

A SAVIOR *for* ALL PEOPLE

A Study of Luke's Gospel



LESSON 4 Luke 4:1-30

Information for Teacher

Today's lesson covers two units: the temptation of Jesus by the devil, and the inaugural proclamation of Jesus' ministry that happens at the Nazareth synagogue.

Two notes about chronology: First, Matthew and Luke record the temptations of Jesus in a different order. Remember, though, that Luke's "orderly account" isn't necessarily chronological, and so this discrepancy is not cause for concern. Luke (or Matthew) may have a literary reason for ordering the temptations the way he does.

Second, Matthew and Mark place Jesus' rejection at Nazareth at different places chronologically (Matt 13:54-58, Mark 6:1-6). Again, Luke has motives other than just telling what happened in order. Luke, who wants to emphasize Jesus as savior to the whole world (and not just the Jews), places the Nazareth synagogue episode at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in order to let that be the foundation and common thread through all that will happen in the rest of Jesus' ministry. At the synagogue, Jesus announces he has come for the Gentiles in addition to the Jews. This sets the stage for everything that will follow.

Covering only two units will hopefully allow you to spend ample time on each. Next week's lesson covers more text, so be sure to ask your class to read ahead. The text for next week's lesson is found at the end of *this* lesson.

Opening Discussion

- **Finish the sentence:** "The greatest temptation for humans is _____."

Introduction

Jesus has just undergone his baptism and is now going to do two more things to inaugurate his ministry: he will first be tested in the wilderness, and then he will proclaim the mission of his ministry among the people of his hometown.

Two things from last week's text help illuminate this week's text: First, Luke writes that at Jesus' baptism, the "Holy Spirit descended on him" (3:22). Second, whereas Matthew's genealogy traces Jesus only as far back as Abraham (Matt 1:2), Luke will go all the way back to Adam, whom Luke calls the son of God (3:38). Jesus' identification with Adam, and their dual

identification as sons of God (Jesus in Luke 3:22, Adam in Luke 3:38) will be important as we see Jesus undergo temptation not unlike Adam did, but with different results.

The Biblical Text

Luke 4:1-13 (The Temptation of Jesus)

- Before he begins his public ministry, Jesus must decide **what kind of Messiah** he will be.
- He is led **by the Spirit** into the wilderness for 40 days. This is **part of the plan**, not a detour.
 - **Moses** fasted for 40 days (Exod 34:28, Deut 9:9).
 - **Israel** wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.
 - **Elijah** went into seclusion for 40 days (1 Kgs 19:4-8).
 - The number 40 (whether days or years) is a way to signify a **long time**.
- The text tells us that during this time, Jesus **eats nothing** (and at the end, he is hungry. Imagine that!)
- Also during this time, Jesus is **tempted** (or tested – same word) by the devil.
- The devil tempts Jesus in three ways. These three things are temptations for Jesus to be a **different kind of Messiah** than he needs to be.
- Temptation 1: **stones into bread** (4:3-4)
 - The devil plays on **Jesus' identity**: "If you are the Son of God..." (Jesus has just been told this in 3:22).
 - The temptation is to be a **social, humanitarian Messiah**. Feed the people, and they will follow.
 - Jesus **answers with Scripture**: Man shall not live on bread alone (Deut 8:3).
- Temptation 2: **authority and splendor** (4:5-8)
 - The devil shows Jesus **all the kingdoms** of the world.
 - Must **worship the devil** in order to receive it.
 - The temptation is to be a **political, revolutionary Messiah**. Jesus could end the rule of Rome right here by taking over the kingdom.
 - Again, Jesus **answers with Scripture**: Worship and serve the Lord only (Deut. 6:13).
- Temptation 3: **free falling** (4:9-12)
 - The devil again plays on Jesus' **identity** as the Son of God.
 - The devil asks Jesus to **throw himself down**.
 - The **devil starts quoting scripture**, telling Jesus that God will send angels to keep Jesus from being injured (Psalm 91:11,12).
 - Jesus **answers with Scripture**: Do not put God to the test (Deut 6:16).
 - The temptation is to be a **stunt Messiah**, gaining followers by spectacle.
- Each temptation was **not bad in itself**. Jesus would indeed feed people. He ultimately will rule over all kingdoms. And on the cross, he was a spectacle, drawing all people unto himself. The problem was the devil was **offering these things now**. Jesus must not only demonstrate superiority over the devil; he must demonstrate **patience** and **trust in God**.

- After the temptations, the devil leaves until “an opportune time” (4:13), and you can imagine the ominous music playing in the background. **We have not seen the last of the devil.**

- *If Jesus isn't going to be a Messiah like the devil wants him to be, then what kind of Messiah will he actually be?*
- *Augustine writes that the root of all sin is pride. Discuss your reaction to this.*
- *Craddock writes that sometimes, “temptation asks us to do things about which much good can be said.” Discuss your reaction to this.*
- *How does Jesus view Scripture as it relates to overcoming temptation?*
- *For the final temptation, Satan and Jesus both quote Scripture to make their point. How do we know who is using Scripture correctly?*

Luke 4:14-30 (Jesus in Nazareth)

- Luke gives us a **geographical interlude**, telling us that “in the power of the Spirit” (there’s that phrase again), Jesus returns to Galilee as news about him begins to spread.
- This news certainly spreads to his **hometown**, Nazareth, where Jesus will now visit.
- This is a sort of **homecoming** as Jesus, the “celebrity,” returns to where he grew up.
- Jesus **attends services at the synagogue**, “as was his custom” (4:16). Remember, Jesus and his family were **good, observant Jews**. Luke reminds us again here.
- The service might have gone something like this:
 - Someone reads the **Shema** (Deut 6:4-9).
 - Someone offers a **prayer**.
 - Someone reads from the **Torah** (Gen-Deut) and offers comments.
 - Someone reads from the **Prophets** and offers comments. **Jesus fills this role** in the order of worship.
- We are not sure if Jesus got to **select the passage** in Isaiah or it was **pre-selected** in the order of worship.
- Jesus reads from the **Septuagint version** (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) of Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6.
- The **original context** of this passage was God’s promise to bring his people **out of exile**, away from oppression, and back into his care.
- So Jesus is now **claiming this role for himself**. Jesus has come to lead God’s people out of oppression (though in a different way than they might expect).
- This scripture **highlights** people like the **poor, prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed**.
 - For a society that thought people were poor, blind, etc. because God was punishing them, this is a complete reversal.
- It also makes reference to the **Year of Jubilee** (the year of the Lord’s favor). According to the OT Law, in the Year of Jubilee (about every 50th year)
 - You must **let the land rest** and not farm it.
 - You **cancel all debts**.
 - You **free all indentured servants**.
 - You **return ancestral lands** to their original families (who might have had to sell them at some point to pay the bills).
- In other words, once in every person’s lifetime, you **reset the economy**.

- So far, so good. Everyone is surely **proud** of their hometown boy and his participation in the service.
- “But then the **trouble begins**. Jesus, not content to quit when he is ahead, points out that the gifts of God do not come automatically to those who attend the Temple...And this is really too much!...The idea that the message is for worthless outsiders rather than us! The very notion that unbelievers will be the recipients of God’s favor and we will not!”³
 - Jesus tells **two stories** to illustrate this point.
 - During a famine in Elijah’s time, **Elijah** is sent to **help a Gentile widow**, not a Jewish one.
 - **Elisha cleanses Naaman** (a Syrian official) of leprosy; he didn’t cleanse a Jew.
 - **God has been at work among the Gentiles** for some time, even if the Jews have been reluctant to believe or embrace this.
- This **message does not go over well**. The people want to throw him off a cliff. (Maybe Luke is ironically reminding us that while Jesus would not throw himself down when tempted, the crowd will be happy to do that for him).
- Stoning was an acceptable, if barbaric, way to punish someone for saying what Jesus has just said. This, however, is **mob rule**. They are so caught up in their anger (and their betrayal by their hometown hero), that they just want to shove him off a cliff rather than stone him according to law and custom.
- Some way or another, Jesus **walks through the crowd** and gets away.

- *Discuss this statement from Craddock: “Jesus does not go elsewhere because he is rejected; rather, he is rejected because he is going elsewhere.”*
- *What kinds of message might make us react the same way as the crowd at the Nazareth synagogue?*

Application

- *In what ways is temptation ultimately about trust in God?*
- *How are we tempted in similar ways to Jesus?*
- *What Scriptures should you commit to memory in order to fight temptation?*
- *Adam and Eve were tempted to “be like God.” Jesus was tempted to flaunt his status as the Son of God. In what ways do we face temptations to “be like God”?*
- *Jonah, representing Israel, was angry when God dared show mercy to the Gentiles in Nineveh. The crowd in Nazareth reacted the same way. Why are God’s people sometimes so selfish in how God shows his love and mercy?*

Next Week’s Text

Luke 4:31-6:16

³ Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology in a New Key* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 94-95, qtd in Justo L. González, *Luke, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster, 2010), 65.