



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from September 27 afternoon through October 4 morning

Matthew 4

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew records that after his baptism, Jesus was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil,” (v. 1). This of course raises an important question: why would the Spirit of God lead the Son to an encounter with Satan? This is not unprecedented; God allowed Satan to affect Job as a test of Job’s faith and a proof of God’s power and faithfulness (Job 1:6-12). The testing of Jesus was meant to demonstrate his commitment to God the Father and his ability to overcome Satan by the power of the Word of God.

It should be noted that the source of this record would have to be Jesus himself, because he was the only one present. The only alternative would be direct revelation from God given to Matthew and Luke (the other gospel author who included it in his writing). It is more likely that Jesus spoke with Matthew and perhaps his other disciples about this event and eventually Matthew and Luke wrote an account (Luke would not have heard it directly from Jesus because he was not one of the 12 disciples).

The lengthy fasting of Jesus is directly connected to the first test. We are not given a particular reason for this fast, nor do we know all the details regarding the exact nature of this fast. Matthew simply explains that this 40-day fast caused Jesus to be hungry. At the end of this period, Satan came to Jesus and attempted to get Jesus to prove he was the Son of God by turning stones into bread. Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus was committed to trusting in the Father, and that meant focusing on the truth and power of the Father’s Word first, before looking to the Father to provide for his physical needs. Jesus understood that the Father’s will for him at this point was to give him spiritual food rather than physical food, and therefore he submitted and refused to use his power to make food for himself.

Satan at this point changed his tactics and used his own quotations from the Word of God (Psalm 91:11-12) in an attempt to persuade Jesus to prove his identity. He tried to get Jesus to throw himself off the highest point of the temple to prove that God would rescue him if he was in fact the Son of God. Jesus went back to Deuteronomy for his response as he quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 and refused to put God to the test. For the third and final test, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and offered him the kingdoms of the world if he would worship him. In response to this final test, Jesus commanded Satan to leave him (“Be gone, Satan!”) and he reached once more to Deuteronomy 6 and quoted verse 13 to emphasize the truth that God and God alone is to be worshiped and served. Matthew records that after Satan left, God sent angels to minister to Jesus.

Matthew 4:12-17

Matthew does not reference the baptism ministry of Jesus (John 3:22, John 4:1-2), and instead moves ahead to a time after the arrest of John the Baptist. At this point Jesus changed his location and the style of his ministry. He moved from Nazareth to Capernaum and from a baptism ministry to a preaching and healing ministry. Matthew records that his change of location was a fulfillment of prophecy as he quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 and Isaiah 42:7. The message of Jesus was identical to that of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," (v. 17). While John used this message to point to Jesus, Jesus of course used this message to point to himself.

Matthew 4:18-25

These verses record how Jesus called four disciples as he walked by the Sea of Galilee. Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew responded to Jesus' invitation to make them fishers of men by immediately leaving their nets and following him. James and John did the same, leaving not only their boat but also their father. Simon and Andrew already had met Jesus (John 1:35-42, Luke 5:3). These men would have recognized this call to follow Jesus as the call of a rabbi to potential apprentices. These men would not have been candidates to follow other rabbis, who were focused more on an academic knowledge of the Law and Prophets. These were working class men, and the call to follow Jesus was more practical than academic; they would learn by direct involvement in the ministry of Jesus rather than only by verbal and written instruction.

At this point, Jesus spent a considerable amount of time in the region of Galilee as he taught, preached, and healed the sick and cast out demons from those who were possessed. Crowds of people came to him and even followed him around the region as he traveled. These people came from Galilee, Syria, the Decapolis (an area of "10 cities" to the east and south of the Sea of Galilee), Jerusalem, Judea and the region west of the Jordan River.

Discussion Questions

1. God the Father allowed God the Son to be tested. How has God tested your faith to help you grow, whether something recent or something more in the past? How can you relate to each of the tests issued by the devil?
2. Satan attempts to manipulate Jesus to prove himself. How are you tempted to prove yourself? What's so wrong about that? Is it always a bad thing? Explain your answer.
3. With each test, Jesus responds to Satan by quoting Scripture. What does this teach you about overcoming temptation?
4. What, if anything, does it mean to you to learn that Jesus began his ministry in a region known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (v. 15)? How are you inspired by the prophecy referenced in verse 16?
5. What are some practical lessons we can learn from how Simon, Andrew, James and John responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him?
6. Why do you think so many people came to Jesus and followed him around, as described in verses 23-25?
7. Why do you follow Jesus?