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Matthew 4

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Learn the Bible at Home

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Matthew 4.

Topics.

- Jesus is tempted by the devil.
- Jesus begins to preach, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John.
- Jesus proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom and heals every disease.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Matthew speaks of John the Baptist in the wilderness proclaiming the Kingdom of God is near and calling people to repentance. People from Jerusalem and all Judea went to be baptised by John. John talks of one coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire and rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus is baptised by John and God says, "'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

MATTHEW 4:1

The Temptation of Jesus by the Devil.

- **Matthew 4:1:** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (diabolos)

1

Before proceeding into the chapter and trying to understand how the devil was able to tempt Jesus it will help if we spend a little time looking at the origin and meaning of the word devil first. The English word devil is a translation of the Greek word diabolos. In the Greek language it simply means a false accuser a slanderer or one who defames another. The Bible translators have translated the Greek word diabolos into the English word devil, but that does not change the meaning of the word diabolos its meaning remains the same (i.e., a false accuser or slander). The original Greek meaning of the word diabolos does not change with its translation to the English word devil and take on a meaning that implies some kind of evil demonic angelic supernatural creature as depicted in many Hollywood movies and thought of by some in the Christian faith.

The language of personification: the French, Italian and the Spanish languages are all known as the romantic languages. This is because any noun is personified as either masculine or feminine, the Hebrew and Greek languages are the same and because of this the Bible often uses the language of personification. In comparison to these languages the English language uses very little personification. Since the Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek it helps to understand the language of personification. The following verses are a brief example of biblical personification:

- He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly (Psalm 147:15).
- Wisdom cries without; she utters her voice in the streets (Prov. 1:20).
- Wisdom, "You are my sister," and understanding my intimate friend (Prov. 7:4).
- She (wisdom) has sent forth her maidens (Prov. 9:3).
- Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect (James 1:4).

- There is none to guide her (Jerusalem) among all the sons she has borne (Isa. 51:18-19).
- For I heard a cry as of a woman (Jerusalem) in labour, anguish as of one giving birth to her first child (Jer. 4:31).

From these verses we see that God's word is pictured as a person running swiftly throughout the earth, wisdom is personified as a woman crying in the streets and as a sister and an intimate friend and a woman with maidens. Patience is personified as a woman doing a perfect work and Jerusalem is personified as a woman in labour who has given birth to her first child and many sons. Though, it is common practise for Greek literature to personify words, especially if they are an attribute of human character and also common for nouns to be spoken of as persons, it is never the intention of the author using the Greek style of writing that a reader would embrace the personified word to mean a literal person. For further information see the title:

- Personification in the Old and New Testament.
- In, Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

MATTHEW 4:2-4

The First Temptation: Stones to Bread.

- **Matthew 4:2-4:** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

This entire story is a graphic and vivid personification of what was going on in the mind of Christ, it is showing us in picture form the battle between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit, the diabolos (devil) in this context is the personification of the mind of the flesh, and it is with this that Jesus is battling against. Jesus has just been water baptised and God has declared him His beloved Son and poured His Spirit upon him without limitation empowering him and making him ready to begin his ministry. Now Jesus is confronting those voices that every Christian (especially religious leaders with great power and global authority) hear in their minds, to a lessor or greater degree.

2

Consider the following: Jesus has fasted forty days he would be enormously hungry, in this state the voices in his mind would be saying, use the power God has given you to satisfy your own needs, but Jesus says, there is more to life than food. Jesus is saying that God's word is far richer food than the food of this world and he will not use it simply to satisfy his own need.

NOTE: should anyone doubt the power of these voices in the mind, it is very easy to experience them ourselves, simply decide to fast for five days and observe how loud and how powerful the voices in the mind speak about food.

The practical lesson: since Jesus could have simply gone to the nearest village or town to get food (he was not chained to a tree in the wilderness) he had no need to turn stones to bread. The moral that we can learn seems to be that God's power or gifts are not to be used to satisfy ones own needs or to frivolously display to others when there is no need for it or to be used to gratify self, ego and pride.

MATTHEW 4:5-7

The Second Temptation: Jump of the Pinnacle of the Temple.

- **Matthew 4:5-7:** Then the devil (diabolos) took him to the holy city (Jerusalem) and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone. " ⁷Jesus said to him (diabolos) "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. (Cited from Psalm 91:11-12) (Deut. 6:16) (Isaiah 7:12).

If the devil was some kind of demonic evil angel, why would Jesus the Son of God spend anytime walking with God's so called wicked and evil enemy up an exceeding high mountain? This entire story is a personification of the spiritual battle that takes place in the human mind between good and evil. The tempter or voices in the mind of Christ are saying something like the following:

- Go to the highest point on the temple and prove to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem you are the Son of God by jumping off. God won't let you die his angels will save you. This will prove to all the unbelieving, prideful hypocritical religious leaders that you are the Son of God.

Obviously this would appeal to pride and ego, and it is not a lie, if Jesus had done this it is certain the religious prideful, hypocritical rulers and no-doubt many others would have to admit that truly Jesus was the Son of God, but Christ knew that this was not the way in which his heavenly Father wanted him to use his power and therefore never submitted to the voices of the devil (pride and ego) and the temptation, but rather held firm to the word of God.

The practical lesson: though angels are there to protect it does not mean it is OK for a Christian to deliberately put their life in harm's way or do things that put their lives in extreme danger. Testing God in this context is, deliberately doing something that has the possibility to serious harm or even kill, us and then trusting that God is going to protect, even Jesus would not deliberately put his life in danger in this way.

MATTHEW 4:8-9

The Third Temptation: Worship the Tempter.

- **Matthew 4:8-9:** Again, the devil (diabolos) took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to him, "All these I (diabolos) will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus is now tempted with all the power, authority, fame and riches of this world. The "me", Jesus is to bow down and worship is the personification of self. The devil (diabolos) is the personification of the voice of self, self-gratitude, self-satisfaction, pride and ego. These voices can be enormously loud in the mind of someone who has the potential to reach the heights of fame and power. Many kings throughout history have gone to war or been brought to ruin simply because they did not recognise or resist the temptation of what these voices of self, pride and ego were telling them to do. The tempter is now telling Jesus all he has to do is bow down to self, pride and ego and use his power and he will become the king of the world. Once again this is no lie, if Jesus had used his God given power in such a worldly way there is no-doubt he would have been the most powerful and richest king this world has ever seen. This entire event is taking place in the Lord's mind, but depicted in simple childlike story form so we can understand what Jesus is spiritually battling with, because all Christians will mentally battle with these things at some level.

This temptation is shining a spotlight on the battle between:

- The Spirit of God and the spirit of the devil (self, ego and pride).
- The mind of the Spirit and the mind of the flesh (self, ego and pride).

The following is a possible paraphrase of what these voices in the mind of the Lord maybe saying:

- Use your power to show people who you are, do it your way, bow down to me, (the mind of the flesh, self, pride and ego) and you will have all the glory of the world and even more than this people will believe in you. Use your power according to your natural way of thinking after all God's way is going to cause you enormous pain so do it your way and avoid all that rejection and suffering.

Remember: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane fully aware of the brutal, bloody and cruel death he was about to face prayed:

- Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done (Luke 22:42).

This prayer shines a brilliant spotlight on the truth that Jesus had his own mind, his own thoughts and his own will. As he prayed it seems he hoped there would be an easier way to save us all rather than suffer as he did, but he loved his heavenly Father and you and me more than his own life and was therefore obedient to the will of God. The Bible also says:

- We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:14-15).

These temptations are not only an example of temptations that came to Jesus, but also an example of temptations that all Christians are confronted with to some degree or other. The following is a very similar scenario to what any Christian can experience in their mind, especially those who have tremendous success in their ministry. The voices or entity called the devil or false accuser can be heard in the mind, saying something like:

- Now you have all this power, think of all the good you could do for the lost and God's suffering people, you could start a church and heal the sick. With this power you can have everything the world offers, after all you deserve it, you have sacrificed far more than most Christians, you are entitled to a million dollar house, luxury cars, boats, gold watches, designer clothes and tremendous fame after all you are a child of God and even more than this you could be one of the most important and powerful people in the Christian world, imagine what you could do for God then?

Mary, Jesus mother no-doubt taught Jesus the Scriptures from childhood, he knew them inside-out and would have understood all the prophecies concerning him, so he is fully aware that the Pharisees are going to deliver him into the hands of the Romans and that he will be brutally beaten and cruelly crucified. It is certain Jesus would not have battled with thoughts of using God's power for evil. His battle would most likely have been with good ideas and good thoughts coming to him (i.e. thoughts on how he would be able to use his tremendous power in spectacular ways to extend the Kingdom of God and have people believe in him so as to avoid the brutal horror of the cross). Jesus here in the wilderness and in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane resisted these powerful and tempting thoughts and voices of the devil in his mind and always prayed to his Father to seek His will for his life and lived with the constant attitude, "Not my will, but thine be done" regardless of the cost and the suffering.

Jesus power over the devil: Jesus always-quoted Scripture to resist the voices that rises up out of the bottomless pit of self, pride and ego that often sound so loud and clear in the human mind (many people are driven crazy by them), but it is not just saying or quoting verses of Scripture that give power to resist. The power comes when a person's primary desire in life is love for God and the desire to do His will. It is, knowing what pleases God and being prepared to put God's will before self that give the power to overcome the temptations of pride and ego (the devil). When these attitudes are behind the words being spoken the Scriptures are given power.

A beautiful mind: a film was made portraying the true story of a world-famous mathematical professor. The movie was called, "A Beautiful Mind." The director of the film used real people to portray the real voices and conversation going on in the mind of the mathematical professor who suffered with schizophrenia, yet in real life he never saw real people, but only heard their voices. The director of the movie used real people in place of the voices so the audience could know what was going on in the mind of the man. Matthew is doing a similar thing in this story in writing, about Jesus and his battle between the mind of the Spirit and the mind of the flesh.

This battle could also be called the battle between:

- God's will and His ways against our will and our ways.
- Giving and humbleness against pride self, ego and greed.
- Selflessness against selfishness.
- Others first against me first.

All of these battles are summed up in the word "diabolos" translated to the English word devil which can apply to any person, attitude, behaviour or action that is against the will of God.

MATTHEW 4:10-11

Be Gone Satan!

- **Matthew 4:10-11:** Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! (Satanas) For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. ¹¹Then the devil (diabolos) left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

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Satan: (satanas) from Strong's Concordance means adversary, meaning one who opposes another in purpose or act, or who stirs up apostasy from God and encourages to sin it also applies to a Satan-like man. Satan in these verses is identified with the devil (diabolos) they are both the same entity. The devil is constantly seen coming to tempt Jesus in the wilderness temptation and yet in verse ten Jesus rebukes Satan and after rebuking Satan verse eleven says the devil (diabolos) left Jesus, thus Satan and the diabolos are interchangeable terms and both the same entity though in some contexts there are subtle differences between Satan and the devil.

Summary of the devil: the devil (diabolos) is presented as the personification of the thoughts that rise up out of the bottomless pit of self and self-will. At various times these thoughts can sound so loud and clear in the mind that they seem like real audible voices or an individual entity of its own. The thought, voice or entity is personified as the devil (diabolos) and is spoken of as a false accuser making false statements. This thought, voice or entity is also personified as Satan and is seen as an adversary or the one that opposes and withstands God's will, His purposes and even God Himself. For further information see the titles:

- Devil and Satan, in, Satan and his Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

MATTHEW 4:12-16

The People Dwelling in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light.

- **Matthew 4:12-16:** Now when he (Jesus) heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might

be fulfilled: ¹⁵"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ¹⁶the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

These verses are cited from the following words of Isaiah:

- But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Galilee: was on the west side of the lake or Sea of Galilee it was known as Galilee of the nations (Isaiah 9:1) or Gentiles because the Jews had been carried away captive and replaced by a colony of heathen immigrants and the predominate mixture of Gentile races corrupted the worship of Judaism.

Nazareth: was where Jesus was raised it was a small insignificant town in lower Galilee in Palestine.

Capernaum: was Jesus home town and headquarters for much of his public ministry it was on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in Palestine.

John the Baptist is arrested: (v12) Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) a client ruler of Galilee for the Roman Empire had arrested John the Baptist because John had reproved Herod for divorcing his wife (Phasaelis) and unlawfully taking his brother Herod Philip 1 wife. When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left his hometown Nazareth in Galilee and went to Capernaum.

On them a light has dawned: those dwelling in darkness and the fear of death, refers to the people in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, but by extension embraces everyone who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ. The majestic words, "On them a light has dawned" applies to everyone who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW 4:17

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand.

- **Matthew 4:17:** From that time Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The kingdom of heaven is the same as the Kingdom of God Matthew is the only writer that calls it the Kingdom of Heaven, Mark and Luke call it the Kingdom of God. The expression "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" means it is close by or approaching. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, can apply to all three of the following:

1. To Jesus himself.
2. To Jesus death and resurrection because it did away with the Old Covenant and holy days, the ceremonial feast, the high priest and the entire Levitical priesthood and ushered in the New Testament Kingdom of faith now made possible by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and God's grace to Jews and Gentiles alike.
3. To the glorious and majestic return of Christ and God's Kingdom on earth.

Since you cannot have a king without a kingdom nor can you have a kingdom without a king some teach that the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," refer to the Lord Jesus Christ because his

is the King and he is with them. Others say that the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," apply to the message of the cross and the Gospel of salvation since Christ will soon be crucified. Obviously, it would be foolishness to argue over who is right since both applications are true and both can apply.

MATTHEW 4:18-22

Jesus calls Peter Andrew, James and John.

- **Matthew 4:18-22:** While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Peter (Petros) means "a rock" (larger than a stone) and Andrew means, "manly" he was also a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn 1:40). Peter, Andrew, James and John were all from Bethsaida, they appear to have been fishing business partners and eventually all became part of the group called the twelve apostles. To correctly qualify for this title one had to have lived from the time of John the Baptist to the day Jesus was resurrected, lived with Jesus while on earth and witnessed the resurrection so they could bear testimony to it (Acts 1:21-22) (Acts 4:33), no-doubt this is one of the reasons the apostle Paul considered himself least of the apostles.

MATTHEW 4:23-25

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Jesus travels through all Galilee.

- **Matthew 4:23-25:** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Jesus travels throughout all Galilee:

- Teaching in synagogues proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- Healing every disease and every affliction.

Jesus fame spread throughout all Syria: the following brief history of Syria (in Turkey) gives some idea of how far Jesus fame spread and the distances people were travelling to see him. Prior to the Roman Empire Syria was brought under the control of Alexander the Great it included enormously large areas to the east including Babylon, added to this by the close of the second century the Romans made Syria a province and increased its area to include all the territory from Egypt to the Taurus Mountains, and from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates.

Syria: played a prominent part in the early church because Antioch was the capital of Syria and one of its largest cities and commercial center. It had business connections all over the world so it was able to see the coming and going of all sorts of people from every quarter of the globe. It was in Antioch that followers of Jesus were first called Christians and Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (in Syria) and commissioned with Barnabas by the Antioch church to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 11:26) (Acts 9:1-9) (Acts 13:1-3). (Syria today is now called Iraq).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

Bible House of Grace