

16. Going Deeper: The Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1–11)

The Spirit Led Jesus Into the Wilderness (v.1)

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

This is stunning. It wasn’t the devil who brought Jesus into the wilderness—it was **the Holy Spirit**.

- Temptation is not just something that happens to us—sometimes it's part of God's plan for our growth.
- Spiritual trials are not signs of failure, but often a sign of being on the right path.
- God doesn’t tempt, but He **permits** the testing, because **virtue can’t grow without resistance**.

 **Reflection:** How does this challenge the idea that “if God loves me, life should be easy”?

Sidebar: Does God Lead Us Into Temptation? (What Pope Francis Said)

In the *Our Father*, we pray:

“Lead us not into temptation...”

But Pope Francis has suggested that this **isn’t the best translation**. He explained:

“It is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation.”

So what does it really mean?

- **God does not tempt us**—that’s the role of the **devil**.
- God **may permit** us to go through trials or testing—but never with the intention of making us fall.
- A better way to express the prayer might be:

“Do not let us fall into temptation.”

This translation shift has already been adopted in **Italian and French versions** of the Mass.

How does this apply to Matthew 4:1?

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

- The **Holy Spirit** leads Jesus into the wilderness—but **the devil** is the one who tempts.
- God allows the testing as a part of spiritual growth—but never tries to trap Jesus or us.

Key Point:

When we pray “*Lead us not into temptation*,” we’re not accusing God of setting us up to fail—we’re **asking Him to protect us from falling** when we face life’s trials.

The Reversal of Israel’s Story

Jesus is in the wilderness for **40 days**, mirroring **Israel’s 40 years**.

- Israel failed in the desert—grumbling, idol-worshipping, and testing God.
- Jesus succeeds—quoting the very Scriptures from Deuteronomy that were given to Israel in that same wilderness.

This isn’t just Jesus “passing a test.” He’s **re-living and redeeming the history of God’s people**, rewriting the story with **perfect obedience**.

Every Response Comes from Scripture

Jesus doesn't argue with the devil, show off, or use miracles—He uses **God's Word**.

- He quotes only from **Deuteronomy**, the “wilderness book” of covenant renewal.
- He shows us that **Scripture is not just for study—it's for survival**.

💡 **Challenge:** Do we know God's Word well enough to stand on it when we're in our own wilderness?

👑 **Jesus Rejects All Three Faces of False Messiahship**

Each temptation isn't random—it represents a kind of **messiah** people were hoping for:

1. **Bread** – The economic provider (fix hunger, fix the world)
2. **Spectacle** – The religious celebrity (win attention with stunts)
3. **Power** – The political conqueror (rule like Caesar)

Jesus rejects each one. He refuses to be the kind of messiah people want—and chooses instead to be the one they **need**, the Suffering Servant.

💡 **Reflection:** Are we tempted to follow a messiah who looks more like Caesar than Christ?

🗺️ **Jesus Enters the Wilderness Right After His Baptism**

Just after the voice from heaven says, “*This is my beloved Son,*” Jesus is plunged into solitude, hunger, and confrontation.

- Spiritual highs are often followed by spiritual battles.
- Baptism isn't the finish line—it's the **starting line**.
- Being beloved doesn't exempt Jesus—or us—from hardship. It **prepares** us for it.

💡 **Takeaway:** Do you recognize the wilderness as part of your own spiritual journey?