

The Test of All Tests
Tests of God Conclusion
Luke 4:1-13

For we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in us.

In Southwestern South Dakota, there exists a specific area of land that is uninhabitable and has been for centuries. It covers 242,756 acres. The soil is infertile. The climate is arid. The terrain is rugged. And the air is dry. There is no Ocean Grill. There is no Mountain Grill. And there is no Valley Grill. When early French fur trappers passed through this area, they called it “bad lands to travel across.” That’s why we call it Badlands, USA. In the Badlands, the pleasant things of life are unable to be enjoyed or are absent altogether. In the Badlands, there is a struggle to survive from day to day. In the Badlands, the flesh cries out for relief.

In the Bible, the Badlands are not in South Dakota. They are in the wilderness. In fact, in both Testaments, the wilderness is the scene for the greatest test of all: The Test of the Wilderness. That’s why I call it the Test of All Tests. And the reason is this: in the wilderness there are two voices that call to you and beckon you to surrender to their plan. There is the still small voice of God, like the gentle whisper of the rushing wind and there’s the thunderous voice of the Devil. In the wilderness, the plan of God and the plan of the Devil are on full display. Because in the wilderness, God tests in order to strengthen but the Devil tempts in order to destroy. That was the Test of All Tests in the wilderness for Israel when God was leading them to the Promised Land while the devil was whispering in their ear “Oh how life was better back in Egypt.” And that was the Test of All Tests for Jesus when he was led by the Spirit to the wilderness while Satan whispered in his ear: “if you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.”

You see, friends, the Tests of All Tests – the Test of the wilderness – is a test of choices. And the choices we make in the wilderness will determine whose voice we really obey in our lives. There is the Choice of the Word. In the wilderness, will I listen to the Great Tempter or to the Divine Tester? There is the Choice of the Will. Will I exercise my will in a way that’s dependent on the Father or will I act independently of what he desires for me? There is the Choice of Ways. Will I choose the way that offers a quick and painless reward, or will I choose the path God has for me, even if it’s difficult? And There is the Choice of Wants of God. Do I want to put God to the test by forcing Him to act? Or do I want to trust God and trust Him to act in His time and His way? Those were the choices Jesus faced in His Test of All Tests in the Wilderness. We face them also. And we see them in Luke 4:1-13.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,² where for forty days he was tempted^a by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.⁶ And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours.”⁸ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here.¹⁰ For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully;’¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”¹² Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

1. The Choice of the Word (1-2)

- **Muscovy Ducks vs Mallard Ducks:** (1) On one side of our yard, Mallard ducks like to pay a visit right after the rain. (2) On the other side, Muscovy Ducks like to pay a visit any time they please because they are evasive and very proud of it. (3) It’s hard to distinguish between the two. (4) It can be hard to distinguish between a test and a temptation also. And the wilderness is the spot God chooses to teach us the difference between the two.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** A test is divinely orchestrated and designed to build and strengthen. A temptation is allowed by God but orchestrated by Satan. It’s designed to tear down and destroy. Both occur in the wilderness.
- **The Test:** (1) A Test for the Righteous: Notice the text says Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit.” The test of the wilderness – or any test of God for that matter – doesn’t mean sin is present. It means God is strengthening you for what lies ahead. (2) A Test Divinely Orchestrated: The text also says he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. God orchestrated the test. He didn’t orchestrate the evil, but he allowed it to happen.
- **The Temptation:** (1) A Temptation to Destroy: The text says Jesus was tempted forty days by the devil in the wilderness. If you switch the word “day” and insert “year,” you have the story of the Book of Numbers. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. 40 denotes a generation. Because of their sinfulness in the wilderness, the Exodus generation would not enter the Promised Land. Satan wanted to do the same thing to Jesus. (2) A Temptation Targeting Weakness: Luke limits the dialogue to one scene of those 40 days: at the end – when it was almost over – and when Jesus was hungry. The weakness for Jesus was physical. He was hungry. You can be sure that the devil will target a weakness at the moment you are weak and weary amidst great spiritual devotion even.

- **App:** In the wilderness, when you are weak and at a point of need, one voice wants to strengthen you and the other wants to destroy you.
2. **The Choice of the Will (3-4)**
- **Tardive Dyskinesia:** (1) Tardive Dyskinesia is a movement disorder characterized by involuntary repetitive body movements. (2) The first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was a temptation of spiritual Tardive Dyskinesia. Satan's sole aim was to get Jesus to work independently of the Father: to say: "my will, not thy will."
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** Satan will tempt your will by trying to get you to act independently of the Father. The Lord will test you to see if you really believe "man shall not live by bread alone" in moments of great need.
 - **The Temptation:** (1) Satan's temptation centered on Jesus' desire for food. He tempted Him to take control of the situation by utilizing His divine attributes in order to satisfy his hunger. (2) Had Jesus done that, He would have acted independently of the Father's wishes for his own ends and turned away from the reason he became flesh in the first place – to save.
 - **The Test:** (1) Jesus responds by quoting Scriptures: "It is written, "man shall not live by bread alone (but every Word that comes from the mouth of God). (2) His point was that life's most important aspect was not food. It was obeying the commands of God. (3) It was more important for Jesus to obey God, even if that obedience meant the physical hunger remained.
 - **App:** We always face choices in life that require us to decide what are priorities are. Satan tempts us to neglect our relationship with God for hundreds – if not thousands – of less important reasons. But the test from God is to see if our walk with Him is our primary concern.
3. **The Choice of Ways (5-7)**
- **The Road Not Taken – Robert Frost:** (1) "And I shall be telling this with a sigh. Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I. I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference." (2) Two roads were emerging in the wilderness for Jesus: one with the promise of a quick and painless reward and ne that will involve the suffering and hardship of the cross.
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** Satan will tempt with an offer of the promise of a quick and painless reward. The Lord will test you to see if you will take the right path when that path involves an element of suffering and hardship.
 - **The Temptation:** (1) This temptation is empty on the surface because Satan offered something that already belonged to Jesus: the kingdoms of this world. (2) The temptation, however, was in how he acquired them. Satan tempts him here to acquire the kingdoms without the pain of the cross. It was a temptation to bypass the crucifixion. (3) But the offer came with a catch: "if you will worship me." Accepting Satan's terms would have meant no suffering or death for Jesus. It would have also meant no atonement or forgiveness.
 - **The Test:** (1) Jesus rebuked the devil with an appeal to Scripture: "Get behind me. . .for you shall worship the Lord and serve him only." (2) It's a rebuke that gets repeated to Peter when he suggests a different path for Jesus than the one the Father had him on. (3) The Kingdoms of the world were His because he was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
 - **App:** When it comes to our ways, paths, and routes that we travel in life, the temptation of Satan will always be one that offers a quick and painless reward, one that limits the element of suffering and hardship. But the test from God is will we maintain our walk with him even if that means we have to take the road less traveled, one that isn't comfortable or even desirable at times.
4. **The Choice of Wants of God (**
- **Luke 4:12 on My Blood Pressure Pill Bottle:** (1) I wrote Luke 4:12 on my blood pressure pill bottle this week. (2) It says: "Do not put the Lord to the test." (3) I believe that God is totally sufficient to take care of me if I don't take my medicine. (4) But, friend, I don't want to find out because it's never wise to try to force God to act decisively. And that's exactly what Satan tried to get Jesus to do with the third temptation.
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** Satan will tempt you by trying to get you to force God to act decisively. The Lord will test you to see if you will trust to act without you putting Him to the test.
 - **The Temptation:** (1) The language of the temptation changes significantly here. Satan, who had been rebuked twice with Scripture, now uses Scripture out of context to tempt Jesus. (2) "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down." The idea is Jesus should have no fear and have complete trust in God to save him. For the Scripture says, "he shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you." (3) The quote has to do with the writer of Psalm 91 being confident that God will prevent him from stumbling on a stony path, not throwing himself off the temple. (4) It was a temptation to force God to act decisively in protecting His son.
 - **The Test:** (1) Jesus responds, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." (2) It's one thing to trust God to prevent you from stumbling on a stony path in the course of the day. But it's quite another thing to force God to act through a careless act.
 - **App:** Satan knows the Bible more than we do. He wants nothing more than for you to demand something of God and force Him to act based on what you demand. But, friend, the test is to trust Him, not tempt Him. The test is to write Luke 4:12 on the pill bottle of our heart. For we are hard pressed on every side, but never, ever, abandoned in the Test of all Tests. Amen.