

Victory in the Wilderness



SABBATH—JANUARY 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 1:20–23; John 9:39; Matthew 3:7–12; Matthew 4:1–10; Deuteronomy 34:1–4; Revelation 21:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (Luke 19:10, NKJV).

SATAN KNEW THAT ENMITY¹ WOULD CONTINUE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN HIS SEED (FOLLOWERS) AND HER SEED. He also knew that his work of making fallen humans more evil would be interrupted. . . . But as the plan of salvation was more fully shown, Satan celebrated with his angels that he could bring down the Son of God from His high and honored position. Satan boasted that his plans had so far been successful upon the earth. He also boasted that when Christ took upon Himself human nature, Satan could cause Him to fall and fail. In this way the redemption of fallen humans might be prevented.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 66.

This week, as we study about the temptations in the wilderness, we will find what the Bible so clearly teaches us about the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). Satan claimed the world as his, and Christ came to win it back. Jesus' winning it back was the plan of salvation. Having failed to kill Jesus after His birth, Satan tried another way to destroy the redemption² of humans. This week's study explains how Satan tried to do this through the wilderness temptations.

DEFINITIONS

1. enmity—a very deep unfriendly feeling.
2. redemption—Jesus' act of saving sinners from evil and death by dying on the cross for their sins.

IMMANUEL TO THE RESCUE (Matthew 1:20–23)

Read Matthew 1:20–23. What is the meaning of the name given to Jesus: “Immanuel” (NirV)?

Why did Jesus come to this earth to be “with us”?

First, He came to restore (give back) the “kingdom” that Adam lost (Romans 5:12, 15). We catch a quick look at this kingly part of Jesus when He inspired³ the crowds (5,000 wanted to crown Him king). Also the children sang to Jesus their hosannas (praises directed at one who would save the people from their enemies). We, too, find His powers over creation. He showed His ability to restore broken humans into whole persons again. (For example, He healed the man born blind and the woman who bled for 12 years.) And He used His power over nature. (For example, He calmed the storm and told the wind and the waves to be still.)

Second, He came to bring judgment and to destroy the works of the devil (John 9:39; 1 John 3:8). How often do we wonder why evil seems to succeed? Jesus deals with injustice and promises us that it will end soon. Jesus was recognized by demons as having power over them. They would often cry out telling who Jesus really was, sometimes before He was ready to show it. Jesus restored demon-possessed people to normal mental health and gave them peace. Others would flee in fear.

Third, Jesus came into the world to seek (look for) and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to take away their sins (John 1:29). Jesus was made like us so that He could be a faithful High Priest who would restore us to God (Hebrews 2:17). “Jesus dealt with sin, saved humans from it, and gave them grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and glorification. This all was done for the purpose of the single covenant from the beginning and now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”—Adapted from N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), Kindle edition, Kindle Locations 1462, 1463.

Finally, Jesus came to teach us what God is like. He also showed us—and the watching universe—what His true character really is (John 14:9).

How can and should each of these reasons for Christ’s coming improve your life and walk with the Lord?



Jesus healed the woman who bled for 12 years.

DEFINITIONS

3. inspired—to cause, urge, or influence someone to want to do something.

JESUS' BAPTISM (Matthew 3:7–12)

John the Baptist must have caused excitement throughout the area. Here was someone who looked like the prophet Elijah (Matthew 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8). He was the first prophet the people had seen in 400 years. God had never been silent for so long before. Now God was speaking to the people once again. Clearly, something important was about to happen.

Read Matthew 3:7–12. Why would John the Baptist connect themes of judgment—the wrath (God’s anger) to come (Matthew 3:7), the axe laid to the root of the trees (Matthew 3:10), clearing the straw from His threshing floor (Matthew 3:12), and burning up the husks with fire that cannot be put out (Matthew 3:12, NIV) in his introduction to the Messiah (Chosen One)?

The people thought they were living in the last days. They saw John come from the wilderness and encourage them to pass through the waters of the Jordan through baptism. This was a bit like a new Exodus. Getting wet (rather than walking across a dried-up riverbed) was necessary for cleansing and getting ready for the new Promised Land. They thought that the Messiah Himself would lead them from victory over the Romans into God’s eternal kingdom.

But John and Jesus were not leading a political movement. It was a salvation event. The explanation by Luke of what John was doing is a quotation from Isaiah. It describes the way God would prepare a road for His people to return to the Promised Land (Luke 3:3–6). Jeremiah explains the reason for making that special road. It was to make it possible for the blind, the lame, the pregnant, mothers with toddlers—and for all others who wanted to return to the Promised Land—to be able to do so (Jeremiah 31:7–9). No wonder the people flocked to John. Their hope was inspired that they too could be ready for the great day of God, soon to come upon them.

But it came, however, in a way that most of them did not expect. It is not because they had not been told, but because they did not understand the meaning of what the Scriptures taught (Luke 24:25–27).

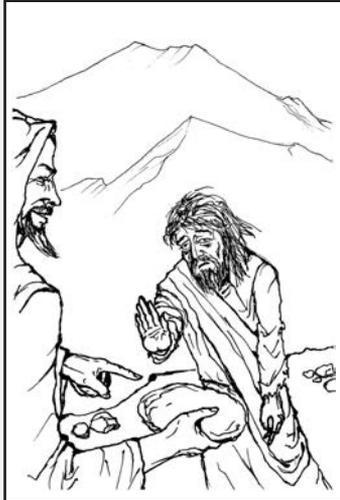
Faithful people had deep misunderstandings about the nature of the Lord’s first coming. How might faithful people in the last days avoid having deep misunderstandings about the nature of His second one?



John encouraged the people to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan.

STONES INTO BREAD (Matthew 4:1–3)

Read Matthew 4:1–3. What is happening, and why? How do we find the great controversy going on here?



“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread’ ” (Matthew 4:3, NKJV).

There are interesting comparisons⁴ between the story of Jesus’ temptations and the experience of the Israelites in their Exodus wanderings. After coming through water, Jesus went into the desert, where He ate nothing and was tested for 40 days. In the same way, the Israelites passed through water (the Red Sea), entered the desert where they had no bread, and stayed there for 40 years. Notice how it is described in Deuteronomy 8:2, 3 (Nlrv). “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way. He guided you in the desert for these 40 years. He wanted to take your pride away. He wanted to put you to the test and know what was in your hearts. He wanted to see whether you will obey his commands. He took your pride away. He let you go hungry.’ ”

The Gospel story says that after 40 days Jesus was hungry (Matthew 4:2). Then someone shows up with “helpful” advice, a bit like Job’s friends who tried to “comfort” him. This is not the first time Satan is shown as “trying to help” someone in crisis. Zechariah 3 tells the story of the high priest at the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Jews’ return from Babylon. As the high priest stood before God in vision, someone appeared at his right hand. The one who stood at the right hand was always the most trusted friend, to protect and guard against any would-be attacker. But the trusted right-hand man in Zechariah 3 was really Satan, pretending to be a trusted friend.

The same thing happened to Jesus in the wilderness. The one who came to “help” showed who he really was when he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread’ ” (Matthew 4:3, NKJV). An angel from God would not have doubted Jesus being the Son of God.

Again notice how Jesus’ answer (Matthew 4:4) is a quotation connected with the Exodus. “ [God] gave you manna to eat. You and your parents had never even known anything about manna before. He tested you to teach you that man doesn’t [does not] live only on bread. He also lives on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (Deuteronomy 8:3, Nlrv).

It is important not to fall into temptation. But how much more important is it to make sure that you, even unknowingly, are not leading someone else into it?

DEFINITIONS

4. comparisons—showing how two or more things are the same or different.

ANOTHER TEMPTATION (Matthew 4:5–7)

The first temptation has some connection with the Exodus. But it also had its roots in the Fall. Jesus made faithfulness to God important instead of giving in to appetite. By doing so, He regained the ground that Adam lost at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But to completely bridge the gap (separation) from where we humans had fallen since the time of Adam, Jesus had to face two more temptations.

According to Matthew, the second temptation involved Satan taking Jesus to the highest part of the temple. Perhaps it was in the southeast corner that overlooked a steep ravine (a deep valley). Again came the mocking statement, “‘If you are the Son of God,’” which showed that the tempter (Satan) was no friend of Jesus.

What is Satan really trying to prove here? Would it have proved anything if Jesus did jump? (Matthew 4:5–7).

Jesus was not interested in cheap actions. His trust in God was true. It was not something planned to impress others. Jesus’ complete trust in His Father was shown in His leaving heaven and becoming a human, suffering through many terrible insults, and through the unfairness of His death (read Philippians 2:5–8). This was His fate, and He was fully prepared for it. His mission was to win back the world that Adam and all those who came after him lost. In Jesus, all the covenant (special agreement) promises were to be fulfilled, and the world would have an opportunity for salvation.

Again Jesus answers with, “‘It is written.’” He again quoted Deuteronomy and again connected His experience with the Exodus: “‘Don’t [do not] put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah’ ” (Deuteronomy 6:16, NIV). Massah was the place where the Israelites bitterly complained about lack of water. So Moses struck the rock to provide it. In evaluating this experience, Moses said that the people had “tempted [caused God to feel anger] the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’ ” (Exodus 17:7, NKJV). The devil tried to trick Jesus by repeating the Savior’s words, “‘It is written’ ” (Matthew 4:4, 6). Jesus, of course, knew better and did not fall for the trick.

It is not always easy to know where the line is between trusting in God for a miracle and taking advantage of His power when we pray. How have you learned to know one from the other? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



Satan takes Jesus to the highest part of the temple and tempts Him to jump in order to prove He is God.

DEVIL WORSHIP (Matthew 4:8–10)

In Matthew's version, the first temptation focused on appetite. The second was focused on taking advantage of God. The third was a direct challenge to Christ Himself, to His kingship and to His total mission on earth.

Read Matthew 4:8–10; Deuteronomy 34:1–4; and Revelation 21:10. What is the meaning of the “exceeding [very] high mountain” that Satan took Jesus to?

Judging by the way the Bible uses the theme of going up to the top of a very high mountain to see nations, we can know that Jesus' trip was not a sightseeing trip. It was also from a mountaintop that Moses sees the Promised Land as it would later be. And John later sees the future New Jerusalem. In the same way, Jesus sees more than just the countries of the Roman world in Bible times. Notice that Satan shows off everything in its best light. He shows the riches and the “bright side.” He did not show the crime, suffering, and injustice.

Satan then says, “ ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me’ ” (Matthew 4:9, NKJV). Satan fooled Adam and Eve into wanting to become like God (when they already were in His image). In the same way, Satan pretended that he was God and that the ownership of the nations of the world was all his. And if Jesus would worship him just a little, he could easily give it all to Jesus (read Luke 4:6; compare⁵ Psalm 2:7, 8).

This test focused on loyalty. Who should humanity give full loyalty to? In Eden, when Adam and Eve gave in to the serpent, they were really giving Satan their first loyalty. And that infection spread quickly through each successive generation. Without God's direct action, the great controversy would have been decided in favor of Satan. Humanity, and maybe even life on earth, could not have continued. The risks were that high.

Notice that Jesus, like Joseph with Potiphar's wife, did not permit evil to stay near Him. Jesus commanded Satan to go away. Joseph could not do that, so he removed himself from the scene of evil (Genesis 39:11, 12). What a simple lesson for us, too.

In all three of these temptations, Jesus used the Scriptures as His defense. What does that mean to us in everyday life? How can we, when faced with temptation, use the Bible to have the same kind of victories?

DEFINITIONS

5. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: A person can find writers through the centuries trying to explain the theme of the great controversy. Some Christians today are looking at the idea more closely. But no one has a deeply developed great controversy worldview as the Seventh-day Adventist Church does. A real, physical, moral (holy), and spiritual war between Christ and Satan is really a very important theme of Adventist thought. And no wonder! All through the Bible there is what one Christian writer has called “the cosmic [involving the whole universe] warfare [fight between God and Satan] theme.” For example, this week’s lesson on the temptations in the wilderness is shown in a very realistic and open manner. The idea of a battle between good and evil can also be found even outside the religious theme. For example, poet T. S. Eliot wrote, “The world turns and the world changes / But one thing does not change. / In all of my years, one thing does not change: / The perpetual [eternal] struggle of Good and Evil.”—*The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952), page 98. German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “Let us come to a conclusion. The two opposing values ‘good and bad,’ ‘good and evil,’ have been involved in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years.”—Adapted from *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Random House, 1967), page 52. The Spirit of Prophecy (the writings of Ellen G. White) along with the Bible show the true nature of this conflict (war) and the eternal issues involved in it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to Wednesday’s question about the line (the boundary) between trusting in God’s promises for a real miracle and taking advantage of God’s power. How do we know the difference?
- 2 Temptation comes in many forms and shapes and sizes and colors and methods. And, of course, some things that tempt one person do not tempt another. Besides the clearly noticed sins, what are the more hidden sins into which we can be tempted?
- 3 Read over the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and the humbling experiences He went through. As you do, think about the fact that this same Jesus was really “God with us.” He was the One through whom “all things were made” (John 1:3). How can we fully understand the thought that God went through this fearful struggle for our sake? Considering this truth, what else is important?