

Reflection and Worship
A Sermon by Chris Hensley
Based on Luke 4:1 – 13
Presented to Sardis Baptist Church
March 9, 2025

Lent is upon us, that season during which the Church collectively makes reparations for the season of Easter. Most often these preparations manifest as fasting and more praying. Hopefully though – however you prepare yourself spiritually – you are engaging with God in more intentional and meaningful ways during this season. Our passages today deal with two, seemingly, different situations. To begin, The Hebrew Bible passage offers to its readers some instruction on what the Hebrew people were to do when they finally arrived in the Promised Land. Recall that this has been a journey a generation in the making. The text tells us that the people wandered for forty years and all but Joshua in that generation who left Egypt would die in the wilderness before arrival at the Promised Land.

What follows in the Deuteronomy passage is a prescribed back and forth, a worship guide of sorts which offers the worshipper of God amongst the Hebrew people a suggested offering and the reasons behind the offering. There is great intentionality behind the described act of worship. There is a call of remembrance on the part of the people. They are to reflect back on

their collective story of deliverance and recall what God has done for them is seeing them out of slavery and into a life of hope which is located in the specific place which they call the Promised Land.

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, explores the role of what is called the Promised Land within our Deuteronomy passage. Throughout the Hebrew Bible the Promised Land takes on the feeling of being another character not unlike David, Jehu, Naomi, or Ruth. Land brings about security, safety, provision, and a more stable identity. Of course, we may look beyond the scriptures for affirmation of this truth. We can look to large swaths of human history where land ownership has led to these things and more – including power. Delmar O'Donnell put it this way in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, “You ain’t no kind of man, if you ain’t got land.” As we look around us here in Charlotte and to the ministries which we help support in Hope Chapel, we see the damage which being unhoused and without land in our own cultural context brings. The Hebrew people of our reading for this morning were being called to remember their own history when they had no land of their own. In this remembrance, they were called to give thanks to God and offer a tithe to from the first fruits of their new found landed-ness and the products of their labor

of the land. Intentional giving, intentional reflection on what is considered to be a good gift from God. This is part of the season into which we have entered.

Jumping to the Christian Testament, we see the back and forth between Jesus and the figure of Satan as recorded in Luke. This is an almost identical reading of Matthew's account of the same story except that the second and third temptations are flipped. In the language used, the author of Luke's account says that Jesus was led in the wilderness by the Spirit. No doubt a harkening back to the ancient Hebrews who were led in the wilderness by a pillar of fire and a pillar of smoke on their route to the Promised Land. The figure of Satan tempts Jesus thrice in our reading, beginning with a simple loaf of bread for the fasting holy man. The temptations move then to more bombastic offers from the Satan figure. Jesus is offered power and authority if he would only worship the Satan figure and, finally ensured protection if he were to make a spectacle of himself and leap from a high point in Jerusalem for folks to see.

There is great intentionality in Jesus actions as he enters the wilderness, led by the Spirit. Further, there is great intentionality in Jesus' refusal to turn a stone into a loaf of bread to sate his hunger, or to bow to the Satan to secure

power and authority in this world, or to make a spectacle of himself rather than to remain humble. It is worth noting that the figure of the Satan quotes a passage of scripture from the Psalms with a literal interpretation to which Jesus responded with a quote from Deuteronomy. Jesus provides yet another model of how his followers might resist temptations. More to our point, though, Luke paints Jesus as a figure of great intentionality when it comes to his spiritual journey. During this season, regardless of whether or not you fast, pray extra, read scripture more frequently, exercise intentionality in your faith practices. Reflect upon why you do the things you do when it comes to your spiritual journey. Find encouragement in our readings for today to continue those practices and to continue them with a greater emphasis on the intentionality behind them.