

The Baptism and Temptation of Christ

Mark 1:9-13

Mark 1:9-13 – *“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.”

Background Notes

Jesus came from Nazareth to be baptized by John the Baptist. Nazareth was an obscure village in Galilee, the northern territory of Israel. Most likely John was baptizing in the Jordan River near Jericho, probably not far from the location of the Allenby Bridge today, so the Lord traveled at least 60 miles to be baptized. He was about 30 years old at this time (Luke 3:23).

The word *immediately*, or *straightway*, is used more than 40 times in the Gospel of Mark. Remember, the theme of Mark is “Jesus Christ as the Perfect Servant,” so the use of the word *immediately* emphasizes the Perfect Servant’s willing promptness to serve.

In verses 10-11 the presence of the full Trinity is seen. The Father spoke with an audible voice from the heavens. The Son, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit took on the visible manifestation of a dove and descended upon Jesus Christ. This was our Lord’s anointing by the Holy Spirit with power as He began His public ministry. We’re not sure whether everyone heard the voice of God and saw the Holy Spirit descending as a dove, but the Lord Jesus certainly heard the Father’s voice and saw the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The wilderness where Satan tempted the Lord was the Judean Wilderness. It stretches to the west and southwest of the area where the Lord was baptized, and is a rugged, mountainous landscape, mostly barren of trees. The “Mount of Temptation” is a traditional site near Jericho that is sometimes visited on Holy Land tours, but Scripture doesn’t identify the precise area of the wilderness where the Lord was tempted.

Mark is the only Gospel that refers to the “wild beasts” that were present during our Lord’s forty days in the wilderness. We don’t know whether these “wild beasts” were energized by Satan and were therefore hostile, or whether they were docile in the Lord’s presence. In any case, the mention of “the devil” and “wilderness” and “wild” animals emphasizes that

our Lord came into a world that was very different from the world He originally made. There was no wilderness and there were no “wild” animals in God’s perfect creation! Satan and the sin of mankind marred God’s wonderful creation - but the Lord Jesus, the Perfect Servant, came to remedy the situation. We will see this throughout the Gospel of Mark.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord Jesus did not need to be baptized by John the Baptist.

John’s baptism was a baptism of *repentance* (Matthew 3:11). Our Lord was sinless - He didn’t need to repent. The Bible makes it very clear that the Lord Jesus was not contaminated by sin in any way. 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“He knew no sin.”* And 1 Peter 2:22: *“He committed no sin.”* And 1 John 3:5: *“In Him there is no sin.”*

So if John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, then why did our Lord submit to it? Even John was surprised! A number of answers could be given here, and probably there are a number of reasons. In Matthew 3:14-15 we read: *“John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’”* To “fulfill all righteousness” is another way of saying that it was God’s righteous will for the Lord to submit to John’s Baptism.

Certainly other reasons were to show our Lord’s approval of John’s baptism, and to give the people an example to follow. In addition, by undergoing John’s baptism the Lord identified Himself with those who denounced the religious hypocrisy of the nation, and with those who were preparing for the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus underwent John’s baptism, but not because He *needed* a baptism of repentance. There was no need for the Lord to repent of anything.

2. It is not a sin to be tempted.

The word “*drove*” is a very strong word: *“And immediately the Spirit **drove** Him into the wilderness”* (v12, emphasis added). The Spirit sent Him, or impelled Him to go into the wilderness. Matthew 4 and Luke 4, the parallel accounts, say that the Holy Spirit **led** Jesus into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tempted by the devil.

So it’s not a sin to be tempted, because our Lord never sinned. But **yielding** to temptation is sin. The Lord Jesus was tempted, but He did not yield in any way. When we are tempted, if we begin to yield, that is sin. Even though we may not actually commit the sinful act, we’ve sinned if we have only yielded in our minds and thoughts. But we have not sinned, and we are not sinful, if we haven’t yielded in any way. Just because the temptation has presented itself to us, that doesn’t mean we’ve sinned.

Here's an illustration: Suppose you have a teenage son who knows how to drive but doesn't have a license yet. And suppose you go out one night and you remind him, "Even though you know how to drive, you're not to drive the car. It's against the law. Don't drive the car!" No sooner have you left than a couple of your son's friends come over and say, "Hey, your parents are gone but their car is here - let's go!" If your son says, "No way! My folks said NO, and it's against the law," your son has not sinned - no matter how enticingly the temptation was presented. But if your son begins to think, "Hey, yeah - my folks are gone. Let's go out and drive around! This'll be great" - he has yielded, and he has sinned. Even if he changes his mind and doesn't actually go out and drive the car, he has sinned in his thoughts. Even if you return home before they go out and he doesn't actually commit the act of driving, he has sinned, because he yielded to the temptation in his mind. The sin was not in the temptation. The sin was in the yielding - whether the act was committed or not.

The Lord Jesus was tempted, but He did not yield in any way. In Hebrews 4:15 we read, "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" So, it's not a sin to be tempted; it's sin when you even begin to yield to temptation. Our Lord Jesus was tempted, but He did not yield in any way.

Practical Applications

1. Pleasing God should be our top priority.

In verse 11 we read that God the Father addressed the Lord Jesus, saying, "*You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" Notice that this was said before the public ministry of Jesus Christ began. None of the Lord's miracles and none of His had yet taken place. And yet the Father, looking back over thirty years of our Lord's childhood and young adult life was able to say, "*This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.*"

Could God say this of us? Think of all the times we've messed up over the years - particularly in our early years, but even now we often fall short of God's standards. Could it be said of us that we're "well pleasing" to the Lord?

What an example to follow! What a model to follow that we have in our Lord Jesus, who was pleasing to God in everything. In 2 Corinthians 5:9 we read: "*So we make it our goal to please Him...*" **Pleasing God should be our top priority!**

2. Let's not forget about God's holy angels.

The Lord was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan, with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him (v13). In what way were the angels ministering to or serving the Lord? Maybe they protected Him from harm. Maybe

they encouraged Him. We don't know. But we do know that the angels of God serve us as well. Hebrews 1:14 says, "*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit the kingdom?*" Those who will inherit the kingdom - that's us! God uses the holy angels to serve us. One form of service would be to guard and protect us. Maybe the Lord has to send out a few extra guardian angels when some of us get behind the steering wheel of a car!

Several years ago our son Ron and I were on a wilderness canoe trip. We were sleeping in an open-front lean-to, and we were awakened by a bear in our campsite. Although we made noise to scare it away, the bear charged right towards us - but at the very last minute it veered off and ran into the woods! I've often wondered if God used an angel to protect us that night. I don't know for sure, but I **do** know we should be very thankful for the angels of God who minister to us!

As the angels of God ministered to the Lord Jesus, so the angels of God serve us. We are not to worship angels, and we should not try to contact angels, and we should not have an unbiblical curiosity about angels. But within those biblical guidelines, let's be encouraged as we remember the work of God's holy angels. They're not imaginary, as in a fairy tale or a religious myth. The holy angels really do exist, and one of their God-given functions is to serve us.

Let's not forget about God's holy angels!