

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On October 8, 1871, a fire broke out in Chicago that killed an estimated 300 people, left 100,000 others homeless, and destroyed over 17,000 buildings. Over the years, Mrs. O'Leary's cow took the heat (no pun intended) for the Great Chicago Fire, but historians eventually removed the blame from this poor animal.

One good thing came out of this tragedy: people became more aware of the need for fire safety. Since 1922, America has commemorated the date of the Great Chicago Fire by observing a National Fire Prevention Week. Schools perform fire drills with their students, and firefighters encourage families to identify ways to prevent fires and establish plans for what to do when a fire does occur.

We face the threat of fire in another way. Satan, our enemy, seeks to harm us with "the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). He continually seeks to tempt us and pull us away from God's gracious and loving desire for our lives. Satan may be crafty, but our Lord is greater, and He modeled for us a foolproof plan to avoid getting burned by spiritual attacks.

QUESTION 1

Where do you turn when you need a fool-proof plan?

THE POINT

We can follow Jesus' example in defeating spiritual attacks.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

MATTHEW 4:1-4

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

None of us is immune to temptation. For some of us, certain things continually tempt us. When we read of the temptations Jesus faced, we might be inclined to assume temptation wasn't a struggle for Him because, after all, He's God! Surely He didn't face the temptations we face today.

Think again. Jesus is God, but He's also fully man. And although He didn't face the exact same temptations we faced last week, He faced the same types of temptations. The writer of Hebrews had this to say about Jesus: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Satan came against Jesus with three temptations. The first temptation centered on Jesus' physical needs. The purpose of fasting is to focus on God through intense prayer. So, Jesus had been feeding Himself spiritually in prayer and communion with His Father. Yet He was likely weak on a physical level, since he had not eaten in 40 days. Satan attempted to exploit this weakness.

"If you are the Son of God" carries the force of jeering—as if to say, "Why not use your power as God to meet a legitimate need in Your own life?" The temptation was for Jesus to misuse, even exploit, His Messianic power for personal gain. Jesus insisted He would not act according to His own will, but only the will of the Father. (See John 6:38.) Therefore, Jesus would trust the provision of His Father instead of taking action for self-gratification.

QUESTION 2

What are some ways we face temptation through our physical appetites?

Jesus responded to Satan by quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy: "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus would live in obedience to the Word of God and nothing else. No matter how physically hungry He may have been at the moment, He would maintain His trust in a loving Father who would provide what He needed.

MATTHEW 4:5-7

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."⁷ Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."

Satan is cunning. Since Jesus deflected the first attack by reminding the devil that we live in obedience to every word of God, Satan's next attempt involved using Scripture as part of his temptation.

Before he quoted Scripture, Satan took Jesus to Jerusalem and "had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple." The temple represented God's presence and power to the Jewish people. Therefore, if Jesus jumped from this highest point, He could demonstrate God's power because, as Satan quoted from Psalm 91:11-12, "He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

There's a big problem with that: Satan was taking the passage out of context. Satan used a psalm centered on God's care and protection for us when difficulties arise, then tried to justify putting God to the test. Instead of rightfully treating the passage as an acknowledgment of God's protection when harm comes, Satan tried to make a case for Jesus deliberately putting Himself in harm's way.

PROMISES, PROMISES

Use the space below to record promises we often encounter in our culture—promises from advertisements, from entertainment, from politicians, and so on. Add as many promises as you can think of in a few minutes.

What's one step you can take to get better at using Scripture to evaluate these promises?

"Jesus refused to exchange the end-time exaltation by the Father for a right-now exaltation of a snake"

RUSSELL MOORE

We're often tempted to challenge God, as well. The Israelites did that when they needed water in the wilderness. Instead of praying and looking to God for provision they questioned and doubted His plan. They put God to the test. Years later, Moses reminded the people of this incident. (See Deut. 6:16.) Now, as He stood before a Scripture-twisting tempter, Jesus repeated the same command God taught His people through Moses: "Do not test the Lord your God."

When we're tempted to question God, doubt Him, or put Him to the test, we can stand strong by doing the following:

✦ **KNOW WHAT GOD'S WORD SAYS.** We should always read a Bible verse or passage in its correct context. Scripture interprets Scripture. Jesus would not let Satan twist a passage of Scripture for his own agenda, and neither should we. Psalm 91 needs to be understood in light of Deuteronomy 6. The Bible corroborates the Bible. The more we immerse ourselves in Scripture—all of Scripture—the better we become at detecting Satan's lies.

✦ **REST IN GOD'S LOVE AND SECURITY.** Jesus knew the truth of Psalm 91:11-12, which is that God does protect and care for us; God gives us no reason to question that or test its truthfulness. We can always trust God regardless of what may tempt us to think otherwise. God loves us completely, and nothing will separate us from His love and protection. "What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31; see also vv. 32-39.).

QUESTION 3

What are some ways we are tempted to test God?

QUESTION 4

What are we often tempted to worship in place of God?

MATTHEW 4:8-10

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Finally, Satan offered his boldest temptation. He took Jesus "to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor." Satan could offer those kingdoms legitimately, since even Jesus acknowledged him as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). But why would Jesus even consider such an offer? After all, Jesus knew God's plan. Jesus knew He would ultimately gain all these kingdoms and rule them forever.

One thing made Satan's offer attractive. Jesus also knew that the road He was about to travel would include pain, suffering, and death. Jesus could avoid all that if He accepted Satan's offer. It would mean the instant achievement of His goal without any of the suffering.

We face the same type of temptation today. We want success, pleasure, possessions—things that are not wrong in and of themselves, but are wrong when we take shortcuts to achieve them. But the temptation to take such shortcuts always comes with a catch, and Satan's offer to Jesus was no different. "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus had enough. "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Pride will lead us down the enemy's short path to success, happiness, or whatever we're chasing—but the price we pay will destroy us. On the other hand, humility before God will ultimately lead us to experience far more than we can imagine. When tempted to take the shortcut and compromise our worship of God, we should remember God's promises: "What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

QUESTION 5

What can we learn from Jesus' example about overcoming spiritual attacks?

LIVE IT OUT

Based on our study this week, what steps will you take to defeat the attacks that come your way? Consider these suggestions:

★ LOOK TO JESUS. Be intentional about keeping your focus on Christ. Lean on Him for strength to stand, knowing He understands. "For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

★ STAY CLEAR. If you know of people, places, or circumstances that fuel your vulnerability to temptation and spiritual attack, resolve to avoid those things. For best results, talk to someone else about your decision.

★ MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE. Make Scripture memory a weekly discipline and habit. Begin with memorizing verses that address areas where you often feel tempted or under attack.

★ PRAY...

Lord Jesus,

We know that when we are in You, we have nothing to fear. Yes, evil is real, but God, You are far superior to any force or opposition that might move against us. May we not live a life in fear but a life of courage and conviction, knowing that You are greater.

Amen

MY THOUGHTS
