

Luke 4:2-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-4/luke-42-4/>

The devil approaches Jesus with the first of three temptations. He asks Jesus to use His divine powers to turn stones to bread after Christ had fasted forty days and nights in the wilderness. Jesus uses scripture to refute the devil.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 4:2-4 and Mark 1:12.

Jesus's sojourn into the wilderness lasted for forty days, where he was tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry (v 2).

Jesus fasted while He was "in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1).

Fasting is a spiritual exercise where an individual intentionally deprives himself of some finite good (usually food) for the purpose of becoming more dependent upon the ultimate good—God (and less reliant upon finite goods).

We know in this instance *Jesus* fasted from eating food because Luke tells us that *He ate nothing during those days*. As a spiritual exercise, fasting requires and increases the virtues of humility and self-control. To fast of food and its sustenance in the harsh wilderness, *for forty days* and forty nights (Matthew 4:2) would have required substantial discipline. The hunger pangs *Jesus* felt would likely have been increasingly constant and severe. This was a moment where *Jesus* keenly felt the frailty and weakness of His humanity. In His frailty, *Jesus* chose humility: *He* trusted and relied upon God in obedience to the Spirit.

It is not without significance that *Jesus's* fast lasted *forty days* and forty nights. In Jewish culture, *forty* is a number that symbolizes testing and discipline. Throughout the Old Testament a period of *forty days*, as well as *forty days* and forty nights, occurs repeatedly.

Some references to *forty* or *forty days* and forty nights in the Old Testament (and possible Messianic parallels) are as follows:

- **The Flood**—*forty days* and forty nights was the exact length of time God caused it to rain upon the earth (Genesis 7:12). God judged the world for disobedience. *Jesus* is the ark upon which humanity is saved from judgment.
- **The Spies**—*forty days* and forty nights was the exact length of time the twelve spies searched out the Promised Land (Numbers 13:25). Ten of them saw the land was good but became fearful when they also saw the difficulties ahead, and refused to trust God's promise. Satan will test *Jesus* by showing Him shortcuts around all the difficulties ahead of Him, trying to lead Him away from trusting God's promises.
- **Elijah's Fasting**—*forty days* and forty nights was the exact length of time Elijah fasted on his journey to "Horeb, the mountain of God" (Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai, 1 Kings 19:8). Just as David was regarded by the Jews as Israel's greatest king, so was

Elijah regarded as Israel's greatest prophet. *Jesus's* miracles parallel and even surpass the miracles of Elijah in both quantity and might.

- **Ezekiel's Demonstration**—*forty days* and forty nights was the exact length of time the prophet Ezekiel laid on his side to symbolically “bear the iniquity of the house of Judah” (Ezekiel 4:6). *Jesus* came to bear the sins of Judah (and the world) upon Himself.
- **Jonah's Preaching**—*forty days* and forty nights was the exact length of time the prophet Jonah preached God's warning to Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). *Jesus* also preached a gospel of repentance, in order for people to avoid destruction.
- *Forty* was the number of years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land (Exodus 16:35; Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 29:5). It was their time of preparation to enter the Promised Land. *Jesus* was led up to be *tempted* as a time of preparation.
- *Forty* was also the number of years that each of Israel's first three kings reigned: Saul (Acts 13:21), David (1 Kings 2:11), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:42). *Jesus* came as the King of the Jews.

And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread” (v 3).

After *He* had fasted *forty days* and forty nights, *He became hungry*. It was then, when *Jesus* was *hungry* and physically depleted that *the devil* came to tempt *Him*. The one who *tempted* Eve to break God's command has now come to test *Jesus*.

The first notable aspect of this temptation is that *the devil* chose a specific time for the temptation: when *Jesus* is physically weakened. *Jesus* was *hungry* after fasting for *forty days* and forty nights. Experiments have shown that human willpower is a resource which eventually depletes due to fatigue or hunger. Satan chose a time to tempt *Jesus* when He would likely not have had the human strength to resist. *He* would have to humble Himself and rely completely upon the Spirit.

As with Adam and Eve, the first circumstance *the devil* chose to test *Jesus* involved food. In *Jesus's* hunger, *the devil* said to *Him*, “*If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.*” (v 3)

What is the actual temptation? Satan could have said, “Why don't you turn these stones into bread, so you won't die?” But Satan does not focus on mere physical survival. He goes for a much deeper value—*Jesus's* core identity. Satan begins his temptation with a conditional phrase: *If you are the Son of God*. In the opening attack of the temptation, Satan demands that *Jesus* prove who He is. It seems Satan is saying “*If You were really the Son of God, then you would not be here starving, You would use Your power to feed Yourself. You must not be who You say You are.*”

The devil is fully aware that *Jesus* is God. But he also sees that after *forty days* and forty nights of fasting, *Jesus* is physically weak. The tempter's suggestion is to command that these stones become bread to prove *Jesus* is the *Son of God*. The sin *the devil* is trying to cause *Jesus* to commit is to rely upon Himself to meet His needs instead of trusting His Father by following the Holy Spirit.

As the *Son of God*, *Jesus* had the power and authority to turn stones into *bread*, which would satisfy His hunger. In fact, *Jesus* will eventually create *bread* in one of His miracles, when *He* feeds five thousand men with a few loaves (Matthew 14:13-21). When *Jesus* creates bread in that instance, it is not a sin. The sin Satan is coaxing *Jesus* to commit is to simply follow His own way instead of following God's leading. *Jesus* speaks of the limitation *He* accepted when *He* took on the form of becoming human in John's Gospel:

“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’”
(John 5:19)

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”
(John 5:30)

Satan's temptation is to get *Jesus* to do just one thing apart from His Father's direction. In this case, to feed Himself. Therefore, it would have been a sin for *Jesus* to act on Satan's suggestion, because that was not an action directed by His Father.

The *Son of God* became Man to fulfill the law as a Man, and this required the Son submitting to the will of the Father and not following His own appetites and desires.

And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone’” (v 4).

Matthew's account of *Jesus*'s response includes the counterpoint of the scripture *He* quotes. The counterpoint is “but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Matthew cites a fuller reference for his Jewish audience. Luke condenses the reference for his Greek audience.

Jesus fights off *the devil*'s temptation by using truth from scripture. *Jesus* tells *the devil* that *Man* is *not* sustained only by filling his belly, but by trusting God and obeying His commands. Obedience to every word of God is the true source of life.

This statement testifies that men and women are more than physical bodies, and as the body needs bread for physical nourishment, their souls need the word of God for spiritual sustenance. The scripture *Jesus* uses to refute *the devil* comes from Deuteronomy, a book of Moses,

“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”
(Deuteronomy 8:3)

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses's farewell speech before he hands over leadership to Joshua to take the Israelites into the Promised Land. In this verse, Moses explains part of God's purpose for taking the Israelites into the wilderness, where they ate manna for forty years (Exodus 16:35).

In quoting this passage, *Jesus* declares that God is giving *Him* a blessing by providing *Him* an opportunity to learn a valuable lesson through experience.

In His humanity, *Jesus* learned obedience (Hebrews 5:8). His response to *the devil's* first temptation demonstrates three things. First, *Jesus* was aware that in His wilderness experience He was being given an opportunity to learn obedience. Second, *Jesus* chose to embrace a perspective informed by Deuteronomy 8:3 that this difficult circumstance was a blessing, an opportunity to learn and grow. And third, *Jesus* recognized that Satan was tempting *Him* to act apart from His Father's will to create His own circumstances. God the Father always chooses what is in our best interest, and for *Jesus* to follow His own appetite would be to reject God's leading.

Like His brethren, the Israelites, *Jesus* was humbled by God's Spirit in the wilderness through hunger. God provided for the Israelites with manna which miraculously and mysteriously appeared from heaven. God did this so that the Israelites would learn that their lives were sustained by obeying God. By quoting this passage, *Jesus* reminds *the devil* of this reality. He chooses the path of obedience and life rather than sin and death. Christ rejects *the devil's* temptation that *He* should act as though *He* is self-sufficient. Instead, *He* chooses to depend upon His Father. *Jesus's* humility is even more remarkable when we recall that as God, He truly was self-sufficient, but Christ set aside His self-sufficiency in obedience to His Father and trusted the Spirit to sustain *Him* in this time of weakness.

When *He* overcomes this temptation, *Jesus* shows Himself to be greater than Moses, in fulfillment of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15. Moses committed a sin of self-reliance when he led the children of Israel in the wilderness and struck the rock to bring forth water rather than speaking to the rock, as he was instructed. As a consequence, Moses was not allowed to lead Israel into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:2-13).

Biblical Text

2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. **3** And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." **4** And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"