

Victory in the Wilderness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 1:20–23, John 9:39, Matt. 3:7–12, 4:1–10, Deut. 34:1–4, Rev. 21:10.*

Memory Text: “‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*).

When Satan heard that enmity should exist between himself and the woman, and between his seed and her seed, he knew that his work of depraving human nature would be interrupted. . . . Yet as the plan of salvation was more fully unfolded, Satan rejoiced with his angels that, having caused man's fall, he could bring down the Son of God from His exalted position. He declared that his plans had thus far been successful upon the earth, and that when Christ should take upon Himself human nature, He also might be overcome, and thus the redemption of the fallen race might be prevented.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 66.

This week, as we look at the temptations in the wilderness, we can see, as perhaps never before so clearly revealed in the Bible, the great controversy between Christ and Satan as it is openly battled out between them. Satan had claimed the world as his, and Christ came to win it back. And central to His winning it back was the plan of salvation. Having failed to kill Jesus after His birth, Satan tried another way to sabotage the redemption of the race. This we see unfold in the wilderness temptations.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 6.*

Immanuel to the Rescue

Read Matthew 1:20–23. What is the significance of the name given to Jesus: “Emmanuel”?

Why did Jesus come to this earth to be “with us”?

First, He came to restore the dominion that Adam lost (*Rom. 5:12, 15*). We catch a glimpse of the royal aspect of Jesus (having dominion) when He inspired the crowds (5,000 wanted to crown Him king) and when the children sang their hosannas (a form of praise directed at one who would save the people from their enemies). We also see His powers over creation, such as with His ability to restore broken humans into whole beings again (for example, the man born blind and the woman who bled for 12 years), and in His power over nature, such as when He stilled the storm and told the wind and the waves to be still.

Second, He came to bring judgment and to destroy the works of the devil (*John 9:39, 1 John 3:8*). How often do we wonder why evil prospers? Jesus addresses injustice and reassures us that the end is in sight. Jesus was recognized by demons as having power over them. They would often scream out His true identity, sometimes before Jesus was ready to reveal it. He gave peace to demon-possessed people and restored them to sanity when others would flee in fear.

Third, Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost (*Luke 19:10*) and to take away their sins (*John 1:29*). He was made like us so that He could be a faithful High Priest and so restore us to God (*Heb. 2:17*). “Dealing with sin, saving humans from it, giving them grace, forgiveness, justification, glorification—all this was the purpose of the single covenant from the beginning, now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”—N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), Kindle locations 1462–1463.

Finally, Jesus came to show us what God is like, to reveal to us—and to the onlooking universe—what His true character really is (*John 14:9*).

How can and should each of these reasons for Christ’s coming enhance your life and walk with the Lord?

Jesus' Baptism

The appearance of John the Baptist must have sent ripples of excitement throughout the region. Here was someone who looked like the prophet Elijah (*Matt. 3:4, 2 Kings 1:8*). He was the first prophetic voice the people had heard in 400 years. God had never been silent for so long before. Now He was speaking to the people once again. Obviously something significant was about to happen.

Read Matthew 3:7–12. Why would John the Baptist connect themes of judgment—the wrath to come (*Matt. 3:7*), the axe laid to the root of the trees (*Matt. 3:10*), thoroughly purging the threshing floor (*Matt. 3:12*), and burning chaff in unquenchable fire (*Matt. 3:12*) in his introduction to the Messiah?

The people thought they were living in the last days. They saw John come from the wilderness and encourage them to pass through the waters of the Jordan through baptism. This was a bit like a new Exodus, and getting wet (rather than walking across a dried-up riverbed) was necessary for cleansing and readiness for the new Promised Land, with the Messiah Himself leading them from victory over the Romans to the ushering in of God's eternal kingdom spoken of by the prophets. At least that is what many people had thought.

But neither John nor Jesus was leading a political movement; it was a salvation event. The explanation by Luke of what John was doing is a quotation from Isaiah, describing the way God would prepare a road for the exiles to return to the Promised Land (*Luke 3:3–6*). Jeremiah explains the reason for making that special road: to make it manageable for society's most vulnerable—the blind, the lame, the pregnant, mothers with toddlers—and for all others who desired to return to the Promised Land to be able to do so (*Jer. 31:7–9*). No wonder the people flocked to John; their hope was kindled that they, too, could be ready for the great day of God, soon to be upon them.

It came, however, in a way that most of them didn't expect—not because they hadn't been told but because they didn't understand the meaning of the Scriptures (*Luke 24:25–27*).

Faithful people had deep misconceptions about the nature of the Lord's first coming. How might faithful people in the last days avoid having deep misconceptions about the nature of His second one?

Stones Into Bread

Read Matthew 4:1–3. What is happening, and why? How do we see the great controversy being played out here?

“When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted, He was led by the Spirit of God. He did not invite temptation. He went to the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate His mission and work. By fasting and prayer He was to brace Himself for the bloodstained path He must travel. But Satan knew that the Saviour had gone into the wilderness, and he thought this the best time to approach Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 114.

There are dramatic parallels between the account of Jesus’ temptations and the experience of the Israelites in their Exodus wanderings. After coming through water, Jesus went into the desert, where He ate nothing and was tested for 40 days. Similarly, the Israelites passed through water (the Red Sea), entered the desert where they had no bread, and stayed there for 40 years. Notice how it is described in Deuteronomy 8:2, 3 (*NKJV*). “‘And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, [and] allowed you to hunger.’”

The gospel account says that after 40 days Jesus was hungry (*Matt. 4:2*). Then someone appears with “helpful” advice, a bit like Job’s comforters. This was not the first time Satan is depicted as coming to “help” someone in crisis. Zechariah 3 records the story of the high priest at the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. As he stood before God in vision, someone appeared at his right hand. The one who stood at the right hand was always the most trusted friend, to protect and guard against any would-be attacker. But the trusted right-hand man in Zechariah 3 was none other than the “accuser,” pretending to be a trusted friend.

The same thing happened to Jesus in the wilderness. The one who came to “help” revealed himself when he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (*Matt. 4:3, NKJV*). An angel from God would have no doubt about Jesus’ divinity.

Again notice how Jesus’ reply (*Matt. 4:4*) is a quotation linked to the Exodus. “‘[God] fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD’” (*Deut. 8:3, NKJV*).

However important not to fall prey to temptation, how much more important is it to make sure that you, even unwittingly, aren’t leading someone else into it?

Another Temptation

The first temptation parallels the Exodus but had its roots in the Fall. By placing a priority on faithfulness to God, instead of giving in to appetite, Jesus recovered the ground that Adam lost at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, to completely bridge the gap from where the human race had descended since the time of Adam, Jesus had to be subjected to two more temptations.

According to Matthew, the second temptation involved Satan taking Jesus to the highest part of the temple, presumably the southeast corner that overlooked a steep ravine. Again came the taunting statement, “ ‘If you are the Son of God,’ ” which showed that the tempter was no friend of Jesus.

What is Satan really getting at here? Would it have proved anything if Jesus did jump? *Matt. 4:5–7.*

Jesus was not interested in cheap theatrics. His trust in God was genuine, not something contrived to impress others. Jesus’ complete trust in His Father was manifested in His leaving heaven and becoming a human being, suffering the indignation, the misrepresentation, the public humiliation, and the injustice of His death (*see Phil. 2:5–8*). This was His destiny, and He was fully prepared for it. His mission was to reclaim the world that Adam and his descendants lost. In Jesus, all the covenant promises were to be fulfilled, and the world would have an opportunity for salvation.

Again Jesus responds with “ ‘It is written,’ ” again quoting Deuteronomy, and again linking His experience to the Exodus: “ ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah’ ” (*Deut. 6:16, NKJV*). Massah was the place where the Israelites bitterly complained about lack of water, and Moses struck the rock to provide it. In evaluating this experience, Moses stated that the people had “tempted the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’ ” (*Exod. 17:7, NKJV*). Jesus, of course, knew better and didn’t fall for the trick, even though this time the devil threw the phrase “ ‘It is written’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, 6*) back at Him.

It’s not always easy to see the boundary between trusting in God for the miraculous and being presumptuous in regard to what we expect from the Lord when we pray. How have you learned to know one from the other? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Devil Worship

In Matthew's version, while the first temptation focused on appetite and the second on manipulating God, the third was a direct challenge to Christ Himself, to His kingship and to His ultimate mission on earth.

Read Matthew 4:8–10, Deuteronomy 34:1–4, and Revelation 21:10. What is the significance of the “exceeding high mountain” that Satan took Jesus to?

Judging by the way the Bible uses the theme of going up to the top of a very high mountain to view nations, we can see that Jesus' trip was no sightseeing tour. There is prophetic vision attached to this scenario. From a mountaintop, Moses sees the Promised Land as it would later be, and John later sees the future New Jerusalem. Similarly, Jesus sees more than just the countries of the ancient Roman world. Notice that Satan shows off everything in its best light. He shows the riches and the glamour, not the crime, suffering, and injustice.

Satan then says: “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (*Matt. 4:9, NKJV*). In the same way that Satan fooled Adam and Eve into wanting to become like God (when they already were created in His image), Satan pretended that he was God, and that the ownership of the nations of the world was exclusively his and that, for a little homage, he could easily give it all to Jesus (*see Luke 4:6; compare Ps. 2:7, 8*).

This test focused on loyalty. Who should the human race give ultimate loyalty to? In Eden, when Adam and Eve gave in to the serpent, they were really giving Satan their first loyalty, and that infection spread quickly through each successive generation. Without direct divine intervention, the great controversy would have been decided in favor of Satan. The human race, and maybe even life on earth, could not have continued. The stakes were that high.

Notice that Jesus, like Joseph with Potiphar's wife, did not permit evil to stay near Him. Jesus commanded Satan to go away. Joseph could not do that, so he removed himself from the scene of potential evil (*Gen. 39:11, 12*). What a simple lesson for us, as well.

In all three of these temptations, Jesus used Scripture as His defense. What does that mean to us in practical terms? That is, how can we, when faced with temptation, use Scripture in order to have the same kind of victories?

Further Thought: Though one can find writers through the centuries touching on the theme of the great controversy, and though some evangelicals today are looking at the idea more closely—no one has a deeply developed great controversy worldview as does the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A literal, physical, moral, and spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan is, indeed, a crucial hallmark of Adventist thought. And no wonder. All through the Bible there is what one evangelical writer has called “the cosmic warfare theme,” and sometimes—such as in this week’s lesson on the temptations in the wilderness—that theme appears in a very stark and open manner. The idea of a battle between good and evil can be seen even outside a distinctly religious context. Poet T. S. Eliot wrote: “The world turns and the world changes / But one thing does not change. / In all of my years, one thing does not change, . . . / The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.”—*The Complete Poems and Plays*, 1909–1950 (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952), p. 98. German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: “Let us conclude. The two opposing values ‘good and bad,’ ‘good and evil’ have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years.”—*On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Random House, 1967; Vintage Books, 1989), p. 52. Scripture, aided by the Spirit of Prophecy, reveals as nothing else does, the true nature of this conflict and the eternal issues at stake in it.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to Wednesday’s question about the line, the boundary, between trusting in God’s promises for the miraculous and that of being presumptuous. How do we know the difference?
- 2 Temptation comes in many forms and shapes and sizes and colors and modes, all carefully designed to reach each of us where we are. And, of course, some things that tempt one person don’t tempt another. Besides the obvious sins, what are the more subtle ways in which we can be tempted?
- 3 Read over the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and the humiliation that He was subjected to. As you do, think about the fact that this same Jesus was, indeed, “God with us.” He was the one through whom “all things were made” (*John 1:3*). How can we grasp the incredible concept here, that of God—God!—enduring this fearful struggle in our behalf? Considering this truth, what else matters?

Finding True Gold: Part 2

The story thus far: Amair's parents divorced, and he and his mother moved to a village on the Amazon. Later he served in the military. Afterward, Amair went to his brother's home, looking for gold, but instead found "heavenly gold." Wanting to share this treasure, he visited his sister, later married, and eventually moved back to his home village and became the community teacher.

A Seventh-day Adventist friend heard that Amair and Francinette had moved to this village, and wanting to help them start a church there, joined them. They began meeting together each Sabbath under some trees by the river. Soon, other villagers began noticing them and wanted to join in their worship. Amair started giving Bible studies, and the group continued to grow.

It didn't take long for word to reach Amair's mother about what was going on. She was so ashamed to learn that her son was a Seventh-day Adventist that she "unblessed" him as her son and cursed him.

Amair and Francinette began praying for his mother, but things only seemed to get worse. As soon as they started studying the Bible with someone, the next day Amair's mother would go to the person and tell them that what Amair was teaching was a lie.

"But we believed that at the right moment, God would do something," says Amair. "The people were openhearted, and they accepted the message."

More and more villagers shared with others the truth they had found through Amair's Bible studies, and the group meeting under the tree by the river grew so large that they decided to build a Seventh-day Adventist church. A pastor from their local conference office came to baptize the new believers and to officially organize the church. Today, the church that began with just one family now has 113 members.

When Amair's mother saw how quickly the Adventist church was growing, she contacted her priest and asked that he establish a church in the village. However, her personal life was unraveling, and soon she was divorced again.

Disheartened, Amair's mother decided to move away. Amazingly, however, the Bible teachings she heard had influenced her. She had come to understand the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath but was ashamed to keep it. But once she moved, she began to secretly keep the Sabbath ("for God the Father," she said), and kept going to church on Sunday ("for Jesus").

God continued working on her heart, and after a series of Bible studies she came to accept the entire Adventist message and was baptized. She then returned to her village to encourage her brothers to accept the "treasure" that she and Amair have found.

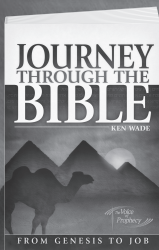
One of the Thirteenth Sabbath offering projects is to build a "floating church" that will be used to reach more people of these remote Amazon villages.

For more stories and information, visit <https://am.adventistmission.org/mq-adult>.

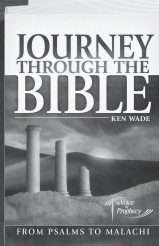
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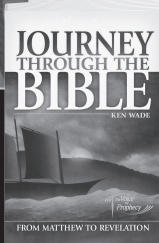
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