convince Jesus to jump. This reminds us that not all uses of scripture are holy. Scripture can be twisted and weaponized—used to harm, exclude, or control others. We must always ask:

- Does this use of scripture bring life or cause harm?
- Is it consistent with the love, humility, and mercy of Christ?
- Is it being used to manipulate, divide or marginalize?

**ANYTIME SCRIPTURE IS BEING USED TO CONTROL, MANIPULATE, DIVIDE OR MARGINALIZE, IT IS BEING USED FOR EVIL ENDS.**

# What about the Angels?

## Genesis: Angels as Guardians of Lost Paradise

In **Genesis 3:24**, after Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden:

*“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”*

- The angels here are **symbols of separation**—divine bouncers keeping humanity from re-entering the presence of God.
- Their job is to **guard holiness** from fallen, disobedient humanity.
- Humanity is *exiled*—and **cut off from communion** with God.

## Matthew 4:11 – Angels Minister to Jesus

*“Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.”*

- In contrast to Genesis, these angels are **not guarding paradise from Jesus**—they are **restoring** and **serving** Him.
- Jesus has just **withstood the temptations** that Adam (and Israel) gave into. He **did not reach for the fruit**—He waited for God.
- The angels’ ministry is a **symbol of re-opened communion**—a return to Eden, but **through obedience** rather than entitlement.

## So what’s the connection?

Genesis 3	Matthew 4
Humanity cast out	Jesus enters into obedience
Angels block the way to the Tree of Life	Angels minister to the One who <i>is</i> the Tree of Life
Adam gives in to temptation	Jesus resists temptation
Death and exile follow	Healing and restoration begin

## Deeper Meaning

Jesus is portrayed as the **New Adam**—where the first Adam failed, Jesus succeeds.

- Eden was lost through *disobedience and grasping*.
- Jesus, through *obedience and surrender*, begins to **restore Eden**—and the angels, once symbols of separation, become **servants of reconciliation**.

The angels’ presence is heaven’s quiet affirmation:

*“This is my Son. He passed the test. He is worthy.”*