Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness



Scripture Reference: Matthew 4:1-11

Suggested Theme: God is stronger than Satan. Satan tempted Jesus to leave God's ways, and He tempts us. We can rely on God's word when tempted.

Memory Verse: "So give yourselves to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run away from you." James 4:7, ICB

Story Overview:

After Jesus was baptised, He had to decide the direction He would take in His ministry. Satan tried to get Him to be the wrong kind of Saviour. Although Satan tempted Him with pride, power, and popularity, this was equally Satan testing Jesus as to what kind of Saviour and Royal Son He was going to be. Was Jesus going to trust God and do His will or not? Jesus stood strong in the Word of God and did not give in to temptation.

Background Study:

This story can also be found in Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13. Although Jesus could have called on all kinds of power, He chose to fight Satan's attack by using the Scripture.

God's Word is powerful. Remember this as you teach bible class. The Scripture you instil in the children you teach can be called upon years later when they face temptation. The words will carry the weight of God's Power.

After His baptism, Jesus seems to go to the desert to be alone with God. The place where Jesus was alone with God for more than a month is believed to be in the mountains near Jericho. This place is bleak and rocky. Jesus was in the desert for forty days. In an interesting parallel, the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Fasting (going without food) was a common way to focus on prayer and devotion to God. At the onset of His ministry, Jesus purposely made Himself open and vulnerable to God in this way. Sensing a possible victory over someone weak and hungry, Satan attacked. Jesus answered every attack by quoting Scripture that had been written when the Israelites were in the desert (on their way to the Promised Land).

Basically, Satan attacked Jesus in 3 ways:

1. Firstly, Satan tried to get a very hungry Jesus to turn stones into bread. When Jesus "*became a man and lived among us*" (John 1:14), He subjected Himself to the limitations of the human body. He suffered hunger as humans do. Satan was tempting Jesus to use His ability to do miracles for selfish reasons, to satisfy this human craving of hunger. However, the purpose of Jesus' ministry was to draw men to God.

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He would not use God's power in this way. Jesus did not give in to this temptation but used the Scripture to point out that God is more important than food. This was a lesson learned by the Israelites many years before (Deuteronomy 8:3).

2. Secondly, Satan tried to insert doubt when he led Jesus to the highest point of the Temple and said, "*If you are the Son of God, jump off.*" That trick had worked with Adam and Eve (the Fall of Man) but did not cause Jesus to question who He was. Jesus did not waver in His trust in God. If we trust someone, we do not have to test them. Jesus quoted Scripture again by saying, "Do not test the Lord your God." This referred back to Deuteronomy 6:16.
3. Finally, Satan offered Jesus a chance to win the world without going through the suffering of the cross. He took Him to the top of a mountain to look down over the kingdoms of the world. At first glance, this might not seem like a temptation to us. But remember, Jesus loved the lost completely. God's plan was that Jesus would suffer on the cross, and people in the world would have a choice to follow Him or not. But here was Satan offering to GIVE the world to Him. If He bypassed God's plan, then He could save the world all at once. Yet once again, Jesus chose the way of God and firmly answered Satan with Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Jesus said to the devil, "Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, 'You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only him!'"

So the devil left Jesus. And then some angels came to Jesus and helped him. Matthew 4:10-11, ICB

Other Bible Verses About Temptation:

- James 1:13-15
- James 4:7
- Luke 22:39-40
- 1 Timothy 6:9
- 1 Peter 4:12
- 1 John 4:4

Way to Introduce the Story:

Divide the class into two teams and play a game of "tug of war." After the game, talk about how it feels to be pulled in two directions. "That is how temptation is. God is trying to pull you in the direction of doing what is right. Satan is trying to pull you in a direction where you are doing wrong. No matter how good you are being, Satan still tries to get you to do bad things. In today's story, we are going to learn about how Satan even tried to get Jesus to do wrong. That's right, the Devil even tempted Jesus!"

The Story:

We cannot see God, but we know He is always near us. He helps us and takes care of us. He always wants us to do the right things so we will be happy. He wants us to come live with Him when we die.

We cannot see Satan, but he is alive too. He is very bad. He tries to get us to do bad things. He does not want us to go to heaven when we die. Heaven is a happy place where God lives. Satan wants us to go to a bad place called hell. No one is ever happy in hell because God is never there.

Temptation:

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Temptation is when bad and wrong things look good to us. Satan tempts us. He hates it when we are good, so he tries to make bad things seem good to us. Sometimes, he makes them look so good that we ignore God's words and do the bad thing.

- Sometimes, we want to do the wrong thing. Wanting to do the wrong thing is called temptation.
- Sometimes, we know to do something good, but we want to forget about it and not do it. When we don't feel like doing something even though we know is good and right to do, that is also temptation.

After Jesus was baptised, He went away to the desert alone for forty days. He wanted to pray and think about God and did not want to be distracted by anything, so He fasted.

Fasting:

To fast means to choose not to eat. Believers in God sometimes choose not to eat for a time so that they can focus more on God. Being hungry makes them think about God and how He provides everything they need for eternal life.

Jesus fasted and did not eat for forty days in the desert. Satan did not like this because Jesus was only thinking about God. Satan hated that Jesus was so good all the time. He decided to tempt Jesus and try to make Him do bad things. Satan came to Jesus and tempted Him in three ways.

Temptation 1: Hunger

Satan knew Jesus was really hungry, so he tempted Jesus to use his powers in a selfish way all for Himself. Satan said, "If you are really the Son of God then use your special powers to turn these stones into bread."

Jesus was hungry, but He also knew that God would only want Him to use His special powers to help people. His power was not just for feeding Himself when He was hungry! Jesus wanted to do the right thing. He knew the best way to answer Satan was to use God's words. Jesus had memorised a lot of Scriptures, so He knew exactly which scripture to say to Satan. He said this verse from the Bible, "*A person does not live only by eating bread. But a person lives by everything the Lord says.*"

Temptation 2: Doubt

Next, Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem to the Temple. Both Jesus and Satan knew that the Temple was a special place to God.

They stood at the highest point of the Temple. Satan wanted to get Jesus to doubt God's power. He told Jesus that He should give God a test to see if His power worked. Satan told Jesus to jump off the Temple and see if God's angels would catch Him.

But Jesus did not need to give God a test. Jesus already knew that God's power was stronger than anything in the world. Jesus told Satan another Scripture from God's word. *"It also says in the Scriptures, 'Do not test the Lord your God.'"*

Temptation 3: Satan's Shortcut

You would think that Satan would have learned his lesson, but he REALLY wanted Jesus to mess up. Maybe Satan thought, "If only I can get Jesus to do things MY way, then I will be more important to Him than God is."

So Satan had one more thing he could do to tempt Jesus. Maybe this time, he could get Jesus to sin. Satan took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain. They could see the whole world from the top of the mountain.

So Satan said, "You say You love all the people of the world. You say you want them to go to heaven. How about a deal? I will help all the people of the world go to heaven if you will just do one simple thing. All you have to do is to bow down and worship me instead of God."

Do you think Jesus gave in to this temptation? No! Jesus had had enough. This is what He said,

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> Jesus said to the devil, “Go away from Me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, ‘You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only Him!’

So, the devil left Jesus. And then some angels came to Jesus and helped Him.

Do you think Satan gave up trying to tempt Jesus? No, he did not give up. Over the next three years, Satan tried again and again to tempt Jesus, but Jesus never did wrong. God understands that temptation is very difficult. It was even hard for Jesus.

Sometimes, we are tempted to do the wrong thing, too. God understands Satan’s sneaky tricks, and He can help us say “no” to temptation. We need to remember God’s true words just like Jesus did.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What does it mean to be tempted? (The devil tries to get you to do bad things)
- Where was Jesus when He was tempted? (the desert wilderness)
- What did Jesus do every time Satan tried to get Him to do wrong? (He quoted a scripture from the Word of God)
- What did the devil tempt Jesus with? (pride, power, and popularity/using power for bread, testing God’s power, and saving all people of the world)
- Did Jesus do the things Satan tempted Him to do? (No)
- Who took care of Jesus after he was tempted? (Angels)
- Who experiences temptation? (every human, including Jesus)
- What did you learn about God or Jesus in this story?

Reflection:

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- How do you think Jesus felt after fasting for forty days?
- What do you think the wilderness Jesus was in was like? (temperature, appearance, weather, plants and animals, etc.)
- What question do you have for God or Jesus about this story?
- How do you think Jesus felt when Satan was tempting Him?
- Why do you think Satan tempted Jesus? Why did he choose to tempt Jesus with those things?
- If you were Jesus, would you have given in to the devil's temptations?
- Which of the temptations do you think was the hardest for Jesus to resist?
- Which temptation would be the hardest for you to resist?
- Have you ever felt tempted before? What are your temptations?
- What can we do to prepare for when we are being tempted? What helps us in moments when we're being tempted?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Goodbye World Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- If You Love Jesus Song
- 1-2-3 The Devil's After Me Song
- Shake the Devil Off Song
- This Little Light of Mine
- I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy
- Use the church songbook to find and sing songs about temptation.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Practice saying this term's memory verses. Think of situations where these Scriptures could help us fight temptation. Example: Luke 1:37, when you think it would be impossible to tell the truth.

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- Make an acrostic (each letter of the word is the first letter of another word) using the letters in the word TEMPTATION. Write the letters on the chalkboard and let the children discuss answers. All of the words can be things that they consider to be tempting. Examples: T=television, E=evil words, M=money, etc.
- Play the “Temptation Game.” Before the group gathers, write statements of faith on cards. Examples might be “We will not lie” or “We will not kill.” Form two teams. One team draws a card and reads the statement of faith on the card out loud. The other team tries to think of things that might tempt the other team to do what they said they would or would not do. The first team thinks of ways they would fight the temptation. Finish the game by reading 1 Corinthians 10:13.
- Use a bible dictionary or commentary to find a drawing of Herod’s Temple (the temple during Jesus’ day). Find out which part would be the highest point (Matthew 4:5).
- Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Discuss the difference between temptation and sin. Jesus was tempted, but He did not sin. Show older children how to use a concordance to find verses about “temptation.”

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Write “Jesus helps me to be good” on pieces of paper. Younger children can paint this and decorate it with happy faces and hearts.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and worksheets about the temptation of Jesus (Calvary Curriculum)
- Youtube 2.24 minute video clip of the story from YouTube
- A video of children explaining what to do when you are tempted (PursueGOD Kids)
- Great object lesson using a doorknob. Is wanting to open the door. Giving in to the temptation is choosing to place our hand on the knob and then turning it (Children’s Ministry Deals).

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