

TESTING OUR METTLE—Part Two  
**Luke 4:1-13**

(NIV) Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,<sup>2</sup> where for forty days He was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry.<sup>3</sup> The devil said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"<sup>5</sup> The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>6</sup> And he said to Him, "I will give You all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."<sup>7</sup> If You worship me, it will all be Yours."<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"<sup>9</sup> The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here."<sup>10</sup> For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully;<sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time.

## INTRODUCTION

Four pastors from different denominations spent a few days on a retreat in a lonely mountain cabin. By the third evening, they'd grown quite close and began to share their biggest temptation to gain help to overcome their struggles. One said, "It's kind of embarrassing, but my big temptation is bad pictures. Once I even bought a copy of the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition*." "My temptation is worse," said the second pastor. "I sometimes can't control the urge to drink. I once actually drained an entire bottle of sacramental wine." "Drinking can be a tough battle," said the third, "but try dealing with gambling. Instead of finishing my sermon one Saturday, I went to the race track to bet on the ponies. I had to arrange a secret loan to hide this money loss from my wife." The fourth pastor had been all ears to this point, as if trying to memorize every word of their conversation. He spoke up, "Brothers, I hate to say this, but my temptation is the worst of all. I love to gossip. After we pray together for God to help us, I'd like to make a few phone calls."

We resume looking at the "Temptations of Jesus." The Greek word translated "temptation" or "tempt" in the New Testament can have the malicious intent of luring us into wrongdoing, as when **I Timothy 6:9** (GNT) warns, "[T]hose who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull them down to ruin and destruction." In March 2009, a 62-year old woman was charged with stealing \$73,000 from her church in Washington State. She told detectives interrogating her, "Satan had a big part in the theft." Satan no doubt suggested ways of sneakily taking the money to entrap her into sin, ruin her Christian testimony, and cripple her church financially. The Devil tempts believers, but does he make anyone *do* what God despises? No. **James 1:14-15** (GNT) reminds us, "We are tempted when we are drawn away and trapped by our own evil desires.<sup>15</sup> Then our evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Temptations are not *commands*. Temptations merely offer us options. Our own *choices* are responsible for our actions. The same Greek word often translated "temptation" or "tempt" essentially means, "to put to the test." God knows that many temptations seeking to pull us away from Him also give us opportunity to demonstrate our devotion to the Lord. This same Greek word is thus rightfully translated as "a test," "to test," or "a trial," as in **James 1:2-3** (ESV): "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,<sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Today's them could rightfully be called, "The Testing of Jesus."

## I. THE BACKGROUND TO TESTING JESUS' METTLE

As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed across the United States in the 1860s, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. A train would plummet devastatingly should the bridge fail. Before pronouncing it ready for traffic, the builder put the bridge to the test. He loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the

middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day. A worker asked with great concern, "Are you trying to break this bridge?" "No," the builder replied, "I'm trying to prove the bridge won't break and should withstand any load that challenges its strength." In the same way, God the Father didn't allow **Jesus** to face the temptations of **Luke 4** to see if He would sin but to prove He wouldn't. The "forty days" of being "tempted by the devil" tested His mettle; the quality and strength of His temperament, His fortitude, and His courage.

The fall of the human race into sin and evil being unleashed in our world came about when the "first Adam," representative of the human race as first "created . . . in the image of God," yielded to temptation of "the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan" to distrust and disobey God the Father (**Genesis 1:27; Genesis 3:1-24; Revelation 12:9; Romans 5:12-19**). Adam (with Eve) knew the total reason of his existence on Earth was to experience the joys of fellowship with God the Father. Adam knew his Father deserved his full devotion and obedience for placing him in the paradise of Eden's garden to live and for entrusting him with oversight responsibility over everything else on God's created Earth. Adam had never known a moment of neglect, abuse, or deprivation at his Father's hand. Yet, when God allowed the Devil to test Adam's mettle, the strength of his devotion to his Father, "the first Adam" miserably failed the test of loyal obedience, despite every advantage in his favor, by making a "god" of his own selfish desires.

By His baptism (**Luke 3:21-22**), **Jesus** publicly committed Himself to fulfill God the Father's will for His life, *whatever God might ask of Him*. His Father certified **Jesus'** commitment by publicly affirming, "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased." God the Holy Spirit then fully empowered "the man Christ Jesus" (**I Timothy 2:5**) to accomplish His God-given tasks. **Luke 4:1-2** tells us what next happened, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil." **Mark 1:12** (NASB) states more forcefully, "Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness." It's been said, "people are like tea bags—you have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are." The Jews called "the wilderness" of Judea "The Devastation. It's a dreadful, barren furnace between central Israel's fertile plateau and the Dead Sea. **Jesus** took on the Devil in a wasteland, not a lush garden. Despite being called upon by His Father to fast for 40 days, bringing Him to the brink of starvation rather than being well-fed before His first major test by Satan, **Jesus**, as "the last Adam," marvelously passed all tests of loyalty with God-honoring obedience! His work to undo the ravages brought upon our world by the "first Adam's" disloyalty had begun!

## II. THE FIRST TEST

Most Bible scholars believe **Jesus'** "forty days" of "wilderness" testing mirrors Israel's "forty years in the wilderness" (**Deuteronomy 8:2**). **Jesus** demonstrates the obedience God asked of Israel as a nation, whom He now represents. The only recorded responses **Jesus** gives the Devil are all from **Deuteronomy**, where Moses identifies the three main tests of obedience to God's will that Israel faced in these forty years. The first of these tests is described in **Deuteronomy 8:2-3**: "Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these 40 years in the wilderness, so that He might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands.<sup>3</sup> He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then He gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." God tested whether Israel valued their special relationship *with* Him more than what He could *do* for them.

Israel failed this test. After God awesomely delivered them from Egyptian bondage, He deliberately allowed them to experience hardships to test their mettle; the strength of their commitment to making their spiritual relationship with Him their priority above everything else. This includes trusting God to meet their needs in His own time and in His own way; as He knows is best for us spiritually and eternally. Israel quickly put more of a priority on satisfying their *physical* needs or *personal* whims than the *spiritual* value they placed on honoring the LORD who'd freed them to become His special people. They claimed the right to take their lives out of God's hands if rough circumstances made it appear to them God did not have their

best interests at heart (as in **Exodus 16 & 17**). They became such slaves to doubt and distrust that it cost them the abundant joys of the land God promised them. **Jesus** never wavered in His trust of His Father's care, even in the face of such bleak circumstances that would have withered the faith of most Israelites of Moses' time, of **Jesus'** time, or of many who profess to be God's redeemed people today. **Jesus** refused the temptation He had every right, as the Devil suggested, to take matters into His own hands to satisfy His physical or personal needs, even when His needs were great: "The devil said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

Christopher Nerreau is pastor of St. Stephens Orthodox Church of West Brookfield, MA. His father told him of the days he carried a pilot's license. Once in a while he'd rent a small Cessna and fly around with a couple friends. This pastor asked his father what was the hardest part of flying. He told him it was trusting in your instruments. He described what it was like getting caught in a storm and not being able to see. He said, "Everything in you wants to look out the windshield and figure out what's going on, but that is a fatal move. You must fully trust your instruments; they do not lie." Christopher believes, "This is very similar to living a life of faith. We are called to trust not in our feelings but rather in the unseen God who does not lie." Circumstances, our feelings, or temptations often urge us into actions that seem right to us in a time of great need, rather than entrusting ourselves fully to God's control. This is a fatal move.

### III. THE SECOND TEST

Israel's second major "wilderness years" test involved idolatry; the strength of their commitment to live for their Savior-LORD by not making a "god" of anyone or anything else. Moses declared in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 13-15** (NIV): "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one [NLT, "'The LORD is our God, the LORD alone'"].<sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.<sup>13</sup> Fear the LORD your God, serve Him only and take your oaths in His name.<sup>14</sup> Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;<sup>15</sup> for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and His anger will burn against you, and He will destroy you from the face of the land."

James I. Packer, now age 91, is one of the leading Bible Teachers and Theologians of our time. In his book, *Your Father Loves You* (1986), Packer challenges us by asking, "What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self), and the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (**1 John 2:16**). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run his life becomes his god and the claimants for this prerogative are legion. In the matter of life's basic loyalty, temptation is a many-headed monster."

"The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>6</sup> And he said to Him, 'I will give You all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.<sup>7</sup> If You worship me, it will all be Yours.'" The assumption behind Satan's offer to **Jesus**, which **Jesus** did not challenge, is that until the Earth is reclaimed from the Devil by God's power, it lies, for now, in the hands of the "evil one." The Apostle John wrote, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (**1 John 5:19**, NIV). By offering **Jesus**, "all the kingdoms of the world"; "all their authority and splendor," Satan tempted Him with a much easier path to becoming "King of kings and Lord of lords" (**Revelation 19:16**, ESV) of our world than the path God the Father offered **Jesus** involving rejection, betrayal, torture, and an excruciating death by crucifixion. Mark Twain admitted: "There is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable." Humanly speaking, the Devil certainly offered an "unspeakably desirable" temptation-shortcut to **Jesus**. All that Satan asked in return was, "If You worship me, it will all be Yours." In other words, Satan offered **Jesus** god-like earthly success as long as **Jesus** made the ultimate compromise of abandoning worship of

the true God by making the Devil His "god." Such a compromise would have been a dead-end to **Jesus'** goal of saving us from sin, Satan, and self, and would have left us all on the dead-end road to Hell. We can be eternally grateful, "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'""

#### IV. THE THIRD TEST

When faced with a desperate situation, the temptation to demand God must yet again prove He cares for and protects us, or He'll lose our loyalty, was the third main test of obedience Israel faced in the wilderness. No more than two months after they left Egypt, **Exodus 17:1-7** (NIV) records, "there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?' <sup>7</sup> And he called the place Massah [testing] and Meribah [quarreling] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" God's powerful, awe-inspiring displays of miracles in their behalf, which He unleashed to free Israel from centuries of slavery in Egypt, magnificently demonstrated His devotion to them. In **Psalms 81:7**, God reveals He "tested" the Israelites by allowing them to run short of water. Instead of dishonoring Him with faithless distrust, they could have done what?—honored God with their faithful trust.

In **Deuteronomy** (meaning, "second giving of the Law") Moses reviews God's dealings with Israel after rescuing them to be His special people. In **Deuteronomy 1:31** (NIV), Moses reminds them, "in the wilderness," "you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." Such fatherly devotion on God's part is behind Moses' warning in **Deuteronomy 6:16** (NIV), "'Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah.'" This is the background behind Satan's third major test of **Jesus'** trust in God the Father. "The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: "He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" "The highest point of the temple" may have been the pinnacle at the southeast corner of the Temple's outer wall that overlooked the Kidron Valley 450' below; a "dizzy height" in the words of Josephus, a Jewish 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D. historian.

The Devil knows the Bible better than we do; studying it for thousands of years. He knows the promises of **Psalms 91:11-12** apply solely to those exposed to dangers as a result of their humble commitment to obey God's will regardless of the personal cost. Satan sneakily lifts these verses out of context, as he will do with us. He sought to trick **Jesus** into pridefully pushing His Father into saving Him miraculously from death after taking a very foolhardy leap from the pinnacle of the Temple. One of Satan's favorite tactics is dangling Bible verses taken out of context before our eyes, to trick us into thinking God approves our ungodly actions. **Jesus** avoided Satan's trap by knowing what the Bible really teaches. Demanding God must bail us out of the consequences of our foolishness or stubbornness proves our faithlessness in God's will, not our faith in our Father. A young pilot foolishly thought more of impressing others with how cool he sounded on aviation frequencies than on how well he followed protocol. While approaching a field the first time at night, instead of making any official requests to the tower, he said, "Guess who?" The tower controller brought him back to reality by switching off the landing field lights and replying, "Guess where!"

"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time." "Opportune time" means, in this context, "a more convenient time," "the right time," or "a more favorable opportunity" for Satan. The Devil continued to assault **Jesus**, often striking when **Jesus** would least expect it (as when Peter became Satan's mouthpiece to convince **Jesus** to avoid His death on the Cross in our behalf, **Mark 8:31-34**). Today's victory over Satan does not guarantee tomorrow will be free from temptation or the Devil. Pastor Rick Warren points out we have the same spiritual resources available to us that **Jesus** used when He faced and defeated Satan: Prayer (**Luke 3:22**), the Father's love (**Luke 3:23**), the power of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 4:1**), and the Word of God (**Luke 4:4, 8, 12**).

## CONCLUSION

Archibald Rutledge (1883–1973) was an American poet and educator who wrote over 50 books and numerous poems, usually about his hunting and life experiences in his native South Carolina. He tells us about a man who worked in one of the great forests of the South. His faithful dog burned to death in a great fire that swept through the forest. This little dog had been left under a tree to guard his master's dinner pail. He wouldn't leave it even when the flames roared around him.

This Forest Service worker was brokenhearted when he found the charred remains of his little pal. With tears streaming down his face, he told Rutledge, "I always had to be careful what I told him to do, because I knew he would do it." Even a dog's genuine love for its master can inspire such unconditional obedience that nothing could drive it away from faithfulness to his master's wishes. This should challenge us to call upon the Lord to inspire such unconditional love for our Savior within us, so we will allow nothing to lure or drive us away from faithful obedience to "our only Lord and Master, Jesus Christ" (**Jude 4**)!