

A Lenten Wilderness

By Beth Herrinton-Hodge



Lent marks Jesus' forty days in the wilderness following his baptism. Study Matthew's account of Jesus' wilderness experience as you begin your Lenten journey.

For

Adult/Couple

Season

Winter/early Lent

Needed

Bible, paper and pen, time to read and reflect

Prepare in Advance

- Before you open your Bible to study God's word, prepare yourself and your space.
- Find a comfortable place where you can read and listen for God's word to you.
- Pour yourself a cup of coffee or other beverage, if you'd like one.
- Relax and don't feel rushed.
- If you will share the study with a partner or friend, spend a few minutes in conversation, catching up with one another before diving into the study.

Activity Plan

1. Pray this prayer to begin:

Your Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path, O God. Guide us by your Holy Word, that we may find strength for our journey. Amen.

2. From your Bible read Matthew 4:1–11 (or see text below). Each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) places Jesus' time in the wilderness and his temptations immediately after his baptism. *What do you think is significant about Jesus facing these struggles immediately after being labeled as God's beloved Son?*
3. Look closely at vv. 1 and 2. *Why did Jesus go to the wilderness? How long does he stay there? What do you think he does during this time? How do you think he feels during this time?*
4. In Matthew's passage, "the devil" or the "tempter" are labels for Jesus' adversary. His actions are meant to trip up Jesus, or to work against him. *What three temptations does Jesus' adversary set in front of Jesus? How does Jesus respond to his tempter?*
5. Each of the responses Jesus gives are quotes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. They remind us of the way God helped God's people during their forty years in the wilderness after they were freed from slavery in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 6:10–19). *How did God help the freed slaves while they were in the wilderness? How did God help Jesus during his time of temptation in the wilderness?*
6. In v. 11, how does this story end? *What happens to the devil? What happens to Jesus?*

7. Traditionally, Lent is a forty-day period set aside to contemplate Jesus' life and teachings, as we move closer to the passion and triumph of Good Friday and Easter. Lent can be likened to a forty-day wilderness period, not unlike the forty-days of fasting and praying, which Jesus endured.

Consider your life today: your physical, spiritual, emotional state. Describe where you are in the wilderness. If you are studying this Bible story with a partner, share your description with one another. If you are studying on your own, record your description in a journal or notebook. Write as if you are having a conversation with God.

8. Re-read the passage Matthew 4:1–11, paying particular attention to Jesus' words to his tempter. *Which of these words address your place in the wilderness? What other verses from Scripture support you in the wilderness?*
9. Write out your selected verses on a sheet of paper. Slip the paper inside the cover of your Bible, or post it somewhere in your home, where you will see it daily. Let these words accompany you during these Lenten days.
10. In closing, pray the Lord's Prayer.

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And 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, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him 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 command his angels concerning you,'
and

'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

