



Sunday, March 12, 2023: "Overcoming Temptation With the Word"  
Commentary (The UGP Curriculum)

## Sunday, March 12, 2023

**Lesson Text:** Matthew 4:1-14; **Time of Action:** 26 A.D.;  
**Place of Action:** The wilderness of Judea

**Golden Text:** "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

**I. INTRODUCTION.** Most of the early years of our LORD's earthly life were spent in silence and seclusion. All four Gospels are concerned primarily with the last three years of Jesus' life. All His miracles and all of His teachings took place in that short span of time. While John the Baptist was preparing a people for the Messiah and condemning the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus appeared on the scene to be baptized by John. After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness where He faced three temptations from Satan. In this week's lesson, Jesus teaches us how to overcome temptation.

**II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND.** Almost 30 years after the events surrounding Jesus' birth in Matthew chapter 2 (see Luke 3:23), chapter 3 opens up abruptly by introducing John the Baptist saying that in those days (when Jesus would



come to John to be baptized) he was preaching in the wilderness of Judea calling on the people to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand (see Matthew 3:1-2). The Gospel of Mark tells us that this was the beginning, of the gospel, for at that time Christ began first to appear to John, and then appeared by John to the world (see Mark 1:1; Acts 1:22). Chapter 3 goes on to say that John's presence was the fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 (see Matthew 3:3).

Then Matthew speaks of John's manner of life, (see Matthew 3:4) including the coming of multitudes to him and their submission to his baptism (see Matthew 3:5-6). He also preached to the Pharisees and Sadducees, trying to bring them to repentance and to Christ (see Matthew 3:7-12). In verses 13-17 we see Jesus coming to John the Baptist to be baptized followed by the Father's approval of His Son. Our lesson begins with Matthew chapter 4.

### **III. JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS (Matthew 4:1-4)**

#### **A. Jesus' hunger (Matthew 4:1-2).**

**1. (vs. 1).** This verse says "**Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.**" The word "**Then**" indicates that this happened immediately after Jesus' baptism. This verse says that Jesus was "**led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.**" The word "**tempted**" means "*tested.*" It is an amazing fact that the same "**Holy Spirit**"



who anointed "**Jesus**" for ministry at His baptism also led Him purposely into a "**wilderness**" setting to be "**tempted**" or tested by the devil. This barren, desolate land was significant because it was a place with little or no comfort or companionship. **Note:** *"Jesus" had to endure the devil's attack without physical stamina or the support of other people. To truly identify with sinners, "Jesus" had to face what sinners face. It should be noted that "Jesus" was really tempted with the real possibility of giving in to Satan. If the temptation was not real, there would be no real victory.* Even though "**the devil**" was the agent of the temptation of "**Jesus**," he did not control the situation. God was in control. It was God's "**Spirit**" who "**led Jesus**" to the place of testing. This is important because it explains how temptation fits into God's plan. James 1:13 tells us that God does not tempt anyone to sin. Instead, God will use even the malicious motives of "**the devil**" to further His own good purposes. What "**the devil**" does to destroy Christians, God can turn around to develop them in their spiritual strength. God never allows His people to experience a temptation that they cannot escape through His help (see I Corinthians 10:13). **Note:** *We should be encouraged to know that since Jesus was divinely led into a time of temptation, we can conclude that temptation itself is not a sin. We will be "tempted" on a regular basis, but we should not beat ourselves up because of the temptations we face. It's how we handle them that counts, and in some cases, proper handling will reduce the number of temptations in certain areas of our lives. But it's also dangerous to take temptations too lightly because we can expose*



***ourselves to greater temptations. We should also realize from this passage that the "devil" is real and he is not just a symbolic figment of someone's imagination. The Greek word for "devil" means "accuser." The "devil" is a fallen angel determined to destroy as much of God's plan for mankind as he possibly can (see Isaiah 14:12-17).***

**2. (vs. 2).** This verse says **"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred."** It appears that the devil waited as Jesus **"fasted forty days and forty nights"** until He was very hungry, the meaning of the word **"hungred."** Like all human beings, Jesus felt genuine physical need. The lack of nutrition made Jesus vulnerable to temptation, especially if the temptation involved something to eat. Hunger is a basic and powerful physical drive. The devil would try to exploit Jesus' extreme hunger in his attempt to undermine His obedience to the Father. Jesus' hunger reveals His humanity, which is important for us to know. But we also know that this was God's will for Jesus, because the Spirit of God had led Him there (see verse 1).

**B. Satan's temptation (Matthew 4:3).** This verse says **"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."** When Jesus was at a very vulnerable stage of hunger, having had nothing to eat for forty days, this verse says that **"the tempter came to him,"** and started his temptation by appealing to Jesus' need for food. Of course **"the tempter"** is Satan and he does not usually tempt any of



us in our areas of strength; instead, he repeatedly tempts us where he knows we are weak. When Satan said **"If thou be the Son of God"** he was not expressing doubt about that fact. He was fully aware of who Jesus was. The phrase **"If thou be the Son of God"** can also be translated *"Since you are the Son of God,"* which may be the more likely meaning in this context. What he really meant was *"Since You truly are the Son of God, use Your power to satisfy Your hunger."* He tried to use Jesus' hunger to drive a wedge between the Son and the Father. After admitting that Jesus was **"the Son of God"** the devil said to Him **"command that these stones be made bread."** All around Jesus were **"stones,"** maybe resembling loaves of **"bread"** in their shape and size. The **"Son of God"** could easily change them into **"bread"** simply by speaking a word. But to use His divine power to satisfy His hunger at this time would be a spiritual declaration of independence from the Father. Jesus would not be living under the authority of the Father, but would be following His own way. In reality, the devil was attempting to get Jesus to act just as Adam and Eve had, by putting personal desire ahead of God's direction (see Genesis 3:4-6). Remember, it was God's will for Jesus to be hungry even while He was surrounded by **"stones"** that He could easily turn into **"bread."** But Jesus didn't dare do what Satan was suggesting.

**C. Jesus' response (Matthew 4:4).** This verse says **"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."** In response to Satan's attempt to get Him to provide food for Himself, Jesus quoted from the



Word of God and said **"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."** The words **"It is written"** refers to the passage **"written"** in Deuteronomy 8:3 which told of Israel's experience in the wilderness many centuries earlier. In that passage, God said that He had led Israel into the wilderness in order to determine if they would keep His commandments or not (see Deuteronomy 8:2). But in Jesus' case, He was led into the wilderness to prove that He would keep God's commandments. God wanted Israel to know that real satisfaction does not come by having our physical appetites met. Real satisfaction comes from obedience to God and His Word. Applying this biblical truth to His own experience, Jesus chose to obey God rather than use His divine power to satisfy His hunger. Jesus could be hungry and still be satisfied knowing that He was doing His Father's will (see John 4:34). We too, can be deprived, but still be content when we are certain we are living in God's will and in Jesus' strength (see Philippians 4:11-13). Jesus passed this first test by keeping obedience to God as the first priority in His life.

#### **IV. JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION AT THE TEMPLE (Matthew 4:5-7)**

##### **A. Satan's lure (Matthew 4:5-6).**

1. (vs. 5). This verse says **"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple."** The first test was in the privacy of the





wilderness, but this second test took place in the public setting of Jerusalem. After Jesus passed the first test, this verse says **"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple."** The **"holy city"** here is Jerusalem. **"The devil"** led Jesus to the highest **"pinnacle"** or highest point on the roof of **"the temple."** This would have been the southeast corner of **"the temple"** complex about 450 feet above the Kidron Valley below. In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus said that it was so high that to look down from it made people dizzy.

2. (vs. 6). This verse goes on to say **"And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."** At that highly visible place, the devil challenged Jesus to prove that He really was **"the Son of God"** by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. If Jesus wanted to play the *"quote the Scripture"* game, Satan could do that too! So Satan used Scripture to make his point. Quoting from Psalms 91:11-12, he said God **"shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."** Satan was misusing this Scripture to show that God had promised to send **"angels"** to catch Jesus before He hit the ground. This was a setting in which Jesus could dramatically prove Himself by a spectacular display. Just imagine the ooohs and ahhs that would come from anyone watching Jesus leap off and then land without harm. But the devil cleverly misapplied God's Word as he tried to



tempt Jesus to sin. This passage in Psalms 91 was never intended to encourage God's people to be careless or to presume upon God's gracious protection. Instead, it promised that God would deliver His people who fell into difficulties as they followed His will. **Note: *For Jesus to throw Himself off the temple in a display that would awe and satisfy people would not be God's way of revealing Himself. He would prove Himself in other ways through regular daily ministries but not in spectacular displays. People would come to believe in Jesus as He ministered in ways that fulfilled Scripture (see Matthew 11:1-6). It should be a warning to us that Satan knows Scripture and how to use it for his own benefit. There are times when well-meaning people might lead us astray by giving bad advice based on some Bible verse. False doctrines are built on selective truths found in the Bible. We must stay aware and follow Christ's teachings carefully (see II Timothy 2:15). The devil was not interested in being convinced that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Instead, he wanted Jesus to stoop to human means of attracting a following rather than keep to the plan God the Father had laid out for Him.***

**B. Jesus' reply (Matthew 4:7).** This verse says "Jesus said unto him, **It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God.**" In response to Satan's second test, "Jesus" countered it with another appeal to Scripture from Deuteronomy 6:16 and said "**It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God.**" In Satan's second test (see verse 6), he took Psalms 91:11-12 out of context, but





Jesus used Deuteronomy 6:16 in its original context or meaning. In that passage, God said "*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah.*" The incident at Massah recorded in Exodus 17:1-7 was a time when the people of Israel demanded a miracle from the LORD. God said that insisting on that was testing Him. In the same way, Satan tempted Jesus to compel God the Father to perform a miracle in order to impress people rather than to humbly follow the plan the Father had already given.

**Note:** *Jesus could've jumped knowing His Father would protect Him. Angels could have landed Him safely. But for Jesus to jump off the high point of the temple as Satan suggested would be nothing more than testing the Father. This would have been pure presumption. We commit the sin of presumption when we demand that God do something for our own good or comfort (see Deuteronomy 18:20) which may be against God's will. But Jesus refused. You only test someone of whom you are not sure. Jesus had total confidence in God the Father, and so there was no need to test Him. It is wrong to put God in this kind of situation.*

## **V. JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION ON A MOUNTAIN (Matthew 4:8-11)**

### **A. Satan's offer (Matthew 4:8-9).**

**1. (vs. 8).** This verse says "**Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and**



**sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.**" Unlike the first two temptations or tests that were crafty, this third one was a more blatant attempt to get Jesus to work outside the plan of God. This verse says that "**the devil**" took Jesus into a very "**high mountain.**" There, like Moses viewing the land of Canaan from Mount Nebo (see Deuteronomy 32:49; 34:1-5), "**the devil**" showed Jesus "**all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.**" Luke's gospel says that this took place in "*a moment of time*" (see Luke 4:5). Jesus didn't have to worship Satan in order to have "**all the kingdoms of the world.**" They will all be his anyway (see Revelation 19:16).

**2. (vs. 9).** This verse goes on to say "**And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.**" Satan made Jesus a tempting offer. He said that he would give Jesus all of the earth that he showed Him if He would just "**fall down and worship**" him. In other words, Satan was saying that Jesus could become King without having to go to the cross. He was offering Jesus a short-cut to the throne. Satan often uses this tactic on people today. He offers them an easy but corrupt path to fulfill a dream. It's worth noting here that Satan didn't say "*fall down and worship me only.*" He asked to become just one of Jesus' objects of worship. Satan allows people to worship God as long as they worship him too. Satan knows that God will not accept worship unless it is exclusively focused on Him (see I Timothy 1:17); anything else is idolatry. But just imagine how tragic it would have been if Jesus had yielded to Satan's temptations! If Jesus had done so, there would be no salvation for humans. Satan was



also trying to seize God's authority. Only God has the authority over the earth, and one day He will give that authority to Jesus (see Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation Chapter 5). **Note:** *What this magnificent scene was really like is beyond our comprehension, and how it happened is not explained in detail. What we do know is that Satan's offer to Jesus was legitimate because he is "the prince of the power of the air" (see Ephesians 2:2) and "the god of this world" (see II Corinthians 4:4). Currently, we live in a world that largely belongs to Satan. That said, Satan's control is limited to what God allows and it will come to an end (see Revelation 20:1-3, 10). But right now, God is allowing him a great deal of influence in the world. Until the time when Jesus is the undisputed ruler of this world, Satan will continue to exercise enormous amounts of influence on human beings. Still, it is hard to believe that Satan had the unmitigated gall to actually tempt Jesus to bow down and worship him.*

## **B. Jesus' command (Matthew 4:10-11).**

1. (vs. 10). This verse says "Then saith Jesus unto him, **Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**" At this point, Jesus rejected Satan and his temptations totally! He ordered Satan to "**Get thee hence**" or "*get out of here.*" Then Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 to show that Scripture clearly prohibits the "**worship**" of anyone but God. So Jesus said to Satan "**for it is written, Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and**



**him only shalt thou serve."** To "**worship**" is to recognize God's worth. It is to reverence, respect, love, and serve Him in all we do. But notice the words "**him only shalt thou serve.**" The key words are "**him only.**" No one can "**worship**" and "**serve**" God and also give their allegiance to another. Jesus said it clearly: "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (see Matthew 6:24). God often uses Satan's temptations to strengthen His servants and build character. Spiritual strength is developed as a person resists temptation.

**2. (vs. 11).** This verse says "**Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.**" After three unsuccessful attempts to tempt Jesus to sin, "**the devil leaveth him.**" Satan could not stay around when Jesus ordered him to go. This should remind us of the words of James 4:7: "*Submit yourselves therefore to God, Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" It's ironic that Satan had just offered to be Jesus' master, but Jesus' authoritative command to get away from here along with Satan's cowering obedience, demonstrated who the real Master was. Once the tempter left Jesus, we are told that "**angels came and ministered unto him.**" God's "**angels**" came and waited on the LORD serving Him most likely by providing food to nourish Him physically, and with fellowship to encourage Him emotionally. **Note: *The Bible teaches that we are all tempted to sin in three areas (see I John 2:16). First, we are tempted by the "lust of the flesh." So was Jesus, for He was tempted to feed Himself.***



*Second, we are tempted by the "lust of the eyes." So was Jesus, for He was tempted when Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. Third, we are tempted by the "pride of life." So was Jesus. He was tempted to demonstrate pride by testing His Father. Jesus is our perfect example for resisting temptation since He was in all points tempted like we are (see Hebrews 4:15), although He remained sinless. Jesus' success in resisting temptation was due to His full dependence on His Father. He depended totally on God's Word. He knew that the Bible is indeed God's Word and that it is alive with power (see Hebrews 4:12). Jesus fully believed that the Bible is God's truth (see John 17:17), and that God's Word will be fulfilled in each and every detail (see Matthew 5:18). Do you believe that? God's Word, the Bible is our best defense against temptations.*

## VI. JESUS BEGINS HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY (Matthew 4:12-14)

**A. Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 4:12).** This verse says "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee." In the early stages of His ministry, Jesus received word that "John" the Baptist had been "cast into prison." He was thrown "into prison" because as Matthew 14:3-5 says, his forthright preaching brought the wrath of King Herod upon him. John spoke against Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias, his sister-in-



law. Herod arrested John and wanted to kill him, but he was afraid of the Jewish multitudes who regarded **"John"** the Baptist as a prophet (see Matthew 21:25-26; Mark 11:32; Luke 7:28; 20:6). The fact that **"John"** was in **"prison"** was important to Jesus because it was His signal to begin His ministry. After hearing of John's imprisonment, Jesus **"departed into Galilee."** With **"John"** unable to continue his public ministry, it seems that the Pharisees in Jerusalem turned their attention to Jesus (see John 4:1-3). No doubt Jesus sensed that this was not the time to engage these Jewish religious leaders, so He left Judea and traveled north to the province of **"Galilee."** There He would begin His great Galilean ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (see Matthew 4:23). **Note: Notice that Jesus did not go into the region of "Galilee" until He heard of John's imprisonment. Before "John" was imprisoned, he was given time to "prepare the way of the LORD" (see Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:1-3; John 3:23-24), before the LORD Himself could appear and begin His ministry. It was in God's plan that John's ministry should be dimmed before Christ's ministry could shine forth (see John 3:27-28, 30); otherwise the minds of people could have been divided between the two men (see John 3:25-26). It's quite possible that some people would have said, "I am of John and others, I am of Jesus," thus causing a division (see 1 Corinthians 1:11-13). "John" the Baptist was sent to be Christ's herald, not his rival. John's ministry was ending and Jesus' ministry was just now beginning. This verse brings us to another point. God will not leave Himself without a witness or His church without leaders. When He removes one useful instrument, He can raise up another, and He will do it,**





*if He has work to be done. After the death of Moses, God said to Joshua "Moses my servant is dead, now, therefore, Joshua, arise." Now God was saying "John is cast into prison," therefore Jesus, arise.*

## **B. Jesus settled in Capernaum according to prophecy (Matthew 4:13-14).**

1. (vs. 13). This verse says **"And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim."** After **"leaving Nazareth,"** this verse says that Jesus **"came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast."** Although Jesus had lived for many years in **"Nazareth,"** He chose to leave **"Nazareth"** and make **"Capernaum"** His ministry headquarters. The town of **"Capernaum"** was a busy and energetic place focused on the fishing industry. The phrase **"which is upon the sea coast"** means that **"Capernaum"** was situated along the Sea of Galilee. This verse also tells us that the town of **"Capernaum"** was also located **"in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim."** These are the two cities in the north that Isaiah prophesied would first experience the Messiah's ministry (see Isaiah 9:1-2). **Note: *Jesus had good reason to leave "Nazareth" for the men of that city "thrust him out" from among them (see Luke 4:28-29). Jesus made those in "Nazareth" the first offer of His service, but they rejected Him and His doctrine, and were filled with indignation at Him and it. Therefore, He left "Nazareth," shaking the dust off His feet for a testimony against those there (see***



*Matthew 10:13-15; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5), who would not allow Him to teach them. "Nazareth" was the first place that refused Christ, and was therefore refused by Him. This is proof that God, will take the gospel of His grace away from those who don't want it, and also thrust them away. Christ will not stay long where He is not welcome. Scripture indicates that Jesus was welcome at Capernaum, and was received better than He had been at Nazareth (see Luke 4:31-37). The truth is, if some reject Christ, others will receive Him, and make Him welcome. Nazareth's lost was Capernaum's gain.*

2. (vs. 14). This verse continues to say **"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying."** Here, Matthew tells us that what we read about Jesus in the previous verse was a fulfillment of prophecy **"spoken by Esaias the prophet."** The prophecy that was **"fulfilled"** is from Isaiah 9:1-2 where it is prophesied that the northern tribes of **"Zabulon and Nephthalim"** (or Zebulon and Naphtali) would see a great light, which was a reference to the Messiah.

**VII. Conclusion.** God's prophecy of a promised Messiah had been fulfilled in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus had become an adult, God gave confirming evidence not only that He was the promised Messiah, but also that He was God's beloved Son who was about to begin His public ministry. Jesus was tested comprehensively, but



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He was victorious over every temptation that was presented to Him. Temptation is real for all of us. In fact, we are tempted in the same basic areas as Jesus was. We can be thankful for the example of victory that Jesus set. His experience demonstrates how important it is to learn the power and content of Scripture.

**\*\*\*The Sunday School Lesson; Union Gospel Press Curriculum\*\*\***