

# Held in the Wilderness Matthew 4:1–11

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## Big Idea

- Jesus enters the wilderness led by the Spirit and sustained by God’s word.
- Temptation becomes the place where trust is clarified and identity is anchored.
- Lent begins with learning:
  - Obedience does not remove struggle.
  - God’s presence holds us steady within it.

## What just happened before this passage

- Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:16–17).
- The heavens opened.
- The Spirit descended.
- The Father declared Jesus beloved.

## Then immediately

- Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.
- This was not punishment.
- This was preparation.

## Meaning of the wilderness for Israel

- Place of wandering between slavery and promise.
- Place of dependence on God for:
  - Food
  - Water
  - Direction
- Place where trust and identity were formed.

## Biblical connections

- Israel — 40 years in the wilderness.
- Moses — 40 days on Sinai.
- Elijah — 40 days to Horeb.
- Jesus — 40 days of fasting.

## Key insight

- Jesus steps into Israel’s story.
- Where Israel struggled, Jesus remains faithful.

## Temptation 1 — Stones to Bread (Matthew 4:3–4)

### Situation

- Jesus is physically hungry and weak.
- The tempter challenges identity: “If you are the Son of God...”

## Core temptation

- Independence
- Self-reliance
- Control instead of trust

## Jesus’ response

- Quotes Deuteronomy 8:3.
- Anchors identity in God’s word.

## Truth

- Trust grows when we depend on God rather than control outcomes.

## Temptation 2 — Temple Spectacle (Matthew 4:5–7)

### Situation

- The tempter quotes Scripture.
- Encourages Jesus to force God to prove protection.

## Core temptation

- Demanding proof
- Manipulating God
- Faith based on visible outcomes

## Jesus’ response

- Quotes Deuteronomy 6:16.
- Refuses to test God.

## Truth

- Faith does not require spectacle.
- Trust rests in God’s character.

## Temptation 3 — Kingdoms Without the Cross (Matthew 4:8–10)

### Situation

- Offer of power, authority, and influence.
- No suffering required.

## Core temptation

- Shortcut to success
- Compromise of worship
- Influence without obedience

## Jesus’ response

- Quotes Deuteronomy 6:13.
- Declares worship belongs to God alone.

## Truth

- Temptation ultimately concerns allegiance.
- Who we worship shapes how we live.

## Conclusion of the Text (Matthew 4:11)

- The devil leaves.
- Angels minister to Jesus.
- God's presence never left Him.

### **Key insight**

- The wilderness clarified Jesus' identity.
- It did not weaken it.

### **Our World**

#### **Modern wilderness seasons may include**

- Uncertainty
- Waiting
- Grief
- Health challenges
- Financial strain
- Transition
- Spiritual dryness

#### **What wilderness does**

- Slows us down
- Exposes what we rely on
- Reveals where trust truly rests
- Removes illusions of control

#### **Important truth**

- Obedience does not remove struggle.

#### **Jesus was:**

- Obedient — yet tested.
- Spirit-led — yet hungry.
- Loved — yet challenged.

#### **Therefore**

- Struggle is not proof of God's absence.
- Sometimes struggle is where trust grows strongest.

### **Formation in the Wilderness**

Wilderness seasons can produce:

- Deeper trust in God
- Greater humility
- Increased compassion for others
- Spiritual maturity
- Clarity of identity

These seasons are not wasted.

### **The Message of Lent**

Lent reminds us:

- Faith does not eliminate uncertainty.

- Being loved by God does not guarantee ease.
- God's presence remains constant.

Jesus was sustained by God's word.

We are sustained by the same presence.

### **Reflection Questions**

- Where does life feel uncertain or stretched right now?
- What temptations toward control or shortcuts do you notice?
- How might God be shaping trust in this season?
- What practices help anchor you in God's word?
- How has difficulty deepened your compassion for others?

### **Key Takeaway**

- The wilderness does not mean God has left.
- The Spirit leads.
- The Word sustains.
- The Father remains present.

**We are held.**