

# **BIBLE STUDY**

## **The Life of Jesus Christ**

### **His Baptism and Wilderness Temptation**

#### **Study Section 4**



# Jesus Christ: Study 10

## The Baptism of Jesus

Jesus travelled from Nazareth in Galilee, to the Jordon where John the Baptist was. This time in the life of Jesus marks the formal beginning of His public life of ministry. At the age of 30, Jesus went to John for baptism. Thus once again, we see the continuity of the Bible, and echoes from the Old Testament which pointed forward to Christ.

1. It was the age (30), when a Levite was allowed to begin service in the Temple. (Numbers 4:3)
2. It was the age when Joseph (a type of Christ) began his great work in Egypt. (Gen. 41:46)
3. It was the age when David (the ancestor and type of Christ) began to reign in Israel. (2 Sam. 5:4)

Now all four Gospel writers record the baptism of Jesus: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23; John 1:32. They all record that as Jesus came up out of the water having been baptised the Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove.

It is significant to remember at this point that John's baptism was one of repentance for the remission of sins. (Luke 3:3-5) Those who wanted to be baptised would need to recognize their failings in the sight of God, repent and confessed their sins, prior to being baptised. (Matthew 3:6) Without such a confession of faith and repentance, being baptised was invalid, as far as John the Baptist was concerned, because these were the principles of God that all must follow if He is to forgive their sins. Matthew, chapter 3, verses 5-12, records the burning indictment by John, of those who perceived baptism as simply a means to escape the wrath or judgement of God, without accepting any responsibility for the change and repentance that was needed within them.

So as we read these verses, an interesting scene unfolds before us. The self-righteous Pharisees and the Hellenizing Sadducees presented themselves before John for baptism. The former considered themselves as righteous, holy and superior to all

others, looking down upon those whom they considered to be ‘sinners’. (John 7:48-49) The Sadducees were in league with the Gentiles, representing paganism, the very principle of which was contrary to Judaism.

John saw that to baptise such individuals would be to baptise those who were ignorant of its meaning, therefore he refused to baptise them. They viewed themselves as being in a privileged position, being as they were, descended from Abraham. They could not conceive that they should need to repent of anything. John however saw them as a “generation of vipers”, who needed desperately to depart from the thinking of the flesh and show repentance in their lives. If the existence of “sons of God” depended only on God’s physical powers, He could make them out of stones. It remains true today, that unless belief from the heart and repentance exists, baptism should still be refused. It is upon this solemn note, the need for denial of the flesh (in other words pleasing our selfish human desires), that Matthew records the coming of Jesus to John. (Matthew 3:13-15)

John would not at first have recognized Jesus, certainly not as the Messiah. In spite of their blood relationship, he and Jesus had grown up apart, as complete strangers. It is not possible to even assume that they may have met from time to time, for later on John told the Pharisees: “I knew Him not” (John 1:31). One thing he would know, however, was that anyone with sins to confess could not be the Messiah. So putting this background together with the brief accounts in the four Gospels, we can reconstruct the scene, using Matthew’s record as the basis. We read:

**“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I 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 fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.”** Matt: 3:13-15

Now, remembering that this was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, John as always, would have asked for an acknowledgment of sinfulness and the confession of a desire to abandon this state. So he would have asked Jesus the question he had asked of so many before: “What are your sins?” The answer would of course have been, “I am sinless”.

John’s response to this is quite logical. In other words John says in effect, “in that case I have a need to be baptised by you, for not even I can claim to be sinless. Why do you come to me?”

## Why Should Jesus be Baptised?

In view of the fact that Jesus was sinless, one might indeed question the need for this baptism of repentance. John's reluctance to do this was quietly, but firmly, set aside. Jesus' answer to him gives us the answer regarding the need for this baptism:

**"...permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness".**

The word "us" used by Jesus, supplies the key to a better understanding of this matter. It does not refer to Jesus and John, but to Jesus and the others who were similarly being baptised. This can be confirmed from the phrasing in Luke's record:

**"now it came about when all the people were baptised, that Jesus also was baptised ..."** Luke 3:21

By this act, Jesus openly associated Himself with the sinners He came to save. By it He proclaimed the essential oneness of His nature with theirs. Jesus was declaring his recognition and disowning of the source of all sin, namely human nature or the flesh.

Thus in fulfilling all righteousness, Jesus submitted to a ritual which spoke of death to the flesh and resurrection to newness of life. In His baptism, there was thus ritually set forth that which was true of His whole life - He "was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification". (Romans 4:25)

## The Response from Heaven

The record describes how, when Jesus was baptised, He "...went up immediately from the water..." (Matt: 3:16), following which a remarkable event is described for as Jesus emerged from the water, the heavens were opened (Mark's word for "opened" means "split") and a dove came out of the sky and rested on Him. Matthew underlines this statement with the word "**BEHOLD**", and confirms, as do all of the Gospel writers, that this dove was a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit or Power coming upon Jesus.

God, as the Father of Jesus, could have obviously empowered Him without this visible sign in the form of a dove. But this was a sign that had been promised to John

the Baptist, from which he would know with certainty who the Messiah was. It would also indicate that his own work was finished, and indeed from that point on John's calling began to decline, until it ended abruptly with his death at the hands of Herod. But he did receive his sign and thus was enabled to boldly declare who Jesus was:

**“And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.””** John 1: 32-34

In addition to this particular sign, the Biblical record confirms that God also manifested His Spirit in visible form on another occasion, when He was endowing men with His power. All of the Apostles received this astounding blessing following Jesus' departure after the resurrection. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit enabling them to begin their work of building the Church, just as Jesus was enabled to manifest His Father in presenting the good news of the Gospel. We read in the Acts of the Apostles:

**“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...”**  
Acts 2:1-4

Thus following his baptism Jesus was filled with God's power at the beginning of His public ministry.

With the opening up of heaven and the descending of the dove in this manner, we can see an echo, and a fulfilment of prophecy from the prophet Malachi. Malachi foretold the work of both John and Jesus and includes these words:

**“...thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”** Malachi 3:10 (RSV)

John the Baptist confirms this thought. John, the Gospel writer, confirms the Baptist's own statements regarding the fact that Jesus must increase while he must now decrease. As the Baptist is declaring the witness of Jesus as the Son of God, he makes the following statement:

**“He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.”** John 3:33-35

In the opening of the heavens, and the descending of the dove, we also see an apparent fulfilment of the prayer recorded in Isaiah's prophecy:

**“Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! ...”** Isaiah 64:1

Finally, we look at the words proclaimed by the voice out of the heavens: **“...this is My beloved Son...”** Matthew 3:17

Here is an acknowledgment of the Father that the One now before the nation was none other than the Son, whose destiny was to rule the world. We can see a direct echo from the book of Psalms:

**“I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.’”**  
Psalm 2:7-8

The voice continued saying that Jesus was one “...in whom I am well pleased”. (Matthew 3:17) Here we see a reference to the suffering Servant, declared by Isaiah, in whom the Lord delights:

**“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”** Isaiah 42:1

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## LESSON FOR US

God had provided Himself with a Lamb, as Abraham had testified to Isaac, his promised son, so long before. (Gen. 22:8)

Through filling Jesus with His Holy Spirit, God manifested Himself in His own Son, who would one day wear the crown in His Kingdom. But, first, He would bear the cross - as a pattern for all those who would come to God through Him.

In Jesus' own actions, we can see, by example, a confirmation of His instructions to us, as spoken to Nicodemus.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” John 3:5**

### Test Yourself

- 1) Why did John the Baptist condemn the Pharisees and Sadducees?
- 2) Describe the sequence of events that occurred when Jesus was baptised.
- 3) Why was Jesus baptised?
- 4) Briefly describe some of the promises God has made to the one whom He described as “My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”.

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## The Wilderness Temptation (Part 1)

The ministry of the Lord Jesus lasted 3 ½ years and the Gospel record of John verifies this by recording 4 Passovers (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 12:1). The struggle of Jesus against the sinfulness of all mankind began with His introduction to the nation.

At the time when Jesus was baptized, God publicly acknowledged that He was His Father. (Luke 3:22) At this point in his life, having been baptized, Jesus was empowered with His Father's Spirit. Now that the creative and limitless power of God was available to Him to manifest His Father and bring the light of life to this sinful, condemned world of darkness, all things were possible for Jesus. We read:

**“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”** John 3: 34-36

Now, three of the Gospel writers record the next event that takes place in Jesus' life, which is when Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1: 12, 13; Luke 4:1-13). However, only Matthew provides a sense of chronological order to this event, using words such as “when”, “again”, “then”. Both Matthew and Luke provide details relative to the temptation that Jesus faced during this period in the wilderness, subsequent to His baptism. Luke records that Jesus faced “every temptation” (chapter 4:13), making it clear that His record is particularly concerned with every kind of temptation by which men are provoked to sin. Now Mark provides no detail regarding the temptations in the wilderness, but it is he who provides a sense of tremendous urgency in Jesus' journey into the desert:

**“Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.”** Mark 1:12

With the Divine approval, and the coming of the power of the Spirit, the supreme test in the age long struggle between good and evil was to begin in the Judean wilderness,

and so Jesus was driven or impelled into the desert to face this great test. Through the wonder of God's word, we are privileged to witness the conflict and the final outcome. As difficult as the idea may seem, this was the first conscious guidance of the Holy Spirit provided to God's Son.

## A Parallel

Following baptism, every individual who would aspire to become a child of God faces a similar, though far less exacting, challenge. There comes at such a time they need to take a long honest look at the future and decide attitudes regarding a life in Christ, if there is to be a full and complete self dedication to the service of the Lord. Looked at from this perspective, the records of the temptation of Jesus really makes sense.

## Biblical Background

All 3 writers state that Jesus was driven into the wilderness for a period of 40 days. The Biblical associations of this temptation period that Christ experienced are enlightening as parallels pointing forward to Christ's ministry. The "40" days recalls how Israel also faced the temptations of the wilderness for 40 years, after a symbolic baptism following Moses through the Red Sea. It was at the end of that 40 years that Moses forfeited his own immediate inheritance of the land as a result of his rash speech at Meribah-Kadesh (Numbers 20:12).

It was at the end of 40 days that Elijah's morale collapsed in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:8). It was also after the invincible champion of the Philistines, Goliath, had presented his challenge for 40 days (Josephus) that he was slain by the valiant David (1 Sam.17:40).

One detail found only in Mark, that Jesus was "with the wild beasts" has symbolic force. Here was Jesus, the second Adam, fulfilling the Divine commission to "have dominion over every living thing that moveth" (Gen 1:28), the lower creation of the animal world which the descendants of the first Adam had so brutalized. Here was foreshadowed the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam:

**"You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—Even the beasts of the field." Psalm 8:6-7**

It is difficult to visualize this scene without thinking of the earlier test of the first Adam.

In the beauty of the garden of God, after a period of harmony with his maker, with all the animal creation subject to him, Adam had failed when his obedience was challenged. Now, in the fullness of time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam climbs the rugged slopes into the wilderness, its very desolation a symbol of the original Adam's failure, the animals no longer affectionate and patient, but in Mark's words, "wild beasts". It is there that He engages in that struggle, which, in its final victory, is destined to bring harmony between God and His creation in an age when the desert shall blossom like a rose, the cow and the bear shall feed together and a little child shall lead them.

This experience of Jesus in the wilderness was a token fulfilment of the Scriptures that point forward to that wonderful future, and also of Jesus' victory over the wild untamed thinking of human nature.

## The Temptations

When we read all three accounts of this record, we are told that Jesus was compelled to go into the wilderness through the Holy Spirit, and He was led about by the Spirit, during the 40 days. This is similar in principle to Simeon, of whom it was described "**...and the Holy Spirit was upon him**", when he was led by the Spirit into the Temple, when the child Jesus was brought in for presentation as the first born. (Luke 2:25-27)

We also learn that all of the temptations took place in the wilderness, and that they occurred most powerfully at the end of 40 days fasting.

Elation over His Father's acknowledgment and approval was sobered by this long and solitary vigil in the wilderness. As the days lengthened into weeks, the physical needs experienced by Jesus were forgotten. Yet they took their toll, and when resistance was at its lowest ebb, He felt the full impact of temptation.

There is no inconsistency in the fact that Jesus could be tempted with evil. These temptations either originated from or found an answering response in His human nature. This wilderness experience confirms that as Paul writes Jesus was made in all points like His brethren, and His victory shows that He triumphantly withstood the assault of sin. We need to be clear in our minds that there is no iniquity in temptation. It is important to distinguish clearly between the possibility that the thoughts of evil

may have arisen in the Lord's mind, and the fact that He never welcomed nor gave encouragement to these ideas. Sin never developed, as every inclination towards evil was strangled at its birth. The record of God's Word testifies to these two points:

**“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.”**

Hebrews 4:15

**“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”** Hebrews 2:18

This record of Jesus' experience in the wilderness and His own personal example, gives to us a very powerful message. The more we allow our human instincts to occupy our thoughts, the greater the danger of compromise. The yearning within us to come to terms with human desire is the first sign of defeat in the battle against sin. In the wilderness temptation, Jesus teaches that the nearer we live to God, the shorter and sharper will be the conflict with evil. Conversely, the lower our Spiritual condition, the longer will be our fight, and the greater our danger. There are three temptations mentioned in the first epistle of John, chapter 2, verse 16, as being of the world, and not of the Father:

**“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”** 1 John 2:16-17

These temptations correspond exactly with the process by which Eve's fall to sin is recorded in Genesis 3:6 providing an unmistakable Bible echo:

**“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”**

Genesis 3:6

The temptations of Jesus are presented on exactly the same basis. They were thus typical temptations, designed to express every way by which human nature can be assailed, but which, in His case, were overcome. They were:

1. Miraculous provision of bread - an appeal to Jesus to satisfy the lust of the flesh. (Matt. 4:2-3)
2. Miraculous demonstration of personal power - an appeal to Jesus based on “the pride of life”. (Matt. 4: 5-6)
3. Miraculous attempt at world rule, ignoring His Father’s plan of salvation - an appeal to Jesus based on what the eyes behold, “the lust of the eye”. (Matthew 4:8-9)

To invite a hungry man to turn stones into bread was to suggest that He satisfy the lust of the flesh. To suggest that He demonstrate His power was to appeal to His pride of life. To ask Him to behold the kingdoms of the world, as an incentive to gaining them, was to exploit the lust of the eye.

But to resist these suggestions Jesus as the Son of Man, humanity’s representative, was to triumph in the points at which all other men fail.

In this way the record portrays Jesus as the second Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. Eve desired at first to fulfil God’s law (Gen. 3:2-3) but she came to believe that she could be like God. (Gen. 3:5) So leaving God out of account, she gave way to temptation, disobeyed God and led Adam to fall with her. The first temptation of Jesus was more subtle than it appears for we read:

**“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”**  
Matthew 4:3

The hunger of Jesus was the cause, rather than the object of the temptation. For nearly six weeks He had been lost to the needs of His body. Now He becomes conscious of acute hunger. If the stones at His feet were loaves in His hand, how quickly could the faintness of His body be strengthened!

Yet the temptation was deeper than this. It lay also in the suggestion of doubt - “**...if you are the Son of God...**” Down in the Jordan Valley, Jesus had heard the voice of His Father acknowledging Him as His Son, and with this recognition had come the power of God. The uncertainty that increased with the lowering of bodily resistance could so easily be resolved by a harmless test which would at once relieve the ache in His body and the doubt in His mind. Jesus recognized the temptation as a trial of faith, as well as of endurance, and did not hesitate in His response:

**“...It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”** Matthew 4:4

In direct contrast to the hungry Israelites, who complained of their lack of bread in the wilderness, Jesus was content to leave His sustenance completely in the hands of God. His knowledge of the Word showed Him the way of victory, and His faith in it gave Him the power to resist the evil thought. With the authority of His own conquest, He could later exhort His disciples:

**“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ”For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”**

Matthew 6:31-32

In resisting this temptation, Jesus brushed aside the suggestion that He should fall back on the Divine gift of power to ease His suffering. He desired no exemption from the common lot of humanity. He demonstrated His faith by a committal of His physical needs into the hands of His Father, and He demonstrated the power of God’s Word in the presence of spiritual danger.

The battle was being won but the conflict was not over. With extraordinary subtlety a new attack struck suddenly at the foundations of the previous victory. The doubt persisted, thus it still had to be successfully challenged. Jesus was tempted to seek a practical demonstration of the trust He claimed. Moreover, the Word of God to which Jesus had turned was used to support the second test. (Matt. 4:6)

In effect the temptation was: “you have acknowledged your confidence in God and in His Word. Prove it by your actions. The Word tells you that God will give His angels charge over you to keep you and prevent you dashing your foot against a stone. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, and show your confidence in that Word, and in Your Father, **if** you are the Son of God. This spectacular demonstration will also be a dramatic opening to your mission and assure for you a national response”. Once again, Jesus relied on His witness to the strength of God’s Word to dispose of this temptation as quickly as the thoughts arose saying:

**“...it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

Matthew 4:7

This quotation, used by Jesus, provides another echo back to a time of trial in the wilderness. Our reference takes us back to the words of Moses, during the final months of the period in the wilderness, when he warned the children of Israel that they should not continue to put God to the test. (Deut. 6:16)

The children of Israel had repeatedly tested the Lord by disobedience and distrust. Time and time again they had rebelled against God by their desire to go their own way. To have wavered before this temptation now, would have been to abandon, at the very outset, the life of faith which Jesus came to live. He would have sought His own way to show Himself to Israel, rather than the spirit of waiting upon God.

The wording of the temptation to Jesus, as described in Matthew, is a reference to Psalm 91:11-12. The Divine promise in this Psalm was that God would give His Angels **“...charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone”**

The way that Jesus was committed to going was the way His Father appointed. Any other way would be a faithless rebellion, and would be to tempt or test God. Jesus was to appeal to the people’s wonder, not by a spectacular demonstration of power, but by so startling a manifestation of love, that a hardened Roman soldier was to cry: **“surely this was the Son of God!”** (Matthew 27:54)

Jesus would give them a sign, but it was not to be a public salvation proclaimed by thousands of excited countrymen. It was to be a victory witnessed by lonely, weeping women, in the solitude of a burial garden. (Mark 16) Such was the Father’s way, and in this way Jesus **was** kept by the Angels, who were even now waiting to minister to Him in the wilderness.

But first, before all this was possible, the temptations to consider forsaking the way of God and accept the temporal reward of human nature must be overcome. Jesus felt the temptation surge within Him to forsake the path of suffering and humility, and use His power to bring all men to His feet. Through the limitless power given to Him by His Father, He could even then free the children of God from the oppressor’s yoke, and all men could enjoy the blessings of peace and prosperity.

But to attempt to achieve even the most laudable ends in a conscious defiance of the way of God is a victory for human nature and thinking. Such thought is contrary to the way of God. Thus with the supreme and relentless discipline of spirit, Jesus banished the temptation saying:

**“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”** Matthew 4:10

Once again, His words provide us with an echo of Moses’ instructions to the children of Israel towards the end of their time in the wilderness. (Deut.6:13-14) Jesus would

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follow and serve only His Father. He would not follow the ways of men, worshipping the things of this world - the broad and easy highway that in the end leads only to death.

With this final rebuke to fleshly desires, the temptations were over for a season. And in the place of challenge and strife came the ministering Angels of God, bringing with them the fruits of victory. The victor emerged from the wilderness stronger than when He entered it. His resolution had taken the strain, and now He was ready for the work His Father had committed to His trust.

## LESSONS FOR US

The triumph of Jesus points the way to victory in the lives of all those who follow Him. We do not require the extreme rigours of the wilderness to tempt us to make stones into bread. Most people live by bread alone, they ignore God and do not discover until too late that without Him all is vanity and vexation of Spirit. It is a supremely important lesson to learn that life is about much more than worrying about how we can provide for our physical needs. As Jesus said:

**“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”** Matthew 6:25

The primary objective of life in the words of Jesus is to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Matthew 6:33

## Test Yourself

- 5) Why did Jesus face temptation in the wilderness?
- 6) Describe the three temptations that Jesus faced and why these in particular are recorded for us to read.
- 7) How did Jesus overcome temptation and what lessons can we learn from His experiences.

## The Wilderness Temptation (Part 2)

### The Temptations Renewed

Even though Jesus had resolutely overcome these temptations, in later days they were to return, for we read:

**“When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” Luke 4:13**

However, though sorely tempted, Jesus was resolutely devoted to doing His Father’s will. How many times Jesus was assailed with such allurements during His ministry, it is impossible to say, but a number of incidents are clearly traceable in the Gospel records. They take place under varying conditions and circumstances, but in each case the temptations can be discerned as one or more variations of the basic trials in the wilderness.

It is valuable to trace these incidents through the Gospels and observe the events and individuals involved in presenting these invitations to depart from God’s way. John’s Gospel gives no explicit record of the Lord’s temptations in the wilderness, but all three elements are plainly traceable in his account.

- Jesus turned a few loaves and fishes into abundant food, but not for Himself. (John 6:9-13)
- At the word of His mother, Jesus turned water into wine, but in doing so, He manifested His glory only to the six disciples He had so far gathered around Him. (John 2:1-11)
- At His last Feast of Tabernacles, His own brothers somewhat scornfully urged Him to manifest Himself to the (Jewish) world, by doing wonderful works before the crowds in Jerusalem, for not even they “**...were believing in Him**”. (John 7:2-5) His own brothers were the tempters, challenging the fact that He was the Son of God.

After the feeding of the 5,000, the third wilderness temptation was pointedly renewed when the crowd sought to take Him by force, and make Him a King. (John 6:15)

People who believed in Him were now the adversaries, tempting Him to take His rightful place as King immediately. Jesus could have accepted this greatness and taken up the kingdom by popular acclaim, but instead He went up into a mountain, not to contemplate the kingdom He might have and its glory, but to seek in prayer strength to overcome and thrust the temptation away.

The second wilderness temptation assailed Jesus again, fiercely, when enraged men in the Synagogue in Nazareth would have cast Him headlong over a cliff. He could have let them do it, and have alighted unharmed on the rocks before them, thus turning their bitterness to awe. Instead, Jesus quietly evaded them and departed from the scene. (Luke 4:29-30)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, just prior to His capture and crucifixion, the temptation to avoid what He knew was going to happen arose within Him, and Jesus appealed to His Father to **“let this cup pass”**. But once again, devotion to His Father’s will immediately stifled this thought and Jesus declared that His Father’s will was to be done. (Matthew 26:39)

In that same garden, His word about 12 legions of Angels, alert to save Him from His enemies was no dramatic statement, but was the literal truth. Jesus knew that without a doubt He only had to but speak the word and His Father’s support would have been there. But this calling upon Divine providence would have frustrated the Divine purpose, thus Jesus meekly allowed Himself to be taken. But the thought was obviously in His mind. (Matt. 26:53-56)

Finally hanging there upon the cross, Jesus had to listen to the taunts and jeers of men, as they mocked Him with the challenge:

**“...the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matthew 27: 41-43)**

What tremendous temptation did these adversaries present, for Jesus knew that He could easily have done what they said. Yet if He had come down, then Jesus would

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have failed to follow God's will, and thus through disobedience, He would not have saved anyone. On other occasions throughout the gospel records we read of other instances where Jesus faced temptation. In Matthew 16:1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees are the adversaries, tempting Jesus to show them a sign in order to convince them of His identity. Jesus set His disciples an example by turning away from the challenge, as He left these unbelievers and departed.

Even that faithful disciple Peter was at one point classed as Satan by Christ, when he sought to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem and facing the suffering that lay ahead. Both Matthew, (16:23), and Mark (8:33), record Jesus' quick reaction in seeing the danger of this repeated third wilderness temptation and He reacted in the same abrupt emphatic way:

**“He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”** Matthew 16:23

Some of the records, such as this one, emphasize very much the loneliness of Jesus at times, particularly when temptation was strongest. His disciples appeared to have been little or no help to Him. But this was obviously not always the case, for towards the end of His ministry He thanked them for their support:

**“...you are those who have continued with Me in My trials (temptations)”** Luke 22:28

By their tenacious, though often uncomprehending loyalty, when there seemed reasons enough for deserting Him, they had been a greater help than they knew.

## Questions

Having considered the Gospel records about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, two questions can be considered namely:

1. What is the source of the record?
2. What was the source of the temptation?

The answers to these two questions can only be determined by a careful consideration of them within the overall context of God's Word. An extremely valuable study tip to remember is that we should always strive to allow God's Word to enlighten or explain

His Word, in other words let scripture explain scripture. So let's now briefly consider the two questions.

## **1. The source of the record?**

It is hardly a waste of time to inquire the source of the Gospel writers' information regarding this solitary temptation of Christ. How could Matthew and Luke have access to the facts that they describe? Now, it cannot be ruled out that the Gospel writers were the subjects of direct inspiration from God, once having been empowered with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost following the departure of Jesus from the earth.

However, other considerations, point to the probability that, as Luke himself states at the beginning of his Gospel, this record was also the fruit of the meticulous compiling of information, under Divine influence and direction. If this is the case, then Jesus himself would probably have been the source of this information, quite probably during the 40 days of instruction and being with the Apostles following his resurrection. It is noted that during this period Jesus did much to broaden their Spiritual education. (Acts 1:1-3)

However, how could Jesus convey to the disciples any truly adequate or worthwhile idea about the depth of mental conflict he had faced at the beginning of His ministry? What better way than to bring the narrative to life than by expressing it in the form of a parable, a method that Jesus has so often used before to great effect. Such a conclusion cannot be regarded as certain, but it has much to recommend it. Long exposure to Greek culture, with its mythology of demi-gods, demons, and the underworld, had familiarized the Jews with figures and concepts which Jesus had utilized before in presenting lessons to the people. This would be in terms which they could visualize and grasp quickly. Paul used this same technique, drawing upon Greek literature, figures from Olympic Games, and the Roman military to present his message.

## **2. The source of the Temptation?**

Superficial reading of the Gospels has led many to the conclusion that this Satan confronting Jesus was a personal, super-human devil, the primeval rebel against the supremacy of God.

An alternative suggestion put forward is that it was a human individual or representative group sent by the Jewish Sanhedrin, who finally located Him in the wilderness at the end of the 40 days. As custodians of the law, it was their function to test the credentials of anyone claiming to speak on behalf of God. They sent a deputation to John for this purpose (John 1:19-28). Thus some Bible students consider that they would treat Jesus in the same manner.

The third suggestion is that these thoughts and temptations arose from within Jesus Himself, originating from His human nature, the same nature and inclination toward sin that we all bear. At the end of 40 days in the wilderness, driven there by the Spirit, He was tired and hungry. He was endowed with more power than any other human being had ever experienced, and His ability to use this power without restriction from God was as yet untested.

When considering these three alternatives, there are certain factors that we should first take into account. Now, Mark clearly states that all three temptations took place in the wilderness. Thus, Jesus did not go, nor was He taken literally, to the pinnacle of the Temple, or to a very high mountain overlooking all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Further, there is no mountain in that area, or even in the world, that is high enough to overlook all the kingdoms.

No human being could or would tempt Jesus to bow down and worship him. Not even the emperor of Rome had the authority and the ability to give Him all the kingdoms of the world, even if he were so inclined, simply because this man Jesus bowed down before him. However, a personal, super-human devil, could present no challenge to Jesus, as He would easily recognize him for what he was. He certainly could not tempt Him with an offer to rule the world in return for falling down and worshipping him. Jesus had the full power of God at His disposal and knew that all nations and peoples and creatures in the world are subject to His Father. No matter how powerful such a devil might be, Jesus would know that he did not have the ability to deliver this promise.

So let's put all assumptions aside regarding the identity of this tempter and review what the Bible has to say regarding the identity of such tempters. Read through these Biblical statements, compare them against related Biblical references and then form your own conclusions.

## **The Devil and Satan**

In the Old Testament, there is no mention of the “devil”. (The four times the King James Version uses the word, they can be seen from a concordance, to mean pagan idols. (an example can be found in Psalm 106:37-38.) Indeed throughout the Old Testament God never warns His people against a super-human being that tempts them to sin, man alone, is held responsible for his sins. Thus we read for example:

**“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5**

**“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”. Isaiah 59:2**

The New Testament does use the word “devil” which come from a Greek word “Diabolis”, meaning a “false accuser” or “slanderer”. This term is sometimes used of human beings. For example we read:

**“...Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” John 6:70**

**“Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers (Diabolis)\*, temperate, faithful in all things.” 1Timothy 3:11**

- NOTE: This is the same word which has been translated as devil in the Matthew account of the temptation.

The word “Satan” is a Hebrew word and means an “adversary”. In the English translations of the Bible, it is either rendered as “adversary” or transposed just as is, “Satan”.

**“...do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our adversary.” 1Samuel 29:4**

**“He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon (besides the trouble that Hadad caused); and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.” 1Kings 11:25**

**“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” (Margin note in some Bibles reads: or, adversary). Job 1:6**

These three uses of the original words do not suggest that devil or Satan is the name of a super-natural being. Now in the temptation of Christ, the words “devil” and “Satan” are used interchangeably. So again we read:

**“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”** Matthew 4:1

**“And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan...”**  
Mark 1:13

The meanings “false accuser”, “slanderer”, and “adversary” would certainly aptly describe the nature of the temptations Jesus faced. Other records in the New Testament indicate who or what Jesus was contending against throughout His ministry and His crucifixion. For example:

**“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”** Hebrews 2:14

The scriptures clearly that Jesus shared our flesh and blood nature in order to destroy the devil, which is described as having the power of death. Now, numerous Scriptural records define for us exactly what has the power of death. Therefore we read for example:

**“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”.**  
Romans 5:12

**“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire...”** Romans 7:8

**“For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.”** Romans 7:11

**“The sting of death is sin...”** 1 Corinthians 15:56

**“...when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”** James 1:15

It is James, among others, who defines the source of sin saying that **“...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed”**. James 1:14

Now Jesus said:

**“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”** Mark 7:21-23

Finally two more quotes to consider:

**“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...”**  
Jeremiah 17:9

**“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells...”**  
Romans 7:18

Now, we can look at what Jesus did destroy in His death.

**“...He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”.** Hebrews 9:26

**“...after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”** Hebrews 10:12

**“...what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.”** Romans 8:3

From these verses, one can see that the battle that Jesus was fighting was with His own flesh and blood nature, the same nature that tempts us to please ourselves, rather than please of God. The human desires which were conquered during the temptation of Jesus were destroyed at Calvary. This was accomplished by the destruction of the source of these ungodly desires - the nature inherited from Adam. So the Lord Jesus destroyed sin in the place where it resided, in the flesh; that is the devil.

On this basis, sin, the great enemy with all its temptations that come from our nature, is personified as the devil, the false accuser, slanderer, and the adversary.

As a final point, one might note that “personification” was not a new or novel concept in relationship to Scripture. In this context we can read for example of where wisdom is personified as a woman:

**“Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table.”** Proverbs 9:1-2

**“Happy is the man who finds wisdom... She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand...She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.”** Proverbs 3:13-18

Sin itself is personified as a master and a King:

**Jesus said “...whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”** John 8:34

**“...sin reigned in death...”** Romans 5:21

Riches are also personified as a master:

**“No one can serve two masters...you cannot serve God and mammon.”**

Matthew 6: 24

The people of God are personified as a body and as a chaste virgin.

**“Now you are the body of Christ...”** 1 Corinthians 12:27

**“...I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 11:2

# Baptism and Temptation Study Section 4

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## LESSONS FOR US

Three times in the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus demonstrated the power of the Scriptures, by recalling God's own Word in the face of temptation. Temptation was not translated into sin because of the close association Jesus had with His Father and the complete knowledge Jesus had of the ways and Word of God. The counsel of God, his Father, was with Jesus at all times, guiding Him to distinguish immediately between right and wrong, thus rejecting evil instantly.

We have been privileged to be provided with the written Word of God. If we read the pages of scripture and meditate upon the Word of God daily, then we will be drawn closer to God and to Jesus. In the trial of our daily temptations, no matter what we feel is the source of them, His Words will come flooding into our minds when we are faced with the choices that could take us away from Him.

**“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season” Psalm 1:1-3**

### Test Yourself

- 1) Briefly discuss the source of the temptations that Jesus experienced.
- 2) What do the words ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’ mean.
- 3) Give some examples of ‘personification’ used in scripture to guide and help our understanding of scriptural principles.