

## Small Group Material Lent 2019

### Learning from Jesus 1

#### Our Trials - Luke 4.1–13

Looking at Jesus' time in the wilderness; considering how he stood fast in the face of temptation and how we can also draw from the same source.

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#### Welcome (10 mins)

What does the word "wilderness" mean to you? Has there been a time when you experienced being "in the wilderness"?

#### Worship (10 mins)

Meditate on God's faithfulness.

Read Psalm 36:5      Lamentations 3:22- 23

*Sing or listen to a hymn or chorus*

*Suggestions (Words at end) :-*

Great is thy faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o>

Faithful One [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8\\_bMB\\_qBsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8_bMB_qBsk)

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#### Word (50 mins)

Read Luke 4.1-13

(Parallel versions can be found in Matt 4:1-11 Mark 1:12-13 Luke 4:1-13 *If you have time you may like to compare them*)

**Questions** ( *see **Leaders' Supplementary Notes** for additional material and suggestions to aid discussion if you find them helpful. Other Commentaries are of course available and may differ! )*

- Why do you think Jesus had to go into the wilderness and fast?
- Why do you think Satan laid before Jesus three separate and distinct temptations?
- Why do you think Jesus used passages in Scripture to defend against these attacks?

*See Deuteronomy 6-8 and separate leaders' notes for the quoted scriptures, and/or Psalm 106 for a short version of the wanderings in the wilderness.*

- What can we learn from Jesus in this passage that will help us combat the temptations we all face from Satan?
- How can we help encourage one another and hold ourselves accountable?
- Think about the temptations you struggle with the most? Share only if you feel comfortable. How can the group help you through these difficult situations?

- Look individually at the three temptations and discuss whether there are parallel ways in which our own relationship with God is put under strain. Can the Old Testament verses as quoted by Jesus help us as well?

### **Witness (and during the week) (10 mins)**

Focus on The Lord's Prayer, especially those verses which link in to our texts:- Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.

*Say the Lord's Prayer together slowly, pausing as you reach those sections for everyone to reflect silently on them in the light of what they may have seen afresh in this study.*

Pray for conversations which will lead to opportunities to invite people to services, groups or other occasions as we prepare through Lent for Easter

Faithful One so unchanging  
 Ageless One You're my rock of peace  
 Lord of all I depend on You  
 I call out to You, again and again  
 I call out to You, again and again

You are my rock in times of trouble  
 You lift me up when I fall down  
 All through the storm  
 Your love is the anchor  
 My hope is in You alone

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my father!  
 There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
 Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not:  
 As thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

*Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness,  
 Morning by morning new mercies I see:  
 All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
 Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
 Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
 Join with all nature in manifold witness  
 To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth.  
 Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide, Strength for today  
 and bright hope for tomorrow  
 Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

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## **Leaders' Supplementary Notes on Luke 4 1- 13**

### ***The Son of God is tested in preparation for his mission, and he defeats the devil's attempts to drive a wedge between him and his Father.***

The devil's proposals echo and depend on the declaration that Jesus is God's Son, which has just been made in 3: 22. This scene, still set in the wilderness where John has been baptizing, now completes Jesus's preparation before his public ministry begins in 4: 14. That ministry will take him back up north to his home province, among the ordinary population of Galilee. But first, in an area away from human population, he must face a crucial spiritual test. This scene thus provides the unseen background to the struggles ahead; behind human opposition stands a more threatening supernatural force.

#### **Key Points**

- Jesus's wilderness experience is initiated by the Spirit, and so it serves the positive purpose of "testing" as well as the devil's aim of "tempting."
- The devil's proposals focus on the title "Son of God" and aim to disrupt the relationship between the Father and the Son.
- Jesus's replies from Deuteronomy 6– 8 reveal a close parallel with the testing of God's "son" Israel in the wilderness.
- Jesus comes through with his loyalty to God uncompromised.
- The devil's retreat is only "until an opportune time."

#### **Additional optional questions on the parallel versions of the story**

Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

– What is similar about these three versions? What do they all say?

– What is different about them and which one provides the most/least amount of information?

#### **Luke's Account -**

According to Luke's account, there were three temptations Satan put before Jesus. Each one was intended to tempt Jesus to do something that is a natural instinct for mankind. Satan challenged Jesus to **provide** for himself, **promote** himself, and **protect** himself. In answering the questions focus on how Jesus responded to each one and how we too can defend against similar attacks.

#### **Cultural/Historical Background**

This private experience can only have been related by Jesus himself to his disciples. It is told in terms of physical relocation to a "high place" and to Jerusalem, but no actual high place commands a view of all the kingdoms of the world, and we should think rather in terms of visionary experiences while Jesus was still in the wilderness (cf. Ezekiel's "visit" to Jerusalem while still in Babylon [Ezek. 8– 11]), from which he will return to Galilee in 4: 14.

The wilderness is significant in Jewish thought because it was a place of meeting with God and of new beginnings. This ideology derived from Israel's forty years in the wilderness, where they were formed into a nation under God. In Deuteronomy 6– 8 Moses reminded Israel of the lessons that they had learned during that period, and it is from those chapters that all three of Jesus's responses in 4: 4, 8, 12 are drawn. Deuteronomy 8: 2– 5, the source

of the first of those responses, describes Israel as God's "son," "tested" and learning to depend on his Father through the discipline of deprivation in the wilderness. This is the background for Jesus's own testing as the Son of God.

- **Why do you think Jesus had to go into the wilderness and fast?** *The obvious answer to this question is that the Holy Spirit led him there, but you have to dig deeper and ask why the Holy Spirit led him there.* The wilderness experience reflects the history of Israel's time in the wilderness. The traditional site of Jesus' temptation is a barren area northwest of the Dead Sea. The "40 days" motif is prominent in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 7:4; Ex. 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8; Jonah 3:4). It is not by accident that Jesus' temptation continued for 40 days, just as Israel's wanderings and temptation continued for 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus' responses to Satan's temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, chapters 6 and 8, confirm that He was thinking about the experience of the nation in the wilderness. And yet, though the Israelites were miraculously fed in the desert, Jesus ate nothing.
- **Why do you think Satan laid before Jesus three separate and distinct temptations?** The temptations were all messianic in nature. Jesus was specifically tempted as God's Son. This is most clearly seen in the second and third temptations, but the fact that the temptations were introduced and concluded by "If you are the Son of God" indicates that all three were messianic in nature. The account consists of three scenes, and each scene contains a temptation from the devil and a reply from Jesus. They are also tied together by Jesus' use of Scripture in each of his replies and by the fact that all three scriptural quotations come from Deuteronomy.
- **Why do you think Jesus used passages in Scripture to defend against these attacks?** Jesus's thrice-repeated

formula "It is written/ said" expresses his constant appeal to the Old Testament as the word of God and the ultimate arbiter of truth and right action. He will question accepted interpretations of Scripture, but never the authority of Scripture itself. His repeated references here to Deuteronomy 6– 8 develop the important typological theme of Jesus as the new Israel. Israel was tested in the wilderness as God's "son," and Jesus now takes up that role. Israel was a disobedient son, but Jesus's perfect submission to his Father's will enables him to fulfill Israel's mission to be a light to the nations.

- What can we learn from Jesus in this passage that will help us combat the temptations we all face from Satan?
- How can we help encourage one another and hold ourselves accountable?
- What temptations do you struggle with the most and what are some ways the group can help you through these difficult situations?

**Suggestion:** Look individually at the three temptations and discuss whether there are parallel ways in which our own relationship with God is put under strain— and if so, how the Old Testament scriptures quoted by Jesus can apply to us as well. But Luke's primary purpose is not to teach us how to resist temptation but rather to demonstrate that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and the Son of God, well equipped to accomplish the messianic task. Jesus's filial relationship with God is on a different level from ours. But are there basic principles of trust and loyalty here that should also govern our relationship with our Father in heaven?

## COMMENTARY NOTES:

**4:1** *full of the Holy Spirit* . . . led by the Spirit. This double mention of the Spirit leaves no doubt that this was a divinely planned and necessary experience, from which Jesus will then return "in the power of the Spirit" (4: 14). Like Israel's testing in the wilderness (Deut. 8: 2), it is designed by God to prepare his Son for what lies ahead.

**4:2** *for forty days he was tempted by the devil*. Forty is a round number, which may be intended to echo Israel's forty years in the wilderness. The three recorded tests come at the end of the forty days, but Luke tells us that the devil had been tempting Jesus throughout that time. The verb *peirazō* can mean both to "test," in a good sense, and to "tempt" to do wrong. Both senses apply here, corresponding respectively to the intentions of God and of the devil. In biblical thinking the devil operates only within the overall sovereignty of God, and God can even sometimes use the devil's hostile actions for his own good ends. This story is traditionally referred to as Jesus's "temptation," but that is perhaps to give too much weight to the devil's aim over against God's design: hence the term "testing" in the title for this section.

**4:3** *If you are the Son of God*. The "if" here and in 4: 9 need not imply doubt. Following the unambiguous declaration in 3: 22, it is instead an inference from what Jesus now knows for certain. The devil therefore assumes that Jesus already has the miraculous power that belongs to the Son of God. His strategy is rather to probe the dynamics of that relationship and to suggest that Jesus exploit it for his own benefit. God fed his people with manna in the wilderness (Exod. 16). So surely God's Son need not be hungry. The temptation is for him to use his undoubted authority as God's Son simply to satisfy his personal need.

**4:4** *Man shall not live on bread alone*. Israel's hunger had been part of God's scheme of testing (Deut. 8: 2– 3). Jesus too must keep his

priorities clear and accept God's plan for him rather than use his miraculous power to escape that plan and thus assert his independence.

**4:6** *It has been given to me*. Compare the description of the devil as "ruler of this world" in John 12: 31; 14: 30; 16: 11. His authority is limited but real, and he can reward those who serve him. Jesus's mission to the whole world (see Luke 2: 31– 32), as the "son of man" set over all the nations (see Dan. 7: 13– 14; cf. the messianic destiny set out in Ps. 2: 8), must lead to conflict with the devil, who already "rules" it. But instead the devil offers a gentlemen's agreement. It is not a very subtle temptation, but it goes to the heart of Jesus's mission as Son of God. Note too that the devil offers the "splendor" of the kingdoms along with the authority; is this an appeal to the self-importance that might be expected of the Son of God?

**4:8** *Worship the Lord your God and serve him only*. Israel's status as the people of God depended on their refusing the attractions of other gods when they came into the promised land (Deut. 6: 13– 15). Jesus too must be uncompromisingly loyal to his Father, even if it means mortal conflict with the devil.

**4:9** *the highest point of the temple*. Perhaps we should think of the corner of the temple portico that overhung the Kidron Valley. Even now, with the superstructure destroyed, it is a dizzying drop; at that time, according to Josephus, the portico rose a further thirty meters.

**4:10** *it is written*. The devil too can quote Scripture. Psalm 91: 11– 12 is a promise of God's protection for all who trust him; how much more, then, should the Son of God be able to take it literally?

**4:12** *Do not put the Lord your God to the test*. Jesus's reply, from Deuteronomy 6: 16, recalls the experience at Massah narrated in Exodus 17: 1– 7. There, Israel refused to trust God's promise of provision in the wilderness, and they forced God's hand by demanding that Moses produce water from the rock. God gave them what they wanted, but the relationship of trust had been irreparably

damaged. Similarly, if Jesus had jumped, presumably God would have saved him, but the filial relationship would be broken. True trust in God does not demand tangible proof. To put oneself in unnecessary danger is to force God's hand.

**4:13** *until an opportune time*. This phrase warns us that Jesus's victory over the devil, though complete, does not mean that the danger has gone away permanently. The devil will not again appear in person in Luke's Gospel (though see 10: 18; 22: 3, 31), but Jesus will be confronted by demonic forces, as well as by people and situations that will place his loyalty to his Father under strain, most notably in the mental conflict of Gethsemane (22: 39– 46). The whole process of Jesus's arrest, trial, and execution is to be understood as the devil's renewed assault (22: 3).