

"Temptation 101: Quoting Deuteronomy"

by Rev. John C. Tittle

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is 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 splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Discussion Questions:

1. Questions, observations, comments about the Scripture?
2. Have you ever fasted before? Would you be willing to try, if you were medically approved to fast?
3. What can the wilderness teach us?
4. What is the difference between the motivations of the Father for testing Jesus and Satan's tempting of Jesus?
5. Jesus miraculously multiplied the loaves and fishes later in his ministry. Why would it be wrong for him to turn stones into bread here?
6. There have been comparisons made between Jesus in the wilderness and Israel in the wilderness:
 - Israel is called God's son in the Scriptures. Jesus too is called God's Son.
 - Just as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea into their Exodus in the wilderness, so Jesus passed through the baptismal waters of the Jordan into his New Exodus in the wilderness.
 - Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness is like Israel's 40 years in the wilderness.
 - Like Israel, Jesus is tempted by hunger in the desert.
 - Like Israel with the golden calf, Jesus is tempted to idolatry.
 - Like Israel with the Promised Land, Jesus is tempted to choose the allure of earthly kingdoms over the kingdom of heaven.
 - *Does this make sense? If so, what is the message?*
7. How is Satan trying to put a wedge in the relationship between the Father and the Son?
8. How might the devil be casting doubts about God's provision for Jesus in the first temptation? What about your relationship with God?
9. What is the difference between trusting God and testing God in the second temptation?
10. Someone has said for the third temptation it wasn't the end that was wrong (Jesus having power), but the means. Do you agree? Why or why not?
11. What do we learn about Jesus by the way he handled these three temptations?
12. How can Jesus help us when we face temptation?