

## LENT: JOURNEYING TO THE CROSS

**First Sunday in Lent**  
**February 21, 2010**

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11**  
**Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16**  
**Romans 10:8b-13**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

### The Consequences of Obedience

There is a common notion today that if you live right and do the right things, then you should not have to face too many difficulties in life. The term that we use to define this idea is *fairness*. In fact, this concept can be found in the book of Deuteronomy, i.e. if you obey God, God will bless you; if you disobey God, God will curse you – it is called the Deuteronomistic Code. Many popular preachers get a lot of traction (and a lot of money) out of this theology. We know it today in the form of the “Prosperity Gospel.” In spite of its popularity, many times bad things just happen to good people. In these cases, we hear the axiom, “Life’s not fair.”

In the Gospel passage for this week in Luke 4:1-13, we see the “Prosperity Gospel” turned on its head by the account of the Temptation of Jesus Christ. After Jesus’ baptism, Luke says that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1, *NRSV*). The term *full* is deep with meaning! Other ways of translating it could be *abounding in*, *wholly occupied with*, *completely under the influence of*, etc. These alternative translations show the depth of Jesus’ connection with the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus would follow the Holy Spirit anywhere – and that’s what he did. Later in that same verse, the passage says that Jesus “was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” Here there is another translation option. Instead of being “led by the Spirit *while* in the wilderness,” which is obviously the case, one can also translate the passage as “led by the Spirit *into* the wilderness.” This double meaning indicates that Jesus was led into the wilderness and continued to be faithful and obedient while there.

These translational options might not seem important, but they show that the temptations that Jesus faced at the hand of the devil (Luke 4:2-13) were *because* of his obedience and willingness to follow the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus’ obedience led him into one of the most difficult situations in his life. Instead of being blessed for his obedience, he was faced with the devil’s temptations.

This is probably more true to life than we are willing to admit. Sometimes our obedience does not lead to sublime blessings. In fact, at times, obedience can lead us directly into difficult situations. Likewise, our obedience and faithfulness never shields us from tragedy and heartache. Since this is true, Jesus’ example in this passage is instructive, i.e.

follow the Spirit into the wilderness; just make sure to keep following the Spirit while you're there!

We are assured that God has promised never to leave or abandon us (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus, "who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin," makes it possible for us to "approach God's throne," where we will "find grace to help us just when we need it" (Hebrews 4:15, 16, *GNT*).

The Reflection for the First Sunday in Lent was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit [www.wiltonbaptist.org](http://www.wiltonbaptist.org) to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Honduras** – With thanks to God that earthquake damage was limited and that Bible Society staff have not suffered attacks or robbery, and with prayers for the Bible Society's service to the Church and people, for the broad use of the Society's facilities, and for plans to educate the country in biblical values; **Guatemala** – With thanks to God for Scripture distribution and that the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program has increased, and that two more ethnic language translations have been completed, and with prayers for an end to the violence and political turmoil in the country and that God's Word and its transforming power may touch the lives of the people.

**Activity Corner:** "Personalizing a Psalm"

Supplies needed: Bible; writing paper; pens or pencils; drawing paper and crayons (for younger children).

Gather members of your household in a circle and read together Psalm 91. This psalm expresses trust and confidence in God, and it is one that is often turned to by those facing or engaged in perilous undertakings. Identify those verses that offer words of assurance and discuss what the psalm writer is expressing. Encourage members of your household to rewrite the psalm, inserting "I" or "me" where appropriate in place of "you" (except where "you" or "me" pertains to God) and substituting "my" for "your." Also invite everyone to begin the psalm with their own name; e.g., "I \_\_ (insert name) \_\_, who live in the shelter of the Most High" or "who go to the LORD for safety," (this opening line will need to conform to whatever translation is being used). Younger children may be encouraged to draw a picture based on the psalm. Conclude by inviting everyone to read aloud together their "personalized psalm" and encourage everyone to refer to their personalized psalm whenever they feel the need to pray for guidance and assurance.