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*Jesus fasts 40 days in the wilderness as Moses does. This and other parallels with Israel are expressions of Jesus' ministry as the ultimate, prophesied Prophet—the One to whom Israel must harken. Third in a year-long series.*

BY DR. JIM SIBLEY

During his days on earth, Jesus functioned as the Prophet God had promised to raise up, the Prophet who would be “like Moses” (Deut 18:15–19). Jesus’ public ministry was bracketed by two 40-day periods, one at its beginning and one at its conclusion. The first was a time of testing; the last—between the resurrection and the ascension—was a time of teaching. Both were expressions of Jesus’ ministry as the ultimate, prophesied Prophet—the One to whom Israel must harken.

Jesus fasted in the wilderness “for forty days and forty nights” (Matt 4:2), “and he ate nothing during those days” (Luke 4:2). Of Moses, the Scripture says, “So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water” (Exod 34:28). There are also parallels with the experience of Israel. As Israel entered the wilderness and was tested for forty years (see Deut 8:2), so Jesus was tested in the wilderness for forty days. In fact, Messiah and Israel are mentioned in similar ways in Scripture. For example, both are referred to as the seed of Abraham, [1] both are called “My servant” by God, [2] and both are given priestly functions. [3]

The first temptation, turning stones into bread is reminiscent of the miraculous provision of manna performed by Moses during the wilderness experience of Israel. Jesus responded to this temptation



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with Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” In context, Moses makes mention of the manna God provided, not just to meet the physical needs of the people, but more importantly, to teach them to be dependent upon the Word of God.

The second temptation, trusting God to rescue him from a leap from the pinnacle of the temple was answered with a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” This seems to point to the incident recorded in Exodus 17 where, in response to their thirst, the people were angry with both God and Moses. Here, Moses responded, “Why do you test the Lord?” (v. 2). Moses was warning the people against testing the Lord and his provision. In a similar way, Jesus did not need to test the Lord, for the Lord was testing him, revealing him to be who he had said he was—his beloved Son in whom he was well-pleased (Matt 3:17).

The third temptation, offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for his worshipping Satan, is met by a command for Satan to leave and a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” This passage alludes to Exodus 23:23–33, where Moses warns against following after foreign gods.

How are we to understand these temptations? In Scripture, Israel is presented as God’s first-born son (Exod 4:22). Where God’s son, Israel, failed, his Son, the Messiah, overcame. In this, not only is he is qualified to redeem Israel and the nations, but he has also pointed the way forward for us as we are tempted by our appetite for things, for recognition, and for power.

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## Footnotes

1. E.g., see Ps 105:6 and Gal 3:16, 19.
2. E.g., see Isa 41:8–9 and 42:1.
3. E.g., see Exod 19:6; Ps 110:4.