

# Matthew 4:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-4/matthew-41/>

*Following His baptism by John, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

The parallel accounts of this event are found in Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-2.

After *Jesus* was baptized by John and affirmed by His Heavenly Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, He encounters a time of isolation and temptation.

Matthew says *Jesus* was led 'up' as a way of informing the reader that *Jesus's* path *into the wilderness* was an uphill journey from the Jordan River where He was baptized. We do not precisely know where or which *wilderness Jesus* was led by the Spirit into, but tradition places it in the Judean wilderness, northwest of Jericho. Its rolling hills are scarred by deep canyons and jutting cliffs. It is a dry and rugged terrain. This *wilderness* is not a place anyone would likely choose to go without a specific purpose.

The distance between Jerusalem and one of the likely sites of *Jesus's* baptism is only about 20 miles. The space between the Jordan Valley to the east and Jerusalem to the west is filled by the Judean Wilderness. *Jesus's* ancestor King David spent substantial time in the Judean wilderness hiding from King Saul, who sought to murder David because Saul perceived him as a threat to his throne. The incident at the Wilderness of En Gedi where David spared Saul's life in a cave is roughly 50 miles south from where *Jesus* may have been baptized (1 Samuel 24).

*Jesus* follows the Spirit's leading. In John's Gospel, *Jesus* repeatedly confesses that His purpose is to do His Father's will; that He does nothing of His own volition; that He only speaks what His Father tells Him. In following *the Holy Spirit*, *Jesus* is repeating a similar pattern. *Jesus* probably did not choose of His own accord to go and spend time in *the wilderness*, but He obeyed the will of the Third Person of the Trinity. It is interesting to note that in one verse God the Father declares that He is *well pleased* with His son to this point (Matthew 3:17), and in the very next verse the Father leads His son to the wilderness to be tested (Matthew 4:1).

It is a consistent pattern throughout scripture that God leads into the wilderness those He prepares for service. A few examples include Moses, who spent many years as a shepherd in the wilderness before he was called to lead Israel out of Egypt. David also spent time in the wilderness hiding from Saul. The nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years prior to entering the Promised Land. The principle here is that times of testing can be a sign of God's approval. It can rightly be viewed as preparation for a great work. Any activity is great, when done as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

Matthew uses the Greek word "Peirazō" (G3985) in this verse which is translated as *to be tempted*. Its root is often translated: "test," "trial," or "tempt." Though translations vary according to the translator's perspective, they mean the same thing. James uses the same root

throughout the first chapter of his epistle where the NASB translates it in all of these senses. But the middle of James 1 provides important truth on the nature of what temptation actually is and how it unfolds.

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust”( James 1:13-14).

James’ passage makes clear that the primary difference between a temptation and a test is intent. A tutor, coach, teacher, or mentor provides tests to promote growth. Like an algebra teacher giving a test to ensure the student is learning the material. The tutor hopes you will pass, and has your best interest at heart. The goal is growth and benefit.

However, a tempter desires the opposite. The tempter desires destruction. James makes it clear that God never desires that we fail. In fact, the Bible promises that God always prevents us from any test we are not capable of enduring (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This passage raises some interesting questions about the temptation of *Jesus*.

If *Jesus* is God, how could He *be tempted*?

Jesus is a paradox. He is fully God. And He is fully human. A paradox occurs when two propositions exist in partnership, but their coexistence is irreconcilable. Every founding principle of a worldview is paradoxical. In a philosophical system based on human logic, a paradox must either be explained, or it is a contradiction. However, God transcends human logic. Human logic is a reflection of God, not a boundary within which He must operate. The Bible does not present itself based on a foundation of human logic. It opens with “In the beginning God.”

Given this, we can explain how Jesus could be tempted by answering “because He was human.” We cannot explain how Jesus could be both God and human, just as we cannot explain existence. It just is.

The Bible’s founding paradox conflicts with that of other worldviews. The Bible presents God Himself as the founding paradox; a God that is one and many. A God that is fully divine and fully human. A God that is beyond explanation. All explanations stem from God, not the other way around. The famous Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. affirmed the paradox that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

[For a full discussion of this question, see the Tough Topics article on the Paradoxical Nature of God here.](#)

Hebrews 2:17-18 shares additional light on the reality that Jesus was truly tempted:

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of

the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18).

This passage expresses that among the reasons Jesus became a human was so that He could identify as a human and we could identify with Him as a human. In becoming human, Jesus is able to minister to men as a man. He who “has suffered” and was “tempted” can minister to other humans as a brother. He can minister as a fellow sufferer to those who likewise suffer and are tempted. Jesus’s wilderness experience demonstrates the frailty of His humanity. If Jesus relied on divine grace and God’s word to sustain Him during temptation, we ought also to expect to depend upon God and His word when temptations arise.

The text says that *Jesus was tempted by the devil*. This statement squares with what James told us in James 1:13-14, that God does not tempt. *The Spirit led Him into the wilderness*, but it was *the devil* who *tempted* Him. God allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7). God allows believers to be tempted but does not allow them to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13). There will come a time when the devil is prevented from tempting (Revelation 20:1-10). In the meantime, God allows him to tempt, but provides a way of escape if we are willing to choose it. Jesus experienced all we experience, so He can sympathize with us. Jesus gained amazing rewards for His faithfulness, and offers enormous rewards for those who follow His example and resist temptation (Philippians 2:8-11; Hebrews 2:5-12; Revelation 3:21).

God is the Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all that is, but even so has created us entirely free to morally choose between good and evil. God does not tempt anyone. These paradoxes are rooted in the character and essence of God.

## **Biblical Text**

### **4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness**