

40-04-04-Temptation by Divine Appointment
 temptation, trial, testing, Holy Spirit, divine guidance
 Mat 4:1

If God leads us into trials, He stays with us through them.

INTRODUCTION:

–Mat 4:1, *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.* This verse begins our *Lenten series* on Christ’s Desert Temptation. By fasting at Lent, we try to *identify with Jesus* in His 40-day episode of experiencing “*testing*” [lit. meaning of Gk. word “*temptation*”]. But Christ’s humanity (*how He identifies with us*) is the underlying theme of this passage. In His *desert temptation*, Jesus went before us, so that in our *trials and testings*, He can legitimately say, “Follow Me.” **HOM.idea.** –*God identifies with our human journey*, not by *watching us live it*, but by *having lived it Himself*. This truth is exemplified by this verse: Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

I. What Was His Experience Before the “Then” of This Verse?

- A. It started *at conception*– Phil 2:6-7 (NASB), who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (To become a real man, God “**emptied Himself**,” But He remained God. [A car on empty is *still a car*; people with amnesia retain their *individual identities*; so when God’s Son “emptied Himself” of the abilities of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, He was still God!)
1. By this emptying, God experienced *normal infancy & childhood*,
 2. But the Spirit started talking to Jesus– (when his parents scolded Him for staying behind in the temple) Luke 2:49-50, “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in **my Father’s** house?” (He was right about knowing who He was, but **His timing was off!**)
 3. So, God put on the brakes for 18 years– Luke 2:51-52 (NKJV), Then He went down...to Nazareth, and was **subject to them**,... And Jesus **increased in wisdom** and stature, and in **favor with God** and men. (He had to **learn spiritual discernment** and *how to please His Father*.)
- B. Then, 18 years later, just before His desert testing came Christ’s greatest confirmation– Mat 3:16-17, As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a **voice from heaven** said, “This is **my Son**, whom **I love**; with him I am **well pleased**.”

TRANS: Jesus had been *growing, learning, increasing in sensitivity* to the inner voice of His Father. Now, **the climax!** That same voice spoke to Him from heaven. Later, Christ revealed the full extent of what happened as *the Holy Spirit descended upon Him*– John 3:34 (CEV), The Son was sent to speak God’s message, and he has been given the full power of God’s Spirit. **Finally!** His *long-awaited time of service* was to begin! But *if He was to minister to lost souls who needed His preaching and healing...*

II. Why Did the Holy Spirit Lead Him into the Desert?

- A. Imagine Christ’s human thoughts about this? It *appeared* to be the exact opposite direction of God’s ministerial call upon His life.
1. Human *reasoning* can easily steer us off the path of God’s plans. [My failure: not following God’s lead to take a book from my car into the clinic so I could later give it to a cancer patient on his last day of therapy.]
 2. Jesus knew He had nothing to teach without *His Father’s voice* and no ministry to people’s needs without *the Spirit’s power*.
- B. “But why did Jesus have to be ‘tested’? He was God’s Son!”
1. It was for Himself: He was still learning, discovering *first hand what humans go through*, sometimes *alone*, with *no audience* to influence our behavior or to cheer us to victory over bad choices.
 2. It was also for us: Jesus had to go before us Himself, if He was ever to lead us through temptations. [Scouts, in pioneer days, checked out the territory first before returning to guide the traveling party through it.]

TRANS: Heb 2:17a, For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God... Jesus never asks us to do what He won’t do or go where He wouldn’t go. If God leads us into trials, He will be right there with us through them. But this “testing” was a devilish trial for Christ! Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. We may ask...

III. How Could God Lead Us into Trials and Temptations?

- A. Didn’t Jesus say to pray, “lead us not into temptation”? (This request is set in a context: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Before His final test of obeying His Father’s voice, as it *led* to the Cross, He also prayed to avoid it, then **added** “not my will but Thine be done.”)
- B. “But why was Satan used for this testing?” That’s how our Fall in the Garden happened, and that’s how God began His redemption

of humanity, in the wilderness that the Fall had created. (Adam failed the original test; Jesus, the 2nd Adam, was about to pass it!)

1. God had promised that a woman's offspring would crush Satan's head, and Jesus, Mary's Son, was about to begin that crushing.
 2. This was *no easy task*, but humanly painful, and again, Christ was *going before us*, to become our **tried** and **true** Human Guide through such *devilish testings*— Heb 2:18. Because he himself **suffered** when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Our **Scout** for the territory of trial and testing is the Expert Guide!)
- C. Jesus, to become our *authentic Human Leader* through temptation, had to depend, not on His own human reason, but on the wisdom of the Spirit Who had *just come upon Him* at His baptism. (Some say “*Jesus could NOT have failed the test!*” That idea turns this trial into a sham, and it denies the **genuine** humanity of Jesus.)
1. Christ was learning *first hand* from the Holy Spirit exactly how to avoid the diabolical traps set by the enemy of human souls— Heb 4:15. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (He calls to us, “Follow Me,” because He knows the way to come through every temptation with victory!)
 2. And because, as a real man, He victoriously passed the test in the territory of human temptation, we can fully take hold of the power in God's promise to Christians— 1 Cor 10:13. No temptation has seized you except what is common to **MAN**. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (The **MAN** we know, Who leads us through life's journey, is the incarnate Son of God, Who left the Desert Temptation with victory!)

CONCLUSION:

–**If God leads us into trials, He stays with us through them.** Again and again, *Christ's humanity* will become clear in this passage about His Temptation in the Desert. But remember this verse: *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. And whenever you are facing fierce and fiery trials, remember that your Lord, Who already faced them Himself, is right there beside you to lead you through them.*