**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part XI**

***Wilderness Experience***

**February 11th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

Read and/or print sermon notes from our website – roundtopchurch.org

**Biblical Context**

Before we get into the particulars that *Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil* (Matthew 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1), we need to make some basic observations about the New Testament manuscripts that record this event in Jesus’ life. Many people, Believers and non-believers, read the Bible without any contexts of any kind. However, it would be correct to observe that today’s Bible reader does have their own life experiences and beliefs they use to discern the Biblical narrative. Each person is their own filter to which all information is received.

Concerning the four Gospels being an account of Jesus’ life, we are all challenged to seek and discern the truth from God’s Word. Believers must take into account that a person who is not familiar with the multiple contexts of the Bible is at a disadvantage regarding understanding the Biblical message. We have accounts that tells us what to do (prescriptive) and others accounts are conveyed to be informative (descriptive). The Ten Commandments can be taken as “prescriptive” (you will not murder), and David’s affair with Bathsheba is informing the reader what took place and not an event to be emulated.

Since our sermon series is focused on the life of Jesus, The Christ, The Savior of the world. . . who was crucified on the Cross for the sins of the world in about 33 A.D., it is foundational to know when the earliest histories of Him were written down. All the Gospels contain historical information. There have been scoffers at the accuracy of the Bible and the dating of the letters, but, as time has marched forward, the Bible, in scholarly circles, has been found to be increasingly historically accurate.

Ossuary box of Caiaphas found: Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest at the time of Jesus' trial and chairman of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish high court). Ossuary box contains the bones of a deceased person.

<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Caiaphas-Bone-Box-of-the-High-Priest>

We all know the Dead Sea Scrolls have verified the Biblical narrative of the Hebraic presence and history of the Jews living in the land we call Israel for over 3,000 years. The Dead Sea Scrolls date as early as the 3rd c. B.C. Here is a link to more discoveries in 2022.

<https://armstronginstitute.org/841-top-10-biblical-archaeology-discoveries-of-2022>

**Why is Jesus’ Wilderness Experience not in all four Gospels?**

Regarding the four Gospels. . . detractors of Christianity will say that all three Synoptic Gospels account for the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the devil but not the Gospel of John. Therefore, the Gospels contradict each other.

First. . . there is not any contradictory text, because there is not any written text to compare John with Matthew, Mark and Luke. Second. . . John specifically stated in the below cited Scripture, that he purposely left out a number of events and signs Jesus performed. John is specific of his intention in writing for the purpose *so that people will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.* By John stating his intentions and goals of the Gospel, God inspired him to write. We can see why he starts the beginning of his letter with “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*.” (John 1:1-5).

From these opening words, we receive the message that John was not inspired by God to write a strict chronology of the life of Jesus. Let’s read some of John’s letter that highlights God’s intention for the Gospel we call John.

**John 21:24** This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

**John 20:30** Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

**John 20:31** but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (1 John 5:13)

In addition, to observing what John’s letter says and what is not recorded. . . there is a time-gap (up to 40 years) in the publication of the Synoptic Gospels and John’s letters (John, 1,2,3 John and The Revelation). To date, the prevailing view of Biblical historians place John writing in the last decade of the 1st c. A.D. Whereas. . . all the Synoptic Gospels were written no later than 70 A.D. This is because none of the Synoptic Gospels record the Jewish revolt (66 A.D.), the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70 A.D.) that Jesus prophesied would take place.

However, with all the opinions placing John’s writing in the 90’s, there are still a few who hold that John could have also written prior to 70 A.D. The credible news is that all the Gospels and the New Testament were written within the 1stc. during the alive times of the men that penned them.

**Does John’s Gospel Chronicle the Temple’s Destruction?**

It is also observed that the Apostle John does not mention the destruction of the Temple either in any of his letters. Why not? The prevailing view is that John’s Gospel was written much later in the 1st. c. The early Church Fathers confirm that John’s Gospel was written last. It is also noted that John’s content or lack of similar content compared to Matthew, Mark and Luke is different. Another reason the Temple destruction was omitted is that John wrote to a Greek audience who did not live in Jerusalem but Asia Minor (Turkey). The Roman destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem were a time-removed event that directly affected another people group. In addition, we see the book of Revelation is addressed to the seven (7) churches in Asia Minor, not to churches in Judea. And the Gospel of John addresses heretical teachings, like Gnosticism. It is viewed that John addressed concerns to a Church that was well developed and had moved many years past the Jerusalem Council chronicled in Acts 15 (ca. 50 A.D.).

**Backdrop of the Destruction of the Lord’s House in Jerusalem**

Be aware that God had warned the Jews through the prophet Jeremiah (Jerimiah 7) that God would abandon the Temple in Jerusalem just like God did at Shiloh (Psalm 78:60). Shiloh was the final stop for the portable Tabernacle (Temple) with which Moses had traveled during the Exodus and was the House of God for 369 years at Shiloh. But due to the people turning from God, He judged them and eventually abandoned His presence from them at Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was housed.

**Psalm 78:60** So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh, The tent which He had pitched among men,

After the time of Eli and Samuel, we see that Shiloh was, in fact, abandoned (ca. 1050 B.C.). This was during the time the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines. When Eli heard of the Ark’s loss he fell backwards off his seat and died at Shiloh (1 Samuel 4:18).

**God’s prophet** Jeremiah harkens back to the Lord abandoning His house at Shiloh and prophesied that the same will happen again due to the people’s rebellion toward God. This was the known history to the Jews that Jesus’ words point back to when He says that not one stone will be left of the Temple. Remember that Jeremiah prophesied right before the Babylonians destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 586 B.C. Therefore, Jesus had historical ground to stand on by prophesying the destruction of the Temple due to the people’s rebellion toward God.

**Jeremiah 7:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,**

**2 "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!'"**

**3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.**

**4 "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'**

**5 "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor,**

**6 if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin,**

**7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.**

**8 "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.**

**9 "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known,**

**10 then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'-- that you may do all these abominations?**

**11 "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD.**

**12 "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.**

**13 "And now, because you have done all these things," declares the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer,**

**14 therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.**

**15 "I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.**

**16 "As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you. (Jeremiah. 7:1-16)**

So, this is the historical significance of the 70 A.D. Jerusalem Temple destruction and why it is a pivotal dated event we can judge to determine the date of the books (letters) in the New Testament were written.

With this said. . . remember that the Book of Acts ends with Paul imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial. We know that Paul is eventually released (ca. 62 A.D.) but arrested again which led to his martyrdom in about 67 A.D. Luke wrote the third Gospel and the book of Acts. Luke never mentions the destruction of the Temple in any of his writings. Mark is known to be the first Gospel written, and therefore, before Luke-Acts. Due to this chronology, it is reasonable for the Gospel of Mark to have been written before 62 A.D.

With great confidence, we can say that Paul’s thirteen (13) letters, the three (3) Gospels and Acts, James, Jude, 1 & 2 Peter (21 of 27 N.T. letters) were all written before 70 A.D. That is within forty years of the Resurrection. Do you remember what took place in your life forty years ago. . .most certainly the important events?

**Jesus’ Wilderness Experience for You**

Now that we have some preliminary foundational understanding about the letters that gives us an accurate historical record of the life of Jesus, we can proceed to the New Testament’s Gospel life-chronology of Jesus. After Jesus’ water baptism by John the Baptist, we are told that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the devil.

**See Attachment: Matthew, Mark & Luke**

Reviewing from last week. . . In Jesus’ wilderness experience. . . it is obvious that God set the stage to prove that the devil never has had an advantage over Him. In all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 4:1:11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 1:1-15), the account tells us that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit. So, there was a Divine purpose in process here. This was not a situation where the devil caught Jesus at a weak moment and decided it was time to take advantage of Him. No, no, no, . . . it is the other way around. The devil took the bait and was exposed for his inferior powers compared to God; even God’s Spirit residing in a weakened human body (Jesus) after fasting forty days in the wilderness was superior. Here is another example, for our benefit, where God is demonstrating that His Spirit is to lead our lives. . .which will bring us victory over the devil. The whole account of Jesus’ wilderness experience was to demonstrate to all of us that even in our weakest human state. . . with God’s Spirit within us, the devil cannot defeat us. This does not mean we may physically survive, but we will spiritually live forever with the Lord.

I say this is the “*test*” of Jesus not the “*temptation*” of Jesus. Why? Let’s define the Greek word peirazo. **Strong’s 3985 πειράζω Meaning:** to make proof of, to attempt, test, tempt. **Origin:** from *3984* **Usage:** did(1), put(1), put to the test(2), tempt(2), tempted(13), tempter(2), test(6), tested(2), testing(7), tried(2), trying(2). N**otes:** Matthew 4:10

In today’s culture, if we say that someone was “tempted” . . . this carries the understanding that the person really thought about what they were offered, and it was churning inside their mind and heart, but, in the end of their internal deliberation, they decided not to advance. They salivated but did not bite the apple. This is not what Jesus did. Jesus never mulled over anything in His mind and heart concerning the devil’s offers. We see that the devil *tested* Jesus, but Jesus passed the *test*. Conversely, Adam failed the *test* the devil presented. . . "You surely will not die! 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

**The Three Tests**

All three tests the devil presented to Jesus are common attractions to all of humanity. They all center around selfish pride and ambition at the expense of others which are hallmarks of rebellion toward God. It is obvious that the devil was attempting to sway Jesus in recognizing another authority that He had to make a deal with. Jesus never made a deal with the devil. The devil’s end-goal was to get Jesus to worship him and turn His allegiance away from His redemptive mission. Unfortunately, many people do sell their soul to the devil for fame and fortune. One of the main lessons we learn from Jesus’ wilderness test is who to trust and place our allegiance. All of the devil’s offerings were centered around temporal and material things of this present world. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Jesus did not need anything the devil had/has to offer and neither do we (anyone).

It is noteworthy to recognize that the Judean wilderness is not a place conducive to human survival. The Judean Wilderness spans an area on the western side of the lower Jordan Valley. . . from north of Jericho to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Jesus had been water-baptized by John the Baptist who was working in the wilderness of Judea (Matthew 3). Today, tourist can visit a placed named “the Mount of Temptation” that has been generally identified with Mount Quarantania, a mountain approximately 1.9 miles north-west of Jericho.

In comparing Matthew and Luke, who present the same three tests, however, the last two are in a different order. Mark’s Gospel simply mentions the event happened but did not give details other than the Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness and angels ministered to Jesus. All three accounts say that Jesus went to Galilee after Jesus demonstrated His superior power over the devil. Luke expounds more detail in the ending, writing. . .

14 And Jesus returned to ***Galilee*** in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. 15 And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. Luke 4:15-14.

It is extremely profitable to trace back to the Old Testament Scriptures with which Jesus responded to the devil. It is in this test-event that we see the devil quoted Scripture (Psalm 91:11,12). The lesson we learn from the devil quoting Scripture. . . is just because a person quotes Scripture does not mean they are speaking for the Lord.

For us to receive the fullest understanding of the dialogue between Jesus and the devil, we must review God’s prophet “Deliverer” Moses and the time of the Exodus. It is there we see the historical rebellion the pagan-ladened Hebrews from Egypt carried with them. Remember, the older generation of Hebrews of the Exodus carried with them pagan idols and continually complained against God. This is why the Lord sentenced them to die (your corpses will fall in this wilderness (Num. 14:29) in the wilderness (Numbers 14:26ff, Deut. 1:34ff). It was the older generation (men twenty and older who grumbled against God) God sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years until they died during the 15th c. B.C. We see God inspired His prophet Ezekiel (over 800 years post Exodus) to convey this truth.

**Ezekiel 20:7-8** (593-571 B.C. active prophet)

7 "I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'

8 "But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

(See Deut. 9:7)

These idol-retaining Hebrews, of the Exodus, allowed the devil to work through them. These tests the devil placed in front of Jesus had already been attempted in the past, as seen in the Exodus, under God’s called prophet and spiritual leader Moses, and they failed to stop God’s redemptive plan. God removed those rebellious to Him and retained those that were not. The Lord’s redemptive plan marched forward. This is comparison to *Adam failed* but Jesus (God incarnate) succeeded (Corinthians 15:21-22, 15:45-47).

There is an obvious comparison to the Hebrew-led Exodus from Egypt, being forty (40) years in the wilderness. . . to Jesus, spending forty days and nights in the wilderness. The number forty (40) is often seen in the Biblical narrative. Moses’ life is divided into three sections of forty (Egyptian upbringing, Midian Exil, Exodus) and Jesus’ Resurrection ministry was forty days. In the forty-year wilderness journey, the Hebrew people became hungry and thirsty and had to depend upon God to supply their temporal needs. But many of them complained and rebelled against God. Remember, these were the same Exodus-Hebrews that built the golden calf idol after they became impatient waiting for Moses to return from meeting with God (Exodus 32).

Many of us who grew-up learning Bible stories and know the phrase “manna from heaven” is a Scripture quote from the time of the Exodus when God rained down “manna” to feed His people for forty years (Exodus 16:33, Hebrews 9:4). Therefore, the devil desired to test Jesus like the rebellious Hebrews in the Exodus. But Jesus did not faulter. . . and God’s redemptive plan was not deterred.

Let us follow the Scripture trail and see the direct parallel between the Exodus Wilderness and Jesus’ Wilderness Experience. We can all choose to be the idol-laden Hebrews of the Exodus or choose to be led by the Lord’s Spirit. Therefore, when life-tests come, and they will come, we will be impowered by God’s Spirit to be victorious.

**Test One (1)**

3 And the tempter came and said to Him,

"If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 **But He answered and said**, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’”

[ Deut. 8:3, John 4:34, Job 23:12, Jer. 15:16 ]

**Deuteronomy 8:1-3** 1 "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers.

2 "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, **testing you**, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

3 "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

**Test Two (2)**

5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand 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, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’”

[ Psalm 91:11,12 ]

7 **Jesus said to him**, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’” [ Deut. 6:16 ]

**Deuteronomy 6:1** "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it, . . .

. . . 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. . . .

. . . 13 "You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.

14 "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you,

15 for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

16 "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at **Massah.**

**Exodus 17:1-7 1** Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink.

2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

7 He named the place **Massah and Meribah** because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they **tested** the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

**Test Three (3)**

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 things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

10 **Then Jesus said to him**, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’”

[ Deut. 6:13, 10:20, 1 Sam 7:3, Neh. 9:6, Psalm 95:6 ]

11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, ***angels came and began to minister to Him***. 12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into ***Galilee.***

**1 Samuel 7:1-4 1** And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

2 From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone.

**Psalm 95:1** O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.

3 For the LORD is a great God And a great King above all gods,

4 In whose hand are the depths of the earth, The peaks of the mountains are His also.

5 The sea is His, for it was He who made it, And His hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

7 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,

8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of **Massah** in the wilderness,

9 "When your fathers **tested** Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work.

10 "For forty years I loathed *that* generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways.

11 "Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."

**Deuteronomy 6:13**

13 "You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.

**AMEN**