

Matthew 4:1–11—Temptation of Jesus and of Adam and Eve

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Their versions are quite similar, though their orders of temptations differ.

Matthew 4:1–11	Luke 4:1–13
<p>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>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, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 11 Then the devil left</p>	<p>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where 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. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”</p> <p>4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And 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. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>9 Then 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, 10 for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On their</p>

him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.	hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” 12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.
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The apostle Paul may or may not have known this story, but he does liken Jesus to a second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49). Adam and Eve were tempted by a serpent in Genesis 3:1–13:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

Perhaps this is what inspired a popular interpretation of the story offered by Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). Also known as Saint Gregory and as Pope Gregory I, this church leader (for whom Gregorian chants would be named) explained how the temptations of Jesus corresponded to those of Adam (and Eve):

The Ancient Enemy raised himself in three temptations against our first parents, for then he tempted them with gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. And in tempting, he was triumphant, for he made them subject to him through their consent.

Indeed, he tempted them with gluttony, when he showed them the food of the forbidden tree and persuaded them to eat. He tempted them with vainglory when he said, "you shall be as Gods." And having made progress to this point he tempted them

through avarice when he spoke of “knowing good and evil.” For avarice has as its object not only money, but loftiness of estate.

But in the same way that he [Satan] overcame the first man, he lay subdued before the Second.

He tempted him also with gluttony when he said, “Command that these stones be made bread.” He tempted him with vainglory when he said, “If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down.” And with avarice for loftiness and power, he tempted him when he showed him all the world, saying, “All these things will I give thee if falling down thou wilt adore me.” (*Forty Gospel Homilies* 16.2–3)¹

For centuries Gregory’s interpretation would be standard fodder for preaching; for example, it is quoted verbatim in the work of Peter Lombard (ca. 1096–1160), a scholastic theologian and Bishop of Paris (see his *Sententiae* 2.21.5).

Some exegetes, however, have found the analogy strained. John Calvin (1509–64) said that it was “ridiculous” to equate *gluttony* with the desire for a hungry man to eat bread: “What kind of high living is there in bread?” he asks. “Is it not ridiculous to speak of an immoderate display of gluttony in the case of a hungry man seeking food to satisfy his nature?” (*Harmony of the Gospels* 1.134–137).

But by then, Gregory’s reading of the story had already inspired a thousand years of sermons.

1. Cited in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 753–54.