

The temptation and other stories of desperation (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus enacts the very things we humans have been unable to enact on our own.

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Whenever you find yourself alone in the scorching desert and talking to a devil, you know the situation is serious. The situation for Jesus, enduring 40 days of temptation, is serious indeed.

However, Jesus' story is also in many ways a recapitulation of several other stories scripture tells, in which humans find themselves in desperate situations and unable to do the right thing, to withstand temptation, to rescue themselves from their troubles. With Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, we find Jesus again enacting the very things we humans have been entirely unable to enact on our own.

There are at least three other stories that Jesus' temptation in the wilderness invites us to consider.

Going back as far as Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine, Christians have long understood Jesus' wilderness temptation story as connected in some way to Moses' 40-day fast during which he meets with God atop Mt. Sinai. Moses, who will soon enough prove to be a flawed human leader, fasts as he receives God's word for the people. Jesus, who will be for us everything Moses was unable to be, fasts 40 days as he, in his very body, brings to us God's true living word.

Further (and perhaps most obviously), Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness reenact Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, when the people wander both because of their

disobedience to God and in preparation for entering the land God will give them. In the wilderness, Jesus overcomes temptation that the people were unable to overcome.

Finally, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness returns us in several ways to Adam and Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden. Adam fails in his task to resist temptation, while Jesus (known in scripture as the second Adam) fulfills, in his resistance to the devil's lying words, what Adam was unable to do.

Jesus brings God's word to us in ways Moses could not. Jesus is faithful where the people faltered. Jesus, in contrast to Adam's failure, confronts the devil, rebuffs his seditious allure, and becomes the true human. With each of these stories, Jesus fulfills our human vocation to resist evil, remain faithful to God, and live boldly as God's healers and image-bearers in the world.