

Luke's Gospel: Chapter 4

Jesus' Temptations and First Galilean Ministry

The temptations of Jesus (Luke 4 v 1 to 13)

Jesus fasted 40 days and nights, and then “he was hungry” (v 2); medics say that when hunger pains return after a long fast, the person is near death.

- (i) *First temptation:* the devil challenges Jesus to prove his deity by miraculously providing bread. But Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 8 v 3, saying God's word is more precious than food.
 - (ii) *Second temptation:* the devil invites Jesus to take a shortcut around the cross; Jesus came to win the kingdoms of the world back from Satan's domain, and Satan offers them to Jesus if he will only worship him. Note that for Satan worship and recognition are more precious than possession of the world's kingdoms – see Isaiah 14 v 13 to 14. Jesus responds with God's Word (Deuteronomy 6 v 13).
 - (iii) *Third temptation:* “For it is written” (v 10) – the devil also quotes Scripture, Psalm 91 v 11 to 12, but he takes these verses out of context, as if to say ‘if you throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple, the Bible promises the angels will rescue you and it will be spectacular self-promotion’. Again, Jesus replies with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy 6 v 16.
- These temptations of Jesus were a test of the kind of ministry he was going to exercise.
 - What was the special point of appeal in each temptation?
 - How do these verses help us to understand the meaning of temptation and the way in which the devil can be defeated?
 - Why do you think Jesus was tempted? See Hebrews 2 v 18; 4 v 15.

Jesus begins his ministry and is rejected at Nazareth (Luke 4 v 14 to 30)

Verse 14 marks the beginning of Jesus' ‘Galilean ministry’, several months later, after his ‘Judean ministry’ as described in John 1 v 29 to 4 v 3. A typical synagogue service began with prayer, then readings from the Law and the prophets, and a sermon, perhaps from a ‘learned visitor’. Here, Jesus was the ‘visitor’, returning to his home town, Nazareth.

In this prophecy (from Isaiah 61 v 1, 2), Jesus the Messiah announces his ‘manifesto’, to heal the damage caused by sin:

- (i) Sin impoverishes, but Jesus proclaims good news to the poor;
- (ii) Sin makes people captive and enslaves them, but Jesus comes to set them free;
- (iii) Sin blinds us, but Jesus heals our spiritual blindness; and
- (iv) Sin oppresses its victims, but Jesus brings liberty to the oppressed.

[MORE OVER...]

The comma where Jesus stopped reading from Isaiah shows us the nature of prophecy and its relation to time: the passage goes on to describe what Jesus will do at his Second Coming (“and the day of vengeance of our God”); so far this ‘comma’ has lasted 2,000 years...

- “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath” (v 28) – why do you think the local synagogue congregation got so upset by Jesus’ reminding them of the Old Testament stories of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (see 1 Kings 17 v 1, 8 to 16; James 5 v 17, 18), and Elisha and Naaman the Syrian (see 2 Kings 5 v 1 to 14)?

At first the listeners sensed the grace of God in the announcement that the ministry of the Messiah had come to them (v 22). They were impressed that a ‘hometown boy’ could teach so well, but they also wanted Jesus to prove his claims with miraculous signs (v 23), expecting to be treated with special favour. But when they heard Jesus’ poignant stories, the people were angry because these ‘undeserving’ Gentiles could receive God’s miraculous power and grace...

Jesus heals and preaches (Luke 4 v 31 to 44)

- In the synagogue there was a man who had ‘the spirit of an unclean demon’ (v 33) – was this just an ancient way of describing a medical condition such as epilepsy, or is something more going on?
- Do you think there are evil spirits at work in the world today?
- In this passage, in what ways does Jesus demonstrate his authority? See v 31, 36, 39, 40 and 41.
- How does Peter's mother-in-law show a fitting response for someone touched by Jesus’ healing power?
- How do verses 42 to 44 show us Jesus’ priorities – in his need to spend time alone with his Father (v 42), and in fulfilling the purpose of his mission (v 43, 44)?