

LED BY THE SPIRIT – TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL

Matthew wrote to Jews to prove that Jesus Christ was indeed the promised Jewish Messiah, as prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. He first showed that Jesus meets all the genealogical requirements. Then he showed that Jesus had the necessary forerunner in the person of John the Baptist in fulfillment of prophecy. And then he showed that Jesus, in fulfillment of prophecy, was anointed with the Holy Spirit as seen at His baptism.

As we come to chapter 4, we find that the Messiah had to be TESTED to prove His moral qualifications. In all of the synoptic (similar) gospels (Matt, Mk, and Lk), the temptation of Christ follows His baptism. Before Christ could enter into His public ministry, He had to be anointed with the Spirit, and He had to be TESTED & PROVEN in terms of His character.

Matthew 4:1 (NKJV)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Now that the Spirit had uniquely come upon Jesus in full measure, and as such, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (cf. Jn. 3:34). Jesus was fully God, but in His incarnation, He assumed the position of humility whereby He set aside the independent use of His divine attributes.

God's plan was for Jesus to depend upon Him as a man, depending on the power of the Spirit to guide Him. Jesus as a MAN is the great and perfect representative of humanity. Paul referred to Him as the second Adam (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).

Jesus came fulfilling all those Messianic SERVANT passages prophesied about in Isaiah. In Isaiah 42 – 53, there are FOUR prolonged Servant Passages we commonly call “**Servant Songs**” (cf. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). As the Divine Slave Jesus would not do His own thing but rather as a perfectly yielded SERVANT, He would humbly obey God at every point culminating in the cross (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). This was to be TESTED right at the outset, just prior to His public ministry.

The first Adam was TESTED in the very best of conditions and failed. Israel was tested in the wilderness and failed. Jesus was also TESTED in the harsh environment of the wilderness, referring to the barren region northwest of the Dead Sea.

This was a desolate place in keeping with temptation by the devil. Mark 1:12 says Jesus was there “with the wild beasts”. It was a foreboding, scary kind of place.

But note the Spirit led Jesus out here because God had a specific providential purpose – mainly to allow Jesus to be TESTED. When it says, “to be tempted by the devil,” the word tempted can have one of two meanings.

“The Greek word translated “tempt” or “test” has two meanings: (1) to test or prove (John 6:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Heb. 11:17); and (2) to solicit to evil. The Holy Spirit tested or proved Christ. The devil sought to lure Him to do evil.”
– **William MacDonald**

James 1:13 is very clear that God never tempts anyone in the sense of soliciting them to do evil. However, God does allow His servants to be tested. He does allow the devil to tempt people, and God uses it as a means of testing them.

When Jesus refuted the devil, He quoted from Deuteronomy, where in context Moses was reviewing Israel’s wilderness experience. He said there:

Deuteronomy 8:2 (NKJV)

2 And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Even Jesus in His human nature had to learn obedience as seen in Hebrews 5:8. He NEVER did anything wrong, but He did learn what it was like to undergo real temptation – to be TESTED.

It is not wrong to be tempted; it is wrong to yield to temptation. Even Christ was tempted, but He never sinned; He never yielded to temptation (cf. Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5). In our fallenness, times of testing often result in falling to temptation. But that never happened with Jesus. Contrary to us, Jesus had no inner pull towards sin. He had no sin nature. But being human, He could be tempted from without – in this case by the agency of the devil.

The OT was very clear that the sacrificial lamb (typified in the Passover lamb) had to be “**without blemish**” and had to be TESTED to make sure it was such.

Exodus 12:5–6 (NKJV)

5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

6 Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

Note there had to be a testing period from the 10th day of the month (Ex. 12:3) until the fourteenth day of the month. The lamb had to be TESTED!

Jesus suffered, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). In the OT, the sacrifices always had to be without blemish. The Passover Lamb had to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5). The burnt offering had to be without blemish (cf. Lev. 1). The peace offering had to be without blemish (Lev. 3). The sin offering had to be without blemish (Lev. 4). The trespass offering had to be without blemish (Lev. 5). All of these were types and symbols that looked forward to the ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah Who would be without sin. Thus, it was necessary for the Messiah, introduced by John the Baptist to be the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, to be TESTED and PROVEN (Jn. 1:29).

In this context, the question comes up: Was it possible for Jesus to sin? Concerning the Person of Christ, there is a deep mystery here that we will never be able to completely fathom.

“The NT documents affirm both Jesus’ deity and His humanity, and neither of these affirmations may be permitted to deny the complementary truth. One might argue that Christ’s impeccability [that He could not sin] is a function of His deity but must not be taken to mitigate His humanity, and Christ’s temptability is a function of His humanity but must not be taken to mitigate His deity.” – **D.A. Carson**

Jesus was God, and as God, it was impossible for Him to sin. This is called impeccability. However, He was also fully human and therefore could experience temptation. When you put it all together, Jesus was both fully God and fully human in ONE person. The reality of His deity means He could not sin; the reality of His humanity means He could experience temptation. Oh, the wonder of it all!

Jesus is the tested and proven SPOTLESS LAMB OF GOD Who takes away the sin of the world! Hallelujah, what a Savior!