

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 5: THE SINLESS LIFE AND ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Lesson 14

The Temptation of Christ

Tested in Every Way, Yet Without Sin

The Wilderness, the Devil, and the Victory of the Last Adam

Key Texts: Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49

“It Is Written” — The Son of God Defeats the Tempter with the Word of God

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

We move now from the Christology of Unit 4, the theoretical and conciliar precision of the hypostatic union, the impeccability, the knowledge and will of Christ, into the Christology of active engagement: the sinless life and active obedience of Christ as it was actually lived, tested, and proven in the history of first-century Palestine. Unit 5 is not a retreat from theological rigor; it is the application of the christological precision of Unit 4 to the specific historical events in which that precision found its most dramatic expression. The first of those events, the temptation of Christ in the wilderness immediately following His baptism, is the subject of this lesson.

The temptation narrative (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13) is one of the most theologically dense, most exegetically rewarding, and most personally significant pericopes in all of the Gospels. It is theologically dense because it operates on multiple christological levels simultaneously: it demonstrates the genuine humanity of Christ (He was genuinely hungry, genuinely tempted, genuinely dependent on the Word of God), the genuine impeccability of the divine Person (the temptations were real but could not succeed), and the Last Adam typology that frames the entire redemptive mission (where the first Adam fell in a garden of plenty, the Last Adam triumphed in a desert of deprivation). It is exegetically rewarding because every one of Christ's responses to the three temptations draws on specific Old Testament texts in a way that illuminates both the nature of each temptation and the theological principles that defeat it. And it is personally significant because Hebrews 4:15 explicitly identifies the temptation of Christ as the ground of the sympathetic High Priest's solidarity with every tempted believer.

This lesson works through the temptation narrative with the care and the depth it deserves. It examines the setting (immediately after the baptism, driven into the wilderness by the Spirit), the three temptations (their nature, their strategy, and their relationship to the three categories of human temptation identified in 1 John 2:16), the weapon Christ uses (the Word of God, specifically Deuteronomy), the Adam-Christ parallel that gives the narrative its cosmic significance, and the pastoral and soteriological dimensions of the victory. The goal is not merely to understand what happened in the Judean wilderness at the beginning of the public ministry; it is to understand why it happened, what it accomplished, and what it means for the believer who is engaged in the same struggle against the same adversary.

I. THE SETTING: THE WILDERNESS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE BAPTISM

The Spirit Drives the Son into the Desert, The Context That Frames Everything

A. The Baptism and the Temptation as a Unified Narrative

The temptation narrative is inseparable from the baptism narrative that immediately precedes it (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). At the baptism, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove, and the Father’s voice declares: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17, NASB 1995). The declaration is the most explicit divine authentication of the messianic identity and mission of Jesus at the outset of His public ministry. It is a declaration that answers in advance every challenge that the tempter will raise in the wilderness: the Father has identified Jesus as His beloved Son, well-pleasing to Him, anointed for His mission by the descent of the Spirit.

It is immediately after this definitive divine authentication that the Spirit “led Jesus up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1, NASB 1995). Mark’s version is even more striking: “Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12, NASB 1995). The Greek word translated “impelled” is ἐκβάλλει (ekballei), the same word used for casting out demons, a word of forceful, divine initiative. The Spirit does not merely suggest or permit the wilderness sojourn; He drives Jesus there with purposeful urgency. The temptation is not an unfortunate interruption of the public ministry; it is an essential part of the messianic preparation ordained by the Father and executed by the Spirit. The anointed Son must be tested before He can teach, preach, and heal; the commissioned Messiah must prove His obedience in the wilderness before He can call others to repent and believe the gospel.

B. Forty Days: The Typological Background

The duration of the wilderness sojourn, forty days, is charged with Old Testament typological significance that every reader of the Gospels who knew the Hebrew Scriptures would immediately recognize. Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai in the presence of God, without food or water, receiving the law (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9). Israel spent forty years in the wilderness, a wilderness of testing, failure, and divine provision, before entering the promised land (Numbers 14:33–34; Deuteronomy 8:2). Elijah traveled for forty days to Mount Horeb on the strength of the cake baked for him by the angel (1 Kings 19:8). Each of these forty-day or forty-year periods is a period of divine testing and purification that precedes a crucial advance in redemptive history.

Matthew and Luke arrange their accounts of the temptation in different orders, and both arrange them in ways that reflect specific theological interests. Matthew’s order (stones to bread, temple pinnacle, kingdoms of the world) builds to the climactic confrontation over worship that most directly exposes the identity of the tempter and the nature of the temptation. Luke’s order (stones to bread, kingdoms of the world, temple pinnacle) reserves the Jerusalem temple for the final temptation, perhaps with a view to the trajectory of Luke’s Gospel toward Jerusalem and the cross. Both orders are authorially intentional and theologically significant; neither is merely chronological. The evangelists are not primarily concerned with reporting the sequence of events but with communicating the theological meaning of the encounter.

II. THE THREE TEMPTATIONS: NATURE, STRATEGY, AND REFUTATION

The Lust of the Flesh, the Pride of Life, and the Lust of the Eyes, The Devil's Comprehensive Assault

A. First Temptation: Stones to Bread (Matthew 4:2–4)

The first temptation arises directly from the physical condition in which Jesus finds Himself after forty days of fasting: “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matthew 4:3, NASB 1995). The structure of the temptation is important: the conditional “if You are the Son of God” (εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, ei huiois ei tou theou) is not a genuine expression of doubt about Christ's divine identity; it is a conditional that challenges Him to demonstrate that identity by using divine power for personal benefit. The tempter is not questioning whether Jesus is the Son of God; he is suggesting that being the Son of God means having the right and the power to alleviate His own suffering by miraculous means. “Prove your identity by using your power to satisfy your hunger.”

The temptation addresses the “lust of the flesh” category identified by John (1 John 2:16): the appetite for physical comfort and satisfaction that, when made the governing principle of human action, leads away from God and toward the creature. The specific form of the temptation in the wilderness echoes the temptation of Israel in the wilderness, who repeatedly cried out for food and water and who failed the test of trusting God to provide. The Son, like Israel, is hungry in the wilderness; unlike Israel, He does not demand provision on His own terms.

Jesus' response is the citation of Deuteronomy 8:3: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4, NASB 1995). The response is not merely a pious sentiment; it is a carefully chosen theological statement about the proper ordering of human existence. The original context of Deuteronomy 8:3 is Moses's address to Israel about the purpose of the wilderness testing: God allowed Israel to hunger so that He could feed them with manna, “to 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.” Jesus applies to Himself the same principle that Israel failed to apply to itself: physical life is sustained by the will and word of God, not by the creature's manipulation of its own circumstances through divine power. The Son refuses to use His divine prerogatives for self-advantage, precisely because the mission He has come to accomplish requires Him to live as a genuinely human being in genuine dependence on the Father.

B. Second Temptation: The Kingdoms of the World (Matthew 4:8–9)

The second temptation (in Matthew's order) is the most cosmically ambitious and the most theologically revealing: “The devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me’” (Matthew 4:8–9, NASB 1995). The temptation presupposes that Satan has genuine authority over the kingdoms of the world, an authority that the New Testament

elsewhere confirms: he is “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31, NASB 1995) and “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4, NASB 1995). The kingdoms and their glory are genuinely his to offer, within the limits of what God has permitted.

The strategy of the temptation is subtle and profound: it offers Jesus the goal of the incarnation (the subjugation of all kingdoms to the rightful King, the Davidic Son who will receive all authority, Matthew 28:18) by a means that bypasses the cross. “You can have what you came for, the kingdoms of the world, without going through the suffering, the rejection, the cross. There is an easier path to the goal.” The temptation addresses what we might call the “lust of the eyes” category (1 John 2:16), the desire for visible, tangible possession and dominion, but it also addresses the most fundamental question about the means of redemption: Will the Son obtain His inheritance through obedient suffering or through a shortcut that compromises the Father’s ordained method?

Jesus’ response is the citation of Deuteronomy 6:13: “It is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only’” (Matthew 4:10, NASB 1995). The response cuts to the heart of the temptation: the issue is not merely the means of obtaining the kingdoms but the object of worship. Satan’s offer requires a transfer of ultimate allegiance, from the Father to the tempter. The response refuses the transfer absolutely: the Son will worship God alone, and He will obtain His inheritance through the Father’s appointed means, however costly.

C. Third Temptation: The Temple Pinnacle (Matthew 4:5–7)

The third temptation (in Matthew’s order, the second in Luke’s) is the most theologically sophisticated: “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 strike Your foot against a stone’” (Matthew 4:5–6, NASB 1995). The temptation is remarkable for its use of Scripture: the devil cites Psalm 91:11–12, a genuine promise of divine protection, and attempts to weaponize it against the one to whom it was given. The strategy is the most sophisticated of the three: it uses God’s word to challenge Jesus to force God’s hand, to create a situation in which God is obligated to intervene spectacularly, thereby providing a divine authentication that bypasses the slow, hidden, suffering path of the actual messianic mission.

The temptation addresses the “boastful pride of life” category (1 John 2:16), the desire for spectacular public recognition, the demand that one’s identity and significance be visibly and dramatically confirmed. It also addresses a specific form of spiritual presumption: the claim that faith in divine protection entitles one to create dangerous situations and expect miraculous deliverance. Jesus’ response is again from Deuteronomy: “It is written, ‘You shall not put the LORD your God to the test’” (Matthew 4:7, NASB 1995, citing Deuteronomy 6:16). The response exposes the fundamental theological error of the temptation: using God’s promise of protection as a pretext for testing God’s faithfulness is not faith; it is presumption. It attempts to compel divine action by human initiative rather than to trust divine timing and divine means. The Son refuses to put the Father to the test,

precisely because His entire mission is one of trusting submission to the Father's will and the Father's timing.

"It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'" | "It is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.'" | "It is written, 'You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.'"

MATTHEW 4:4, 10, 7, NASB 1995

III. THE WEAPON: "IT IS WRITTEN"

The Son of God Defeats Satan with the Word of God, Not with Divine Power

A. The Consistent Pattern: Deuteronomy as the Ground of Resistance

One of the most theologically significant features of the temptation narrative is the weapon that Jesus employs in response to each of the three temptations: not a miraculous exercise of divine power, not a direct assertion of divine authority, but the written Word of God, specifically, texts from the book of Deuteronomy. All three of Jesus' responses begin with the same formula: "It is written" (γέγραπται, gegraptai, the perfect passive of γράφω, graphō, indicating a text that has been written and remains standing). The three citations are: Deuteronomy 8:3 (bread alone), Deuteronomy 6:13 (worship the LORD only), and Deuteronomy 6:16 (do not test the LORD). All three are drawn from the section of Deuteronomy that rehearses the lessons of Israel's wilderness experience, the same experience that Jesus is recapitulating in His own forty-day wilderness sojourn.

The choice of Deuteronomy is not accidental; it is deeply typologically significant. The three temptation texts are all drawn from Moses' address to Israel about the lessons of the wilderness: the proper response to hunger (trust God's provision rather than demanding it on your own terms), the proper object of worship (God alone, not the false gods offered by the nations), and the proper attitude toward divine protection (trust rather than presumption). Israel failed each of these tests in the wilderness; the Son of God passes each of them in the wilderness. The wilderness of Christ's temptation is the christological recapitulation of Israel's wilderness, and where Israel failed, the true Israel succeeds.

B. The Sword of the Spirit: Ephesians 6:17

The apostle Paul identifies the written Word of God as "the sword of the Spirit" in his description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10–17: "take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17, NASB 1995). The metaphor is military: the word of God is not merely a comforting resource but an offensive weapon, capable of cutting through deception, exposing error, and defeating the attacks of the enemy. The temptation narrative is the most dramatic illustration in all

of the New Testament of what this weapon looks like in the hands of one who wields it with perfect precision and perfect trust: three attacks, three responses, each response a clean thrust of the sword of the Spirit that cuts through the sophistication of the temptation to its theological nerve.

There is a profound pastoral implication in the fact that Jesus defeats Satan with Scripture rather than with divine power. He could have commanded the stones to become bread by divine fiat and thereby demonstrated His power while satisfying His hunger. He could have summoned legions of angels and thereby demonstrated His authority while rendering the devil's offer irrelevant. He could have descended from the temple pinnacle on a cloud of divine glory and thereby demonstrated His identity while humiliating the tempter. He chose none of these options. He chose instead to stand as a genuine human being, in genuine human weakness and genuine human hunger, wielding the weapon that God has given to every human being who faces temptation: the written, authoritative, sufficient Word of God. The Son of God did not fight the battle of the wilderness with resources unavailable to His people; He fought it with the very weapon He has given to them. This is simultaneously a christological demonstration of the sufficiency of Scripture and a pastoral model for every believer who faces temptation.

IV. THE ADAM-CHRIST PARALLEL: THE LAST ADAM AND THE LAST TEMPTATION

Where the First Adam Failed in a Garden of Plenty, the Last Adam Triumphed in a Desert of Deprivation

A. Paul's Adam-Christ Typology

The theological framework that gives the temptation narrative its deepest cosmic significance is the Adam-Christ typology that Paul develops in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49. In this typology, Adam and Christ stand as the two federal heads of the human race, the two representative figures whose actions have the most far-reaching consequences for those who stand in solidarity with them. Adam is the “first man” whose disobedience brought sin, condemnation, and death to all who are “in Adam” by natural birth. Christ is the “last Adam” (ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ, *eschatos Adam*, 1 Corinthians 15:45, NASB 1995) whose obedience brings righteousness, justification, and life to all who are “in Christ” by regeneration and faith.

Romans 5:19 provides the most direct statement of the parallel: “For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (NASB 1995). The “obedience of the One” that makes the many righteous is not a single act but the entire pattern of Christ's obedient life, every act of submission to the Father's will, every resistance to temptation, every exercise of the law-keeping that Israel and Adam before her failed to render. The temptation narrative is the dramatic, concentrated, publicly staged

demonstration of this obedience at its most extreme: the Last Adam, in the wilderness, facing the same tempter who brought down the first Adam, in circumstances of maximum vulnerability (genuine human hunger after forty days of fasting), and prevailing.

B. The Garden and the Wilderness: Contrast and Inversion

The contrast between the circumstances of Adam's temptation and the circumstances of Christ's is theologically stunning and pastorally significant. Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, a place of abundance, beauty, perfect provision, and intimate fellowship with God. He had every material advantage and no physical deprivation when he yielded to the serpent's suggestion that God was withholding something desirable from him. The garden provided everything; the only restriction was a single commandment about a single tree; and Adam, in the abundance of his garden, chose to reach beyond what God had given him and grasp what God had reserved.

Christ triumphed in the desert wilderness, a place of barrenness, deprivation, physical weakness, and forty days of hunger. He had no material advantages and was operating in conditions of maximum human vulnerability when the tempter came to Him. Yet in the wilderness, with nothing, He prevailed; in the garden, with everything, Adam fell. The inversion is not accidental; it is the theological heart of the Last Adam typology. The victory of the Last Adam is all the more decisive because it was won in circumstances that maximized the appeal of the temptations. The one who conquered the devil in the desert of human weakness has secured a victory that the one who fell in the garden of divine abundance could not provide.

C. Israel in the Wilderness: The Typological Background Deepened

The Adam-Christ parallel is deepened by the Israel typology that the Deuteronomy citations introduce. Israel spent forty years in the wilderness and failed the tests that the wilderness presented: they demanded food on their own terms (the manna complaint), they worshipped the golden calf (the failure of exclusive loyalty to YHWH), and they tested God at Meribah (the failure of trust in divine provision). The three Deuteronomy texts that Jesus cites are all drawn from Moses' rehearsal of Israel's wilderness lessons, the lessons that Israel repeatedly failed to learn.

Jesus, as the true Israel, the representative Israelite in whom the entire covenant people finds its fulfillment, passes in forty days the tests that Israel failed in forty years. He trusts the Father for provision (stones to bread), He renders to God alone the exclusive worship that Israel gave to the golden calf (worship me), and He trusts the Father's protection without testing it (throw yourself down). The temptation narrative is the christological fulfillment of Israel's wilderness experience: the one who is both the Last Adam and the true Israel demonstrates in His own person the obedience that neither Adam nor Israel rendered, and by demonstrating it, provides the representative obedience that can be credited to all who are incorporated into Him.

“For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

ROMANS 5:19, NASB 1995

V. THE LIFELONG TEMPTATION: BEYOND THE WILDERNESS

Tempted in All Things as We Are, The Wilderness as the Beginning, Not the Totality

A. The Wilderness as Paradigm, Not Totality

It would be a significant theological error to treat the wilderness temptation as an isolated event that exhausts the temptation of Christ. Hebrews 4:15 is explicit and comprehensive: He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (NASB 1995). The “all things” (κατὰ πάντα, *kata panta*) is comprehensive, not just three dramatic wilderness temptations but every category of temptation that a genuine human being faces in the course of a fully human life. The wilderness temptations are the paradigmatic confrontation with the adversary, staged at the outset of the public ministry and narrated in detail by the evangelists; but they are not the only temptations that Christ faced.

Luke 4:13 provides the explicit confirmation that the wilderness was not the end of the assault: “When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time” (NASB 1995). The devil does not abandon the field after the wilderness; he retreats to regroup and returns at “an opportune time”, and the entire subsequent ministry of Jesus can be read, in part, as a record of those opportune times: the disciples’ misunderstanding of the messianic mission (“Master, spare Yourself—Peter’s well-meaning but satanically-aligned suggestion, Matthew 16:22–23); the crowds’ attempt to make Him king by force (John 6:15); the Gethsemane anguish, where the full cost of the Father’s will is laid before the human will one final, most extreme time. The temptation of Christ is not concluded in the wilderness; it continues through the entire incarnate life and reaches its climax in the garden of Gethsemane, which is the Last Adam’s final victory over the temptation that brought down the first Adam in the first garden.

B. The Cosmic Significance: The Binding of the Strong Man

The temptation narrative has a cosmic significance that Jesus Himself describes in the image of the “strong man” (Matthew 12:28–29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21–22). When Jesus casts out demons by the Spirit of God, He declares: “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28, NASB 1995). And immediately following: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matthew 12:29, NASB 1995). The strong man is the devil; the binding

of the strong man is the decisive defeat of the devil's authority that is accomplished in the ministry of Jesus, beginning with the wilderness temptation.

The wilderness temptation is the first and most concentrated instance of the binding of the strong man, the moment at which the Last Adam enters the domain of the adversary and demonstrates that the adversary's most sophisticated strategies cannot overcome the obedience of the one who has come to reclaim what Adam surrendered. The exorcisms and healings of the subsequent ministry are the "plundering of the house", the practical outworking of the victory that was won in principle in the wilderness. And the cross and resurrection are the definitive, eschatological expression of the binding: "Now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31, NASB 1995), the final, irreversible defeat of the adversary whose power was decisively broken when the Last Adam refused to worship him in the desert.

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE VICTOR'S VICTORY IS OURS

The pastoral and soteriological significance of the temptation narrative for the individual believer is both direct and profound. The victory of the Last Adam in the wilderness is not merely a historical event that preceded the public ministry; it is a representative victory that belongs to every person who is incorporated into the Last Adam by faith. When Paul declares that "through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19, NASB 1995), the obedience he has in view includes the wilderness obedience, the three refusals of the devil's offers that constitute the most dramatic public demonstration of the active obedience that is credited to the believer in justification.

Hebrews 2:14–15 draws the cosmic conclusion: "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (NASB 1995). The defeat of the devil that is accomplished at the cross and the empty tomb is prepared by the wilderness victory: the tempter who was refused in the wilderness and who returned "at an opportune time" and found the door equally barred at every subsequent encounter was finally and irrevocably defeated at the moment he thought he had finally won, the cross. The one who defeated Satan in the wilderness went on to defeat him at the cross; and the defeat at the cross renders powerless "him who had the power of death" and sets free those who were enslaved to the fear of it.

The angel's ministration at the conclusion of the temptation (Matthew 4:11: "behold, angels came and began to minister to Him", NASB 1995) is the fitting doxological coda of the narrative: the one who refused to be served by the kingdoms of the world is served by angels; the one who refused to demand divine protection is provided divine care; the one who refused to use divine power for self-

advantage is sustained by divine provision through creaturely means. The pattern is the pattern of all Christian discipleship in miniature: the one who loses his life will find it; the one who denies himself will be given himself back; the one who trusts the Father in the wilderness of temptation will find the Father faithful. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Key Texts: *Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13; Mark 1:12–13; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49; Ephesians 6:17; 1 John 2:16; Deuteronomy 6:13, 16; 8:3*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Peirasmos / Temptation	Greek: ‘trial,’ ‘test,’ ‘temptation.’ The same word is used both for a test of faithfulness (a trial that reveals and strengthens genuine virtue) and for an enticement to sin (a temptation that invites unfaithfulness). In the temptation narrative, both dimensions are present: the wilderness is a divine test (the Spirit ‘drives’ Jesus there) and a satanic temptation (the devil actively solicits disobedience). The two dimensions are not contradictory; the divine purpose in the trial is the demonstration of the messianic obedience, while the satanic purpose is the solicitation of messianic failure. God uses the tempter’s assault to occasion the triumph that prepares the Last Adam for the redemptive mission.
Last Adam	The typological title used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45 (‘the last Adam’) for Christ as the counterpart and reversal of the first Adam. Where the first Adam brought sin, condemnation, and death through disobedience, the Last Adam brings righteousness, justification, and life through obedience (Romans 5:12–21). The wilderness temptation is the paradigmatic expression of the Last Adam’s obedience: in circumstances of greater deprivation than Adam’s, facing the same adversary, the Last Adam resists every temptation that the first Adam succumbed to. The Adam-Christ typology is the overarching theological framework within which the entire active obedience of Christ is understood.
Gegraptai	Greek: ‘it is written’ (perfect passive of graphō). The formula with which Jesus introduces each of His three responses to the devil’s temptations in the wilderness. The perfect tense is theologically significant: not merely ‘it was written’ (a past event) but ‘it has been written and stands written’ (a permanently authoritative text). The formula asserts the abiding, settled, unquestionable authority of the written Word of God as the sufficient ground for resisting the most sophisticated temptations of the adversary. The three citations are all from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16), drawn from Moses’

Term	Definition
	rehearsal of Israel's wilderness lessons, the same lessons that Israel failed and that Jesus now fulfills.
Sword of the Spirit	Paul's description of 'the word of God' in the armor of God passage (Ephesians 6:17): the one offensive weapon in the complete armor, used to cut through the devil's deceptions and defeat his attacks. The temptation narrative is the paradigmatic illustration of the sword of the Spirit in action: three temptations, three responses, each response a precise application of the written Word of God to the specific theological vulnerability that the temptation exploits. Jesus fights the wilderness battle with the weapon that every believer possesses, demonstrating that Scripture is sufficient for the defeat of the most sophisticated satanic assault.
Federal Headship	The theological principle by which Adam and Christ act as the representative heads of the two humanities they represent: those who are 'in Adam' by natural birth share in Adam's condemnation; those who are 'in Christ' by regeneration and faith share in Christ's justification. Federal headship is the theological ground of the imputation of both Adam's sin (Romans 5:12–19) and Christ's righteousness (Romans 5:17–19) to those who stand in representational solidarity with their respective federal heads. The victory of the Last Adam in the wilderness is a representational victory: it belongs to those who are 'in Christ' as truly as if they had won it themselves.
Three Categories of Temptation	John's taxonomy in 1 John 2:16 identifies three categories of worldly temptation: 'the lust of the flesh' (the desire for physical pleasure and satisfaction), 'the lust of the eyes' (the desire for visible possession and dominion), and 'the boastful pride of life' (the desire for public recognition and the presumptuous assertion of one's own significance). The three wilderness temptations correspond to these three categories: stones to bread (lust of the flesh), the kingdoms of the world (lust of the eyes), and the temple pinnacle (boastful pride of life). The same three categories are also evident in the Eden temptation: the tree was 'good for food' (lust of flesh), 'a delight to the eyes' (lust of eyes), and 'desirable to make one wise' (pride of life, Genesis 3:6).
True Israel	The typological identification of Christ as the one who fulfills what Israel was called to be, the obedient covenant community that renders to God the loyalty, trust, and worship that Israel repeatedly failed to render. The Israel typology in the wilderness temptation is embedded in the Deuteronomy citations: all three are drawn from Moses' rehearsal of Israel's wilderness failures. Jesus recapitulates Israel's wilderness experience in forty days, passing the tests that Israel failed in forty years. As the true Israel, He renders the obedience that the covenant community was always called to but never achieved, fulfilling the national vocation and providing the righteousness that Israel could not provide.

Term	Definition
The Binding of the Strong Man	Jesus' own metaphor for the defeat of Satan in His ministry (Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21–22). The 'strong man' is the devil; 'binding' him is the decisive act that makes the 'plundering of his house' (the exorcisms, healings, and liberation of those in bondage) possible. The wilderness temptation is the first and most concentrated instance of the binding: the Last Adam enters the adversary's domain and demonstrates that his strategies are powerless against the obedient Son. The cross and resurrection are the definitive, eschatological expression of the binding: 'Now the ruler of this world will be cast out' (John 12:31, NASB 1995).
Active Obedience	The theological term for Christ's lifelong, perfect obedience to the law of God on behalf of His people, the positive ground of the righteousness imputed to the believer in justification. The wilderness temptation is among the most concentrated and dramatic expressions of the active obedience: the three refusals of the devil's offers constitute a publicly staged demonstration of the obedient submission to the Father's will that characterizes the entire incarnate life. The active obedience is not a single event but the cumulative pattern of Christ's obedient life, of which the wilderness triumph is both the paradigmatic early instance and the pattern for all subsequent instances.
Ekballō	Greek: 'to cast out,' 'to drive out.' Used in Mark 1:12 for the Spirit's driving of Jesus into the wilderness for the temptation: 'the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.' The same word is used throughout the Gospels for the casting out of demons (e.g., Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22). The use of ekballō for the Spirit's action in driving Jesus to the wilderness suggests the urgency and divine purposefulness of the temptation encounter: the wilderness testing is not a detour from the messianic mission but an essential, Spirit-ordained dimension of it. The one who will later cast out demons by the Spirit first goes where the Spirit drives Him.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the temptation of Christ is not merely a biographical episode in the life of Jesus, narrated for its inspiring example of personal moral discipline. It is a cosmic, representative, redemptively significant event in which the Last Adam, acting as the federal head of the new humanity, defeats the adversary who had defeated the first Adam and reclaims for His people the obedience that Adam forfeited. The victory in the wilderness belongs to every person incorporated into Christ by faith, not merely as a moral example to imitate, but as a representative achievement that is credited to their account. When Paul declares that "through the obedience of the One the many

will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19, NASB 1995), the wilderness obedience is among the specific acts of obedience he has in view.

We must also believe that the weapon Jesus chose to use in the wilderness, the written Word of God rather than divine miraculous power, is a deliberate and pastorally significant choice. He fought the battle of the wilderness with the weapon He has given to His people. This is not a concession to human weakness; it is a demonstration of the sufficiency of the Word for every encounter with the adversary. The Christian who is being assaulted by temptation has access to the same weapon that Jesus used in the wilderness, and the same Spirit who “drove” Jesus into the wilderness is available to every believer as the one who takes up the sword of the Spirit on their behalf in the thick of the spiritual battle (Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:17).

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the wilderness temptation produce in you a deep and personal gratitude for the representative obedience of the Last Adam. Every temptation you face has been faced before you, by the one who represents you before God. Every category of assault, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, was addressed and defeated by the one whose perfect obedience now stands credited to your account. You are not fighting the spiritual battle unaided; you are fighting it as one who is incorporated into the Last Adam, whose victory in the wilderness is yours by faith.

Desire a deeper personal commitment to the weapon that Jesus used in the wilderness: the written Word of God. The person who meets temptation with a store of hidden Scripture, texts that have been memorized, meditated upon, and appropriated through repeated encounter with the Spirit of God in the pages of the Bible, is the person who is equipped to fight the spiritual battle with the same weapon that the Last Adam wielded. The Word of God does not become the sword of the Spirit by being known abstractly; it becomes the sword of the Spirit by being known personally, devotionally, and pastorally, known in the way that Jesus knew Deuteronomy, as the living word of the living God for the present moment of testing.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach the temptation narrative as a representative, not merely exemplary, event. The most common approach to Matthew 4:1–11 in evangelical preaching is to treat it primarily as an example of how Christians should respond to temptation: with Scripture, with spiritual discipline, with dependence on God. This is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Before the narrative is an example for believers to follow, it is a representative act of the Last Adam on behalf of His people. Preach it first as what it primarily is, the cosmic triumph of the federal head of the new humanity, and then draw the implications for the believer’s own encounter with temptation.
- Memorize the three Deuteronomy texts that Jesus cites in the wilderness: Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, and 6:16. Then memorize the three temptations they address. The exercise of memorizing

these six texts together, three temptations and three responses, is a catechetical discipline that will equip you to preach the narrative with precision and to bring its specific christological content to your congregation with maximum clarity.

- Teach the 1 John 2:16 taxonomy of temptation (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, boastful pride of life) alongside the three wilderness temptations, and alongside the Genesis 3:6 account of the Eden temptation. The three-way typological parallel, Eden (Adam falls), Wilderness (Israel fails), Wilderness (Christ succeeds), is one of the most theologically illuminating patterns in all of Scripture, and teaching it will give your congregation a comprehensive framework for understanding both the nature of temptation and the scope of Christ's representative victory.
- Use the wilderness temptation as the christological foundation for your pastoral care of those struggling with temptation. When you bring Hebrews 4:15 ("tempted in all things as we are") to a struggling believer, bring it with the specific content of the wilderness narrative: the one who sympathizes with your temptation is the one who resisted the lust of the flesh when He was genuinely hungry after forty days of fasting; who resisted the lust of the eyes when the kingdoms of the world were genuinely offered; who resisted the pride of life when a genuinely impressive demonstration of divine protection was within His reach. His sympathy is not theoretical; it is the sympathy of one who has been to the far end of every category of temptation and has not broken.
- Preach the narrative with attention to the Last Adam's choice of weapon: not divine power but the Word of God. This is one of the most encouraging pastoral points in the entire narrative for ordinary believers who sometimes feel that they are fighting the spiritual battle without access to the resources that Jesus had. They do have access to those resources, because Jesus deliberately fought the battle of the wilderness with the resource that is available to every one of His people. The sword of the Spirit that defeated the devil in the wilderness is the same sword that is available to every believer in every encounter with the adversary.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. When you have preached or heard preaching on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11), what has been the primary emphasis: Christ as an example for believers to follow, Christ as the representative of His people defeating the adversary on their behalf, or some combination? Looking back on those sermons or lessons in the light of this study, what would you want to add or change about the emphasis?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Matthew 4:1–11 carefully, paying attention to the structure of each temptation: (a) the devil's offer and its implicit assumption about what Jesus should do, (b) the Old Testament text Jesus cites in response, and (c) the specific theological point of the cited text. For each of the three temptations, identify: the nature of the offer, the category of temptation it represents (using 1 John 2:16 as a guide), the Old Testament text cited, and the theological principle the citation asserts.
3. Read Luke 4:1–13 alongside Matthew 4:1–11. Note that Luke arranges the three temptations in a different order from Matthew (stones to bread, kingdoms of the world, temple pinnacle in Matthew; stones to bread, temple pinnacle, kingdoms of the world in Luke). What does Luke's ordering accomplish theologically or narratively? How does the fact that the two evangelists give the same event in different orders affect your understanding of the Gospels as theological documents rather than merely chronological records?
4. Read Romans 5:12–19 carefully. Identify the specific parallels Paul draws between Adam and Christ. What is the nature of the 'obedience' of Christ in verse 19 that stands against the 'disobedience' of Adam? How does verse 17 ('much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ') describe the beneficiaries of Christ's obedience? How does the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5 illuminate the significance of the temptation narrative?
5. Read Ephesians 6:10–17. Identify the complete armor of God and the specific function of each piece. What is unique about the 'sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' in relation to all the other pieces of armor? How does the temptation narrative function as an illustration of the sword of the Spirit in action? What does the connection between the Spirit ('the sword of the Spirit') and the Word ('the word of God') in Ephesians 6:17 suggest about the relationship between the Spirit and the Scripture in the believer's engagement with temptation?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson argues that all three of Jesus' responses to the devil's temptations are drawn from Deuteronomy, specifically from Moses' rehearsal of Israel's wilderness lessons. What is the theological significance of this choice of citations? How does the Israel typology (Israel failing the wilderness tests; Christ passing them) enrich the Adam-Christ typology (Adam failing in the garden; Christ succeeding in the wilderness)? What do the two typologies together tell us about the scope of what Christ's representative obedience accomplishes?
7. The lesson observes that Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness with the sword of Scripture rather than with a miraculous exercise of divine power, and argues that this choice is pastorally significant because it demonstrates that Christ used a weapon available to all His people. Do you find this

argument persuasive? Does the impeccability of Christ (established in Lesson 12) affect the force of the argument? How would you respond to someone who says: 'Of course He could use Scripture effectively, He's God; it's not the same as when I try to use it.'?

8. Luke 4:13 records that 'when the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.' The lesson identifies several 'opportune times' in the subsequent ministry of Jesus: Peter's suggestion to spare Himself (Matthew 16:22–23), the crowd's attempt to make Him king by force (John 6:15), and Gethsemane. How does each of these subsequent encounters echo the structure and categories of the wilderness temptations? What does the continuity of the temptation across the entire ministry (not just the wilderness episode) contribute to the meaning of Hebrews 4:15 ('tempted in all things as we are')?

9. The lesson describes the temptation of the kingdoms of the world as offering Christ the goal of the incarnation (universal dominion) by means that bypass the cross. What specifically is wrong with the means being offered, worshipping Satan in exchange for the kingdoms? How does Jesus' refusal here relate to the Father's ordained means of His exaltation (the cross and resurrection)? What does this temptation reveal about the nature of the adversary's strategy against the redemptive mission?

10. The lesson concludes with the image of the angels ministering to Jesus after the temptation (Matthew 4:11) as the 'doxological coda' of the narrative. How does this image relate to the temptations that preceded it, specifically, the refusals to use divine power for self-comfort, to receive the kingdoms from Satan, and to demand angelic protection as a spectacular display? What does the quiet, faithful provision of the Father through angelic ministry (after the most extreme cost of obedient refusal) model for the believer about the nature of divine faithfulness?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends memorizing the three Deuteronomy texts that Jesus cited in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13; 6:16) alongside the three temptations they address. Make a commitment to memorize these six texts this week. Then reflect: what specific temptations in your own life or ministry map onto each of the three wilderness categories (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, boastful pride of life)? Which Deuteronomy text is most directly applicable to your own most persistent temptations, and how would you deploy it as a specific, precise scriptural response?

12. The lesson argues that the temptation narrative should be preached primarily as a representative event (the Last Adam defeating the adversary on behalf of His people) before it is preached as an exemplary event (a model for believers to follow). How does this representational emphasis change the emotional register and the theological weight of the sermon on this text? Draft the main point of a sermon on Matthew 4:1–11 that captures both the representational and the exemplary dimensions, without reducing the narrative to either alone.

13. The lesson recommends using the wilderness temptation as the christological foundation for pastoral care of those struggling with temptation, connecting Hebrews 4:15 to the specific content of the three wilderness temptations. Have you used the temptation narrative in pastoral care, either in counseling, in a small group, or in a sermon that directly addressed the congregation's struggle with temptation? What specific dimensions of the narrative (the genuine human hunger, the cosmic stakes of the adversary's offer, the precision of the scriptural responses) were most helpful? Which dimensions have you not yet brought to bear in pastoral care?

14. This lesson opens Unit 5 on the Sinless Life and Active Obedience of Christ. The wilderness temptation is the most dramatic concentrated expression of the active obedience; Lesson 15 will address the active obedience as a theological doctrine comprehensively. Looking ahead to that lesson, how does the wilderness temptation narrative establish the theme of the active obedience? What specifically does the wilderness victory contribute to the cumulative pattern of Christ's law-keeping on behalf of His people? And what does it mean that the active obedience culminated, not in the wilderness, but in the cross, so that the wilderness victory and the atoning death are two dimensions of the single comprehensive work of the Last Adam?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a meditative reading of Matthew 4:1–11, read slowly and with attention to the specific details that most illuminate the christological significance of the narrative: the Spirit's active driving of Jesus into the wilderness, the forty days of fasting and genuine human hunger, the careful structure of each temptation and each response, and the angelic ministration at the end. Let the group enter the narrative as participants rather than observers, not as spectators watching an impressive display of moral discipline, but as people who recognize that this battle was fought in their name, by their representative, on their behalf. The obedience of the Last Adam in the wilderness is their obedience by imputation; the victory of the Last Adam over the tempter is their victory by incorporation.

Spend time in adoration of the Last Adam, the obedient Son who entered the domain of the adversary armed only with the written Word of God and emerged victorious on behalf of every person who would be incorporated into Him by faith. Adore Him for the genuine human vulnerability He brought into the wilderness: He was genuinely hungry after forty days of fasting, genuinely weak in His human frame, genuinely dependent on the Father for sustenance. And adore Him for the unbroken obedience He maintained through that vulnerability: every offer of relief on unauthorized terms was refused; every opportunity for self-advantage through divine power was declined; every temptation to shortcut the Father's ordained means was rejected. This is the active obedience in its most concentrated form, and it is theirs, yours, by grace through faith in the one who rendered it.

Pray specifically using the structure of the three temptations as a diagnostic for the congregation's own spiritual battle. Bring before the Father the specific forms that the lust of the flesh takes in your congregation's context, the appetites and desires that, when made the governing principle of action, lead away from God and toward the creature. Bring the specific forms of the lust of the eyes, the desire for visible possession, status, and dominion that tempts people to pursue the goal of the Christian life (flourishing, significance, the blessing of God) through unauthorized means. And bring the specific forms of the boastful pride of life, the desire for public recognition and spectacular confirmation of one's significance that tempts people to demand visible authentication of their faith.

Close with Hebrews 4:15–16, spoken together as the pastoral conclusion that the wilderness narrative makes possible:

"We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

HEBREWS 4:15–16, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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