

# Matthew 4:1–11

## The Temptation of Jesus

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### Literary Context

Matthew places the temptation immediately after Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13–17). At the Jordan, the Father declares Jesus "my beloved Son." In the wilderness, that identity is tested. The question is not whether Jesus is the Son of God, but what kind of Son He will be (France).

Before Jesus preaches, heals, or calls disciples, He confronts Satan. The wilderness prepares Him for public ministry and frames the nature of His kingship.

### Historical and Biblical Background

- **Wilderness imagery:** Echoes Israel's forty years after the Exodus.
- **Forty days:** Parallels Moses (Exod 34:28) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8).
- **Deuteronomy quotations:** All three responses come from Israel's wilderness teaching (Deut 6–8).
- **Testing language (πειράζω):** Can mean "test" or "tempt." God permits testing; Satan tempts (Davies and Allison).

Matthew presents Jesus as faithful Israel. Where Israel failed, Jesus remains obedient.

### Structure of the Passage

1. Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (vv. 1–2)
2. Stones to bread (vv. 3–4)
3. Leap from the temple (vv. 5–7)
4. Kingdoms of the world (vv. 8–10)
5. Satan departs; angels minister (v. 11)

The temptations escalate from physical need to public validation to global authority (France).

### Verse-by-Verse Highlights

#### 4:1

The Spirit leads Jesus into testing. Obedience sometimes leads into struggle, not comfort.

#### 4:2

Jesus fasts forty days. His hunger emphasizes real humanity (Keener).

#### 4:3–4 — Stones to Bread

Satan challenges identity: "If you are the Son of God..."

Jesus quotes Deut 8:3.

Sonship is defined by dependence on God, not self-sufficiency.

#### 4:5–7 — Temple Spectacle

Satan quotes Psalm 91, misusing Scripture.  
Jesus responds with Deut 6:16.  
Faith does not demand dramatic proof. Trust refuses manipulation.

## **4:8–10 — Kingdoms of the World**

A shortcut to kingship without suffering.  
Jesus quotes Deut 6:13.  
Worship belongs to God alone. Authority comes through obedience, not compromise.

## **4:11**

Angels minister. The Father's approval stands.

## **Major Theological Themes**

### **1. Jesus as True Israel**

Jesus embodies Israel's calling faithfully (Davies and Allison).

### **2. Sonship Through Obedience**

Power does not define identity. Submission does (France).

### **3. Scripture and Discernment**

Jesus models faithful interpretation against distortion (Keener).

### **4. Worship as the Central Issue**

Every temptation ultimately asks: Who will you serve?

## **Wesleyan Reflection**

From a Wesleyan perspective, this passage shows grace enabling holy obedience. The Spirit leads; Jesus responds. Temptation is real, but grace sustains faithfulness (Wesley).

Holiness is not self-generated strength. It is participation in Christ's obedience.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Which temptation feels most familiar in modern life — self-sufficiency, public validation, or power?
2. Why does Matthew emphasize Deuteronomy in Jesus' responses?
3. What does this passage teach about how Scripture should be used?
4. How does Jesus redefine strength and authority?
5. Where might God be forming your identity through wilderness seasons?

## **Key Takeaway**

Before Jesus changes the world publicly, He chooses obedience privately. The wilderness clarifies identity, purifies worship, and shapes mission.