

## Jesus, the Spirit and the Wilderness

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Luke 4:1-14

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- Greetings
- We are busy with a series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- Having completed the first leg, where we considered His work in the Old Testament, we have recently turned our attention to the New Testament, and in particular, His work in the life of Christ.
- We have considered the incarnation and the baptism of Jesus.
- This week, we turn our attention to the next significant instance where we see the Spirit at work in the life of Christ, namely, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.
- We will be considering the temptation from the account of Luke, particularly because of His emphasis on the role that the Spirit plays in the event.

### Luke 4:1-3 NKJV

**<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”**

### Luke 4:4-6 NKJV

**<sup>4</sup> But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*’ ” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. <sup>6</sup>**

**And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.**

**Luke 4:7–9 NKJV**

**<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*’ ” <sup>9</sup> Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here.**

**Luke 4:10–14 NKJV**

**<sup>10</sup> For it is written: ‘*He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,*’ <sup>11</sup> and, ‘*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*’ ” <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘*You shall not tempt the LORD your God.*’ ” <sup>13</sup> Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.**

- The way I would like for us to approach the text this morning is by asking 3 questions:
  - Was this a real fight? Here, I will include two sub-questions.
  - What did the fight achieve?
  - Can we fight too?

## 1. Was this a real fight?

- We know that the bible teaches that Jesus was fully man and fully God.
- For centuries, theologians have been struggling with a vexing question:
- How could Jesus be truly tempted if He was God?

- Now, there are all sorts of doctrinal questions that lie beneath this question — questions about the hypostatic union, the peccability vs the impeccability of Christ and the immutability of Christ — but what it all boils down to is this:
- If Jesus navigated His desert temptation by simply leaning into His divine nature to make His human obedience effortless, then this confrontation was no confrontation at all.
- If Jesus made use of His divine attributes to fight, then
  - This was no real fight at all. It was an illusion, a facade, a staged performance.
  - He cannot really sympathise with our weaknesses.
  - He is not someone we are even remotely capable of imitating.
- This cannot be, because it would contradict [Hebrews 2:18](#) and [Hebrews 4:15](#), which clearly tells us that He suffered temptation in every way, as we do, and yet did not sin; as a result, He is able to sympathise with us in every way.
- So, the integrity of this text relies on a crucial truth:
- Jesus voluntarily restrained Himself from using His divine attributes.
- In other words, He refused to “pull rank.” He refused to act as God and make the trial easy.
- At every turn, He chose to act entirely as a man.
- The implication, of course, is that this was not only a real fight, but it was a fight between a human being and an incredibly powerful supernatural creature.

### Sub-question 1: In what arena did Jesus fight?

- This brings us to our first sub-question: In what arena did Jesus fight?
- Well, there is a clue, right here in the text.
- In verse 5, Luke says that the devil took Him up *on a high mountain*, showing Him *all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*. Now there is much to be said about this sentence.
  - First, the word *moment* here can also be translated as a *flash* or an *instant*.
  - Second, there is no mountain in all of Palestine that is high enough to allow for the viewing of all the kingdoms of the world.
  - Third, the pinnacle of the temple was likely inaccessible to the general public.
  - Fourth, the narrative is packed full of the apocalyptic-type language of angels and devils.
- If you take all of these factors together, it suggests to me that this confrontation is not something that takes place physically. It is more likely that this was a vision.
- In my view, this confrontation took place in the battlefield of the mind, which, as it turns out, is precisely where the devil operates.

### Sub question 2: What weapons did He use?

- This brings us to our second sub-question: What weapons did He use?
- As I see it, He relied on two things, both of which are clearly revealed in the text:
  - 1. The utterance of the written words of God. With every temptation, Jesus responded with the words, “It is written,” and then proceeded to quote

scripture in response to. Notice that the fact that the Scriptures existed was not enough. Also, the fact that Jesus knew the Scriptures was not enough. He needed to fight using His words. His first weapon was speech acts, imbued with the power of the very Spirit-breathed words of God.

- 2. A dependence on the Spirit of God. Look at how Luke frames the account with an inclusio: in verse 1, Jesus is *filled with the Spirit* and is led into the desert *by the Spirit*; in verse 14, He returns *in the power of the Spirit*. The Spirit didn't just drop Him off at the edge of the desert and say, "See you later!" The Spirit led Him in, sustained Him throughout, and brought Him out the other end.
- It was a real fight, fought by a real man in the battlefield of the mind, using the Scriptures and a dependence on the Spirit of God who had breathed them into existence.
- This brings us to our second main question.

## 2. What did the fight achieve?

- As we have seen, the Spirit is the One who is orchestrating this entire event.
- This conflict was not initiated by the devil but by the Spirit.
- As Mark writes, the Spirit *drove* Him into the wilderness. This was a forceful, deliberate act.
- While the bible assures us in [James 1:13](#) that God does not tempt anyone, He subjects us to tests, and one of the ways in which He does this is by allowing the tempter to tempt.
- But I must be honest — I have always wondered why the Spirit subjected Jesus to this in the first place.
- There must have been a deliberate purpose!

- Again, the answer lies right there in the text.
- As I see it, the fight achieved something at both a macro and a micro level.

### The Macro Level

- The passage includes two connections with the Old Testament, which suggest that the passage has broader implications and that something was being achieved at a macro level.
  - The first Old Testament connection has to do with genealogy. Luke includes a genealogy between the baptism and temptation of Jesus, tracing his lineage back to Adam. In so doing, Luke contrasts the temptation of Jesus with the temptation of Adam. Jesus is positioned as the Second Adam, succeeding where the first Adam failed.
  - The second Old Testament connection has to do with the duration of the temptation. The temptation took 40-days. This recalls the wandering of Israel in the desert for 40 years. This positions Jesus as Israel's representative, the true Israel, who remained faithful in His temptation where the Israelite nation itself had failed.
- Friends, this fight achieves something at a macro level: it was a cosmic covenantal battle.
- It undoes Eden and all that transpired as a result thereof.
- Where the first Adam fell in a perfect garden, and where the nation of Israel grumbled and failed across forty years in the wilderness, Jesus stands as the Second Adam and the True Israel.
- Through His active obedience under the law, He was securing our righteousness, binding the strong man ([Luke 11:21-22](#)), and qualifying to be our sympathetic High Priest ([Hebrews 4:15](#)).

## The Micro Level

- While Jesus achieved something at a macro level, the tempter comes to Him with 3 very specific temptations. This brings the fight down to a very narrow, specific, micro-level — to ground level.
- The tempter tempts Jesus in 3 areas.
- The first temptation is in the area of providence:
  - “Hey, Jesus, clearly the Father is not meeting your practical needs. Maybe its time for you to do something about that. Why don’t you lean into your deity — if that is indeed something you possess — and turn these stones into bread?”
  - Jesus, dependent upon the Spirit, quotes Scripture, and in so doing, responds, saying:
    - “Trust in God’s providence takes precedence over immediate needs.”
- The second temptation is in the area of power, prestige and possession:
  - “Hey, Jesus, you know, you were a king once, and you enjoyed all the benefits attached to it. I’m pretty sure you miss it. I am the one who has authority over all the kingdoms of the world. If you will do just this one thing, make this one exception — worship me — I will give it all to you!”
  - Jesus, dependent upon the Spirit, quotes Scripture, and in so doing, responds, saying:
    - “Gaining these things through unholy compromise is no gain at all. Worship belongs to God alone.”
- The third temptation is in the area of protection or preservation.

- “Hey, Jesus, I know that you think the Father has your back, and that He will protect and preserve you, but what if He doesn’t? Maybe we should test that out. Go ahead, take a hop. If God does what He said He would do, you will be spared, and no-one would even know you did it.”
- Jesus, dependent upon the Spirit, quotes Scripture, and in so doing, responds, saying:
  - “Genuine faith does not demand proof; true faith rests in who God is, even when He is silent.”
- And so, the fight that Jesus fights doesn’t just achieve something at the macro level — it achieves something right down at the micro level, where the rubber hits the road, in the every-day things with which we are tempted.
- And this brings us to our third main question.

### 3. Can we fight too?

- There is a sense in which the temptations of Jesus were uniquely tailored to Him as the Son of God.
- The things He achieved in overcoming them were His own unique victories.
- We cannot and will not experience the exact same tests.
- However, there is also a sense in which the temptations of Jesus are not uncommon to man.
- There is a sense in which Jesus’ victories at a micro-level serve as a blueprint, where the perfect man demonstrates for us how He overcame temptation, and how we can do the same.
- Friends, this is not just an event that has been recorded for us to read about and say,

- “Oh cool, thanks Jesus.”
- You know, as well as I do, that we struggle in the area of providence.
- We often find ourselves facing some very real, legitimate needs that are not being met at the rate in which we would like or the way in which we would like and so we begin to think, “What can I do to address this thing?” We want to take matters into our own hands.
- You know, as well as I do, that we struggle in the area of power, prestige, and possessions.
- We want status. We want to be in positions of authority. We want to be recognised. We want to accumulate stuff so that we are secure and no longer need to rely on the providence of God.
- You know, as well as I do, that we seek an assurance of God’s protection.
- We want some sort of tangible evidence that God really cares. We are forever looking for signs. We want to force God to prove His promises. This temptation is formidable because it appeals to what seems reasonable: shouldn’t faith be confirmed by evidence?
- Jesus demonstrates for us that we can overcome these temptations with two things:
  - The utterance of the written words of God. It is not enough that they merely exist. It is not enough that we know them. We need to pick them up, put them in our mouths and speak them.
  - A dependence on the Spirit of God.

- Friends, this is more than just a cool story.
- This passage has far-reaching implications for our lived experience.
- If Jesus leaned into His deity to resist the temptation to sin, then we cannot imitate Him.
- But if He chose to act as a man at every turn, dependant upon the Spirit, and wielding the power of the Scriptures as a weapon, then we have a real example and we can really imitate Him.
- This account of the temptation of Jesus serves as a blueprint, where we are given insight into some of the common ways in which the enemy tempts, how the ultimate Spirit-dependent man resisted temptation, and how we can do the same.