

See Beyond the Current Test

Luke 4:1-13 (March 6, 2022)

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⁴Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Historical Context

Historically, the *wilderness* was the place where God met the Jewish people at Sinai after rescuing them from Egypt. In the wilderness God shaped them into God’s covenant people cared for and led by God with cloud and fire. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is also led, this time by the Holy Spirit, in the wilderness, and he faces temptation by his adversary, the devil. The location of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness reminds us of the narrative of God’s rescue of Israel. Geographically, the wilderness was an arid region in southern Israel between the fertile land near the Mediterranean Sea and the interior desert regions. It was not devoid of life such as one might imagine if thinking about the sands of the Sahara Desert but was rather a place that only produced food for flocks when there were abundant rains.

Theme: See Beyond the Current Test

When considering Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, perhaps this time of ‘testing’ was not really about what happened in the wilderness where he was accompanied by the Holy Spirit and confronted by temptation. It was, rather, a time apart meant to ‘test him’ to get him ready for what would follow. It was a time of honing, sharpening, and perfecting skills that he could later put to use; time set apart to learn and grow and perfect. The forty days surely were not an end in and of themselves.

Perhaps for us, the forty days until Easter are also meant to help give us what we will need for what comes next. In other words, it’s not about what we might give up or other goals we might set. It comes to us as a time set apart to help us become more and more who God intends. What this means for each of us may well be different. But for all of us, it is about how God’s gifts are perfected to help us be all God calls us to be.

For whatever “testing” we undergo in the weeks to come, when we come to Easter once more may we recognize that God has used this time to hone and perfect us for whatever life hands us, for wherever it is God leads us next.