



# Study Series

Follow Me: Week Two PM

Jesus is the perfect Israel: Marc Rader

## Bible

Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

### Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

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

**2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

**4** Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

**5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** "If you are the Son of God,"

he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,

and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

**7** Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

**8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.

9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

## Sermon Summary

Matthew's presentation of Jesus has heightened our expectations of what Jesus will accomplish. This continues in 4:1-11 as Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tested. Even on the surface, this is an extraordinary text. Whilst we may take comfort in the fact that Jesus was tempted even as we are tempted, this temptation scene is unlike our ordinary experience of temptation. First, it is set at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry; the first thing He does after being baptised, as a symbol of His commitment to the plans and purposes of God. This placement tells us that Matthew sees what happens as foundational to Jesus' ministry. Second, these temptations are brought by the devil and involve significant challenges to Jesus' identity. Notice that the first two open with a question: "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus' identity is a critical question in the gospels, and these are surely meant to be temptations aimed at the heart of Jesus' ministry.

There are, however, some less obvious, but equally important connections to the Old Testament. Perhaps the most significant of them is that Israel, like Jesus, were led into the wilderness by God and, whilst there, they were tested. This wilderness season for Israel was foundational for the nation and is presented in both a positive and negative light. On the positive side, this was a time when Israel spent time alone with God. On the negative side, it was a time when Israel failed to trust, obey, and honour God. Time and again they failed. Matthew, having already identified Jesus with Israel in chapter 2:15 by referencing Hosea 11:1, now makes clear that he sees Jesus as the ideal Israel. Jesus represents all that Israel was meant to represent, but where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. He refuses to provide for Himself by making bread from stones; He refuses to force God to save Him by leaping off the temple; and He refuses to worship anyone else but God. In all these ways Jesus fulfils all that Israel was meant to.

This has important implications for understanding Jesus' ministry, but also for following Him. In Exodus 19:5-6 Israel is called to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. This language, while it is strange to us, is the language of mission. The people of God were to

represent God among the nations as priests do. They were to instruct people on how to approach God and how to please Him like priests do. They were to be set apart (holy) in their behaviour, living out what it looks like to live in relationship with God. This was all part of the promise made to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3). As we begin to follow Jesus we must see that His ministry is accomplishing something with universal implications, but also recognise that when we place our faith in Him, we become heirs to the promises and purposes of God for His people. We are brought into the mission, to be a blessing to the world. This is not an additional extra, but is central to being a Christian, because it is central to following Jesus in His ministry.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Where have you seen someone near perfectly perform or demonstrate one of your hobbies or interests. This might be the time you saw a professional succeed in a sport you're interested in, or hearing a piece of music exquisitely performed, or someone in your field of work demonstrate extraordinary skill. How, if at all, did this change how you personally engage with that hobby or interest. Share your reflections with the group.
2. Read Matthew 4:1-11 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been lead to.
3. Jesus represents Israel, the people of God, and succeeds where they fail. What does this invite us to consider about His ministry?
4. The three temptations Jesus faces all relate to a commitment to trust in God. What contributes to the temptation to trust in someone or something else other than God?
5. Jesus makes a way for us to carry out the mission to the world that God invited Israel into. What are some of the characteristics of that mission for us today?

6. Jesus resists the devil by quoting Scripture. How does knowing and understanding Scripture help us resist the lies and temptations of the enemy? What practical steps can we take towards being better equipped this week?

# Prayer

Take some time to pray for each other, and in particular, consider each other's reflections on question 6. Invite the Holy Spirit to begin to refresh and transform your reading and understanding of Scripture. Ask God to help you see the Bible as the double edged sword that cuts off the lies of the enemy, releasing you to carry out God's mission for His chosen people, and to truly live a life changed by Jesus.