

CLARITYONE SCRIPTURE STUDY · HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

Into the Wilderness

The Son Put to the Test

A companion to the film *The Temptation of Jesus* — Matthew 4, Mark 1 & Luke 4

A free gift for viewers

Before the Test, a Voice

This booklet accompanies a sixteen-minute film on the ClarityOne channel. The film reads three Gospels together, Mark, Matthew and Luke, without forcing them into one voice. It reads the Gospels in their Greek and lets the older Scriptures they quote, the Torah and the Psalms, speak in Hebrew.

You can read these pages after watching, before watching, or one page at a time over a quiet week. Each chapter follows a chapter of the film. Wherever the film shows a Greek or Hebrew text on screen, this booklet prints the same text, with its reference and the film's English rendering beneath it.

The story is short. In Mark it takes two verses. Yet it holds one of the oldest questions a person can carry: must I prove who I am before I may rest in it?

The film begins at the Jordan: not with a test, but with a voice.



I. Beloved Before the Test

Before hunger, before the tempter, before a single demand to prove what kind of Son he will be, Jesus stands in the water of the Jordan and hears the Father call him Beloved Son.

The words come first. He does not fast for forty days and then receive them as a reward. He does not defeat the tempter and finally qualify for them. He has not yet begun the public work that will fill Galilee with healings, crowds, conflict and wonder. The Father speaks before achievement.

Then Mark changes the scene almost violently. The verb he chooses is *ekballei*. It can carry the force of driving out, even of casting out. Mark does not choose a gentle word for a pleasant spiritual retreat. The Beloved Son is thrust into the empty place, carrying a word already spoken over him.

Grace does not prevent the wilderness. But the wilderness does not revoke grace.



MARK 1:12 — GREEK

Καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον.

And immediately the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness.

II. Mark's Spare Wilderness

Mark tells almost nothing more: forty days; Satan; the wild animals; angels serving him. No stones become bread. There is no pinnacle of the Temple and no kingdoms spread out beneath him; Matthew and Luke will tell those scenes. Mark leaves something barer: the Spirit, the wilderness, the adversary, creation and care. Perhaps we should resist filling the silence too quickly.

The wilderness in Scripture is never only one thing. It is danger, but also encounter; hunger, but also manna; exposure, but also guidance. Israel wandered there. Moses entered it. Elijah crossed it. Now the Son goes there, not outside Israel's story but deep inside it.

Exodus calls Israel God's firstborn son. Deuteronomy remembers the long road through hunger and provision. In Matthew and Luke, every answer Jesus gives the tempter comes from Deuteronomy. He does not overcome temptation by escaping his Jewish inheritance. He speaks from within it. He remembers Torah.



EXODUS 4:22 — HEBREW

בְּנִי בְכוֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Israel is my son, my firstborn.

III. Stones and Bread

Matthew lets us hear the first challenge: *If you are the Son of God*. Notice its shape. The tempter does not simply say, you are not the Son. The pressure is subtler. If it is true, prove it. Command these stones to become bread.

Jesus is hungry. The Gospel does not hide that. His body is not an illusion, and hunger is not a metaphor laid over a body that floats somewhere above ordinary human need. Nor is bread evil.

Deuteronomy itself refuses a spirituality that despises material life: Israel is hungry, and God gives manna. The point is not that holy people should stop needing food.

The question is who will define the meaning of the hunger. Who will decide what the Son must do in order to prove that he really is the Son?



MATTHEW 4:3 — GREEK

Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι γένωνται.

If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

By Everything That Comes from the Mouth of the Lord

Jesus answers from Deuteronomy. Human life is not sustained by bread alone, but the verse does not end there. Life comes by what goes out from the mouth of God, and Jesus has just come from the Jordan, where the Father's mouth has spoken: Beloved Son.

That is the strange beauty at the centre of the first temptation. The tempter says: make something happen, so that your identity becomes undeniable. The Father has already spoken identity as a gift. The tempter says, produce. Grace says, receive. The tempter says, establish yourself. The Son remains inside what has already been given.

Hunger itself is not the enemy. The real pressure is to let another voice dictate how sonship must be demonstrated. Jesus is not only choosing the morally correct action. He refuses a whole economy: the economy in which being must always be justified by doing, in which identity is never secure until there is evidence, in which enough is never given, because the self must keep manufacturing proof of its own reality.



DEUTERONOMY 8:3 — HEBREW EXCERPT

כִּי לֹא עַל־הַלֶּחֶם לְבָדוֹ יַחְיֶה הָאָדָם

Human life is not sustained by bread alone.

IV. Action Flowing from Communion

The wilderness voice says: make it true. The Father's voice has already said: you are my Son.

This is not passivity. Jesus will act. He will feed crowds, heal bodies, command the wind and confront the powers. Radical grace does not mean that nothing happens. It means that action no longer has to manufacture the one who acts. The deed can flow from communion instead of being used to create an identity.

This is very close to what Christian nonduality means at its best. Not that Jesus disappears into an impersonal absolute, and not that Father and Son become meaningless words. The relationship remains. Love remains. Prayer remains. The body remains. But there is no separate self standing outside the Father, trying to acquire enough power, enough proof, enough possession to become whole.

The Son receives himself from Abba. And because he does not need to make himself real, he is free.



V. The Temple and Scripture

Matthew then takes us to the Temple, and the tempter becomes religious. He quotes Scripture: Psalm 91, the promise that God commands his angels concerning the one who dwells in divine refuge. The words are Scripture. That does not make the temptation holy.

The adversary does not always oppose truth by denying it. Sometimes truth itself is twisted into a demand for performance. Throw yourself down. Make the promise prove itself. Turn trust into spectacle. Force heaven to respond.

Jesus answers again from Deuteronomy. The background is Massah, where Israel in the wilderness asked, “Is the Lord among us or not?” (Exodus 17:7). In effect: give us proof. The temptation reaches deeper than recklessness. It touches the desire to turn relationship into evidence. But love that must keep passing a test stops being love.

This is not disbelief in miracles; the Gospel itself speaks of angels serving him. The question is whether divine care can be turned into a mechanism we control. God is not a machine that the frightened self must force into proving that it is loved.



PSALM 91:11-12 — HEBREW

כִּי מִלְאָכָיו יִצְוֶה-לְךָ לְשֹׁמְרֶךָ בְּכָל-דִּרְכֶּיךָ:
עַל-כַּפֵּי־יְשָׁאוֹנֶךָ פְּרִי־תִגַּף בְּאֶבֶן רִגְלֶךָ:

For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest your foot strike a stone.

VI. The Kingdoms: Matthew and Luke Compared

Then the horizon opens: the kingdoms, their power, their glory. Matthew places this test last. Luke places it before the Temple, and so brings his sequence back toward Jerusalem. We should let both witnesses remain themselves rather than forcing them into one artificial chronology.

The offer now seems larger than personal need. It is no longer bread for one hungry man; it is history. What could be done with that kind of power? How much suffering could be ended? The Gospel does not tell us that Jesus rehearsed those arguments, and we should not place invented thoughts inside his mind. But we know what the offer requires: worship, allegiance, a kingdom acquired by bowing to another lord.

Torah answers again. Worship belongs to God; service belongs to God. The goal cannot purify the allegiance that produces it, and a kingdom received through domination has already been shaped by domination. Behind the scene, Psalm 2 begins to hover: “You are my son”, and then the nations, spoken of as an inheritance (Psalm 2:7–8). The Son does not need Satan to give him what the Father gives. That is the difference between inheritance and seizure, between gift and possession, between kingdom and empire.



MATTHEW 4:1–11 · LUKE 4:1–13

Matthew: Stones → Temple → Kingdoms

Luke: Stones → Kingdoms → Temple

Two witnesses · distinct narrative order

VII. One Temptation in Three Forms

The three temptations begin to look like one temptation spoken three times. Bread, protection, kingdom. Provision, security, power. None of them is evil in itself. The Father feeds; the Father guards; the Father gives the kingdom.

The distortion lies in separation: take the gift without waiting for the giver. Use divine power as a private possession. Turn trust into proof. Turn vocation into control.

The contracted self says: I must get what I need. I must secure myself. I must establish my place. I must become undeniable. And Jesus stands in the wilderness without accepting that premise.

This is not the extinction of personhood. It is personhood without possession, sonship without self-construction, power without grasping, communion without separation.



VIII. More Than Willpower

This is why the story cannot end as a lesson in willpower. Jesus is not set before us merely so that we can admire his discipline and then try to become equally strong. That would turn the wilderness itself back into the economy of performance: try harder, be stronger, prove that you too can resist.

The story moves somewhere else. Later in Matthew, the challenge returns at the cross: *If you are the Son of God, come down*. Again the pressure on sonship is tied to self-deliverance; again identity is challenged through the demand for visible proof. The wilderness and the cross are not the same event, and Matthew does not explicitly explain one by the other. But the resonance is hard to miss. The Son refuses to make self-preservation the final proof of the Father's presence. He remains faithful.

Then Hebrews gives the pastoral meaning of the tested Messiah. He is not a victorious figure standing at a distance from weaker people. He is one who knows testing, the one to whom the vulnerable can come for mercy and help. His victory is not an impossible standard handed to us with instructions to reproduce it. It opens toward mercy. That is radical grace. The story begins with gift, and it ends with gift.



MATTHEW 27:40 — GREEK

εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, κατὰβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

IX. The Word That Comes First

Perhaps the deepest temptation is not simply to do something evil. Perhaps it is to leave the place of gift: to forget that life has already been received, and to turn what comes from God into material for a separate self to possess. Bread becomes mine. Protection becomes my proof. Kingdom becomes my power. Even sonship can be turned into an identity project.

And Jesus refuses. Again and again he returns to the One from whom life comes, in trust, in fidelity, in communion. The wilderness is real. The hunger is real. The adversary is real. The body is real. Grace denies none of them. Grace is what remains true before the test, inside the test and after it.

At the Jordan: Beloved Son. In the wilderness, when there is no bread: Beloved Son. When Scripture itself is turned into pressure, when the kingdoms shimmer in the distance, at the cross when the same words are thrown back as accusation: Beloved Son.

The tempter speaks in conditions: *if you are, if you will*. The Father's word does not.

Perhaps this is why Jesus can walk out of the wilderness without having proved anything to Satan. He never needed the adversary's verdict. And that may be where our own freedom begins: beneath all the voices demanding evidence, there is a deeper word. A word we do not manufacture. A life we do not own. A grace we do not earn. A voice that comes first, and calls us home.



Study & Reflection

Reading Notes

The three tests side by side

- **Mark 1:12–13.** No dialogue: forty days, tested by Satan, with the wild animals, angels serving him.
- **The stones.** Matthew 4:3–4; Luke 4:3–4. Answer: Deuteronomy 8:3.
- **The Temple.** Matthew 4:5–7 (second); Luke 4:9–12 (third). The tempter quotes Psalm 91:11–12. Answer: Deuteronomy 6:16.
- **The kingdoms.** Matthew 4:8–10 (third); Luke 4:5–8 (second). Answer: Deuteronomy 6:13.
- **Later echoes.** Matthew 27:40; Hebrews 4:15–16.

Words to keep

- ἐκβάλλει, *ekballei*: drives out (Mark 1:12).
- בְּנִי בְכוֹרִי, *beni vekhori*: my son, my firstborn (Exodus 4:22).
- מוֹצָא, *motsa*: what goes out (Deuteronomy 8:3). The Hebrew has no separate word for “word” here; Matthew’s Greek (4:4) reads ῥῆμα, *rhēma*.
- מַסָּה, *Massah*: testing (Exodus 17:7; Deuteronomy 6:16).
- תִּירָא, *tira*: you shall revere (Deuteronomy 6:13); Matthew’s Greek (4:10) reads προσκυνήσεις, *proskynēseis*, “you shall worship”, and adds “only”.
- ἔλεος, *eleos*: mercy (Hebrews 4:16).



FOR A SECOND READING

- Where do I hear a voice that says *if you are*, and what does it ask me to prove?
- What have I already been given that I keep trying to earn?

Companion Edition

A Gift for Viewers

This booklet is free. It accompanies the film *The Temptation of Jesus* — *Matthew 4, Mark 1 & Luke 4* on the ClarityOne channel:

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