

Jesus' Baptism & Temptation

Mark 1:9-13

ABC 1/23/22

Picture yourself 25 miles outside Jerusalem in the desert wilderness, on the banks of the Jordan River, surrounded by crowds of people. Everyone is eager to get a glimpse of the man known as *the Baptizer*. You've joined them & are waiting your turn to be baptized. Earlier, you'd come & seen & heard John mention there was One coming after him whose sandals he wasn't worthy to loose & who would baptize with the Holy Spirit instead of water. Today, as you wait your turn, you see John divert his attention & look into the crowd & fix his eyes on one Person. At one point, John points at Him & says, **Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (Jn 1:29). You turn & see a Man you've never seen before. His name is Jesus & He comes forward & asks John to baptize Him. John tells Him, **I need to be baptized by You, & are You coming to me?** (Mt 3:14). In essence, He's saying: *I can't do what You ask. This is a baptism of repentance from sin & You're the Lamb of God, the Lamb without blemish, who takes away the sin of the world. You have no need to be baptized. You should be baptizing me.*¹ Open your Bibles to Mk 1 as we see Jesus enter Mark's gospel.

1. Jesus' Baptism (9-11) John was preaching a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** (4) & proclaiming that Someone greater than he was coming who would baptize **with the Holy Spirit** (8). Crowds were travelling for miles to see & hear him. Mark tells us, **in those days** a carpenter **from Nazareth in Galilee** joins those who want to be baptized by John. Mark keeps it very simple. **9** The phrase **in those days** refers to some point during John's ministry. John had likely been preaching for at least 6 months, if not longer. Outside of their encounter while both were in the womb, this is the only meeting between Jesus & John recorded in Scripture. Though they were related & later contacted each other through their disciples (Mt 11:2), there's no indication they met any other time than this one. This meeting was initiated by **Jesus**, who **came** when the time was right for Him to make His 1st public appearance (Lk 3:21) & began His public ministry. Jews of that day expected the Messiah to come from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religious life. Instead, He came from the

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, First Edition, St. &rew's Expository Commentary, pp 9–10

boonies, far from the religious establishment. Though He grew up in obscurity, the time was here for Him to make His 1st public appearance. He left Nazareth in order to be **baptized by John in the Jordan**. Imagine John's shock as he sees the sinless face of Jesus. How does he recognize Him? We don't know, but it happens. Mark doesn't record John's protest nor his proclamation that Jesus is the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). The crowd would've assumed Jesus was coming to be baptized just like they were, as sinners in need of God's forgiveness. But Jesus wasn't a sinner needing to repent. Why was He baptized? Some say this couldn't have been the baptism of repentance because Jesus had nothing to repent of. What do you think? Here's how G. Campbell Morgan answers that question:

*Jesus was baptized as a repenting soul. His, also, was a baptism of repentance. His, also, was a baptism of the confession of sins. In that hour He repented, He confessed sins, but the repentance was not for Himself, the sins were not His own. In that hour He identified Himself with the multitude who had been thronging out to the baptism, identified Himself with them in the consciousness of sin, in repentance for it, in the confession of it. In that hour of baptism we see the most solemn & wonderful sight of the Servant of God who had come from the silence & seclusion of Nazareth, taking upon Himself the burden of human sin, counting it as if it were His own sin, doing that to which an apostolic writer ultimately referred by declaring: 'He was made sin.'*²

He may be right. The question as to why Jesus was baptized has been the subject of much speculation. It appears He was baptized for at least 3 reasons: 1st, to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). 2nd, to divinely authenticate His ministry. & 3rd, to identify with sinners. Hebrews says the Savior had to be made like His brothers in all things (2:12-14) & Isaiah tells us the Messiah had to be numbered with the transgressors (53:12). As in His incarnation, so also in His baptism, Jesus was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Physically there was no difference anyone could have seen between Jesus & anyone else. He looked & lived like any other man, except He never sinned. It seems Jesus begins His public ministry by identifying with sinful people. The Lord of glory had already humbled Himself & become a man & now He humbled Himself even further & submitted to a baptism of repentance. He did this in spite of the fact that He had no sin of which He needed to repent. But by being baptized by John, He identified with sinners whom He came to save.³ Jesus is identifying with sinners, symbolizing how He'll take our place in physical death. Just as John the

² *The Gospel According to Mark*, p 21

³ Richard Spencer, *Jesus Came*, <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/jesus-came/>

Baptizer was preparing the way of the Lord, by baptizing Jesus he's preparing the way for Jesus' substitutionary death. In Lk 12 Jesus says, **I have a baptism to undergo, & how distressed I am until it is accomplished!** (50). This baptism is the baptism of Calvary, where He'd be drenched, immersed in the wrath of God as the substitute for sinners. Isaiah 53:6 tells us, **All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.** Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, not only through His life of perfect obedience but also through His substitutionary death on the cross, in which God **made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** (2 Cor 5:21). The righteous requirement of God's law was death as a payment for sin. Jesus' death paid that debt in full (Col 2:14). Centuries earlier, Isaiah declared the Messiah would be **numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, & interceded for the transgressors** (Is 53:12; 1 Pt 3:18). In His 1st public act, the One who had no sin publicly identified Himself with those who had no righteousness. The sinless Lamb submitted to a baptism designed for sinners, a foreshadowing of the fact that He would soon submit Himself to a death deserved by sinners. Symbolically, Jesus' baptism looked forward to the cross, just as Christian baptism looks back at it. As the Lord told James & John, **You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?** (Mk 10:38). Being lowered into the water & then rising again pictured His death & resurrection. He was immersed in the river of death in order to bear the sins of those who would believe in Him. It was fitting for Him to be baptized in order that He might fulfill all righteousness, both as an act of obedience to the Father's will & as a way to identify with sinners for whom He would die as a righteous substitute.⁴ But Mark's emphasis isn't on the theological reasons Jesus is baptized, but on its aftermath. **10-11**

Mark focuses on the spectacular event that **immediately** followed Jesus' baptism. As Jesus was **coming up out of the water**, while He was praying (Lk 3:21), a dramatic scene began to unfold. This might best be described as Jesus' commissioning, the divine inauguration of His public ministry. It

⁴ John MacArthur, *Mark 1-8*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pp 32-33

included 2 elements: Visibly, the Son was anointed by the Holy Spirit & audibly, He was affirmed by His Father. Spurgeon summarized the significance of this with these words:

*As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit of God descends upon Him in a visible shape—in appearance like a dove—and rests upon Him. John says that **it abode upon Him**, as though the Spirit was thenceforth to be His continual Companion &, truly, it was so. At the same time that the dove descended & lighted upon Christ, there was heard a Voice from Heaven, saying, **This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased**. This was the voice of God the Father—He did not reveal Himself in a bodily shape, but uttered wondrous words such as mortal ears had never before heard! The Father revealed Himself not to the eyes as the Spirit did, but to the ears—and the words He spoke clearly indicated that it was God the Father bearing witness to His beloved Son. So that the entrance of Christ upon His public ministry on earth was the chosen opportunity for the public manifestation of the intimate union between God the Father, God the Son & God the Holy Spirit.⁵*

When Jesus looked up, **He saw the heavens opening**. But this wasn't a private vision given only to Him. John the Baptist, & presumably others saw it as well (Jn 1:32). Mark's description of this is dramatic. His word for *open* means *to tear* or *rip*. It's the same verb he uses to describe the tearing of the veil in the temple after Jesus' death (15:38). The imagery is reminiscent of Isaiah 64:1, where Isaiah cries out, **Oh, that You would rend the heavens & come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence**. Isaiah's prophecy anticipated the Messiah's arrival. The day would come when the sky itself would rip open & God would come down. With Mark's language, you might expect a violent scene to follow. Instead, **the Spirit like a dove was descending upon Him**. The 3rd member of the Trinity gracefully descended on the Son, providing a visible symbol of divine blessing, authentication, & empowerment at the start of Jesus' ministry. Notice that Mark doesn't say **the Spirit** is a **dove** & we shouldn't picture the Holy Spirit as eternally existing in the form of a bird. Mark's point was simply that the **Spirit** in some visible form descended upon Jesus with the gentleness of a dove landing softly on its perch. It may even suggest more than that. It could be a suggestion of the sacrifice Jesus was going to be. The poorest Jew, who couldn't afford a lamb, could come with a dove as their offering for sin (Lk 2:24). Here's the lowly Servant of God & it's a dove that lights upon Him. Whatever the case, the OT had promised **the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him** (Is 11:2). That promise was repeated by God Himself, **Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him** (Is 42:1). At Jesus' baptism,

⁵ *Lessons from Christ's Baptism*, sermon 3298, March 4, 1866

the Holy Spirit visibly anointed Him as a public declaration of His Messiahship. This raises the question, why did He, the Son of God, the 2nd member of the Trinity, need the Spirit of God? I think it's safe to say, there was never a time in the life of Jesus that He wasn't filled with the Holy Spirit. This was something more, something to enable Him to do His great work. We read in Hebs 9:14 that all Jesus' earthly ministry was **through the eternal Spirit**. Here's the issue: If Jesus needed the Spirit of God to fulfil His ministry, how much more do we need Him? As we know, Jesus was fully God. Even in His incarnation, He didn't give up His divinity. In His deity He needed nothing. But in His humanity, He was being anointed for service & empowered for ministry by the Spirit in a manner reminiscent of the words of Isaiah 61:1, **The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives & freedom to prisoners**. In His incarnation, the Son of God voluntarily laid aside the independent use of His divine attributes. The Son of God took on human flesh, humbly submitting Himself to the Father's will & the Holy Spirit's power (Jn 4:34; Phil 2:6-7).

If that's not enough, the sky being torn & the Spirit descending on Jesus, God audibly speaks, saying, **You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased** (11). Each member of the Trinity was simultaneously present at Jesus' baptism. The Son, in His humanity, physically standing in the water, the Spirit visibly descending upon Him, & the Father in heaven audibly voicing His approval, **You are My beloved Son**. No prophet had ever been told that. Prophets could be called friends of God (Js 2:23), servants of God (Dt 34:5), or men of God (1 Sam 2:27). But no prophet was ever called the **beloved** Son of God. Yet, over 50x in the gospel accounts, Jesus is called the **Son of God**. On this occasion, the testimony came from the Father Himself. His words are reminiscent of Ps 2:7, a passage the Jews regarded as messianic: **I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'** The fact that Jesus is the Son of God, as the Father declares Him to be, is central to Mark's message (1:1). It underscores the truth that He's one in essence with God, possessing the same nature as the Father. Not only is the Son equal in essence with God, but He's also **beloved** by God. This expresses the infinitely deep & eternally profound

relationship enjoyed by the Father with the Son. Though the same word is used of the Father's love for believers (Rom 1:7), the Father loves His Son above all others. It's only because believers are in the Son, that we're privileged to receive the Father's love at all (Jn 17:24–26; Eph 1:6). Having **loved** the Son **before the foundation of the world** (Jn 17:24), the Father is eternally & completely **well-pleased** with Him (Is 42:1). Jesus was well-pleasing to His Father in everything He did. In His incarnation, He perfectly submitted to the Father's will. In His death, He fully satisfied the Father's wrath. The Son would offer Himself as the final sacrifice for sinners & the Father was delighted to receive that sacrifice (Is 53:10). OT sacrifices had to be spotless & unblemished (Ex 12:5; Lev 1:3; Dt 17:1). Only the sinless Lamb of God could ever fully meet those requirements. In Israel's history, no animal sacrifice had ever ultimately pleased God or fully satisfied His wrath. That's because, as Hebrews explains, **it is impossible for the blood of bulls & goats to take away sins** (10:4; 9:12). Those sacrifices only pointed to the cross, where the Messiah Himself would be slain as the seamless substitute for sinners. Peter wrote, **You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished & spotless, the blood of Christ** (1 Pt 1:18–19). At the cross, God's justice was fully satisfied by the pure sacrifice of the Son. Thus the Father was **well-pleased** with the Son, both in His life & in His death. No higher testimony to the sinless perfection of Jesus could ever be given. God's sinless, beloved Son was anointed & empowered by the Holy Spirit to save sinners & establish His kingdom. Later in Jesus' ministry, when the religious leaders asked Him, **By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?** Jesus answered by pointing them to His baptism:

"I will ask you one question, & you answer Me, & then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." They began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From men?'"—they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. Answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." & Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Mk 11:28–33).

Because they were unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of John's ministry of baptism, & Jesus' own baptism, Jesus had nothing else to say to them. If they wouldn't recognize His commissioning, the discussion was over before it began. In essence, Jesus was saying,

If you refuse to admit that John was a prophet of God, then you won't acknowledge the reality of what occurred at My baptism, where the Spirit anointed Me & the Father affirmed Me. & if you reject that, then there's nothing else I can add to convince you about the source of My authority.

That's how critical Jesus' baptism was. It was the divine inauguration of His public ministry. Again, & don't miss it, we see the whole Trinity involved here. At the beginning of creation the whole Trinity was involved when God said, **Let Us make man in Our image** (Gen 1:26). Now as we come to the new creation, the whole Trinity again, at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is involved, saying as it were: *Let Us save mankind.*

2. Jesus' Temptation & so Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit & with His Father's approval, began His work. The 1st thing He had to do in His public ministry was to go through 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. The setting for this temptation was the **wilderness**, a place of desolation where He was far from people & provision. In a short amount of time, He'd gone from the elevated experience of His anointing by the Holy Spirit & approval of His Father, to utter isolation & depravation. Jesus had been commissioned to begin His earthly mission. At that highest moment, the Holy Spirit drove Him into the desert to face a severe, supernatural assault from hell, from Satan Himself. In all 3 Synoptic Gospels, the account of Jesus' temptation directly follows His baptism. The 2 events stand in stark contrast. Having received the royal accolades of heaven, Jesus **immediately** faced the fierce assaults of hell. His coronation by the Spirit & confirmation from the Father are followed straightaway by His confrontation with the devil. He went from knowing the Father's smile to experiencing Satan's vile. It was as if, in an instant, after the heavens being opened, that all hell was opened upon Him. Satan knows his days are numbered. He knows he's only a creature & can't defeat God. In fact, he can do nothing without God's permission. & yet, in spite of the futility of it all, he continues to oppose God. Jesus was sent into the wilderness for 40 days without food to be tempted by Satan. But God always has a purpose in bringing trials. & we know the purpose of Jesus' temptations. We are told in Heb 4:15 that **we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.** Jesus knows what it's like to endure hardship & temptation, & He was completely victorious. Let's put this into a biblical perspective & contrast the task given to Jesus with the

temptation the 1st Adam experienced. Jesus was in the wilderness; Adam & Eve were in a garden. Jesus had nothing to eat for 40 days; they had all the food they could want. He was with wild animals who would like to harm Him, whereas all of the animals in the garden were completely subject to Adam & Eve. & Jesus' temptations were unimaginably greater than the one that Adam & Eve succumbed to. & yet, by the Spirit's power, Jesus was victorious. In Mark's account there's no time for Jesus to relish the joy & glory of His baptism & commissioning. Mark's description doesn't even include a transition sentence: **12-13**

The **Spirit** here is the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus fully submitted Himself to the Spirit's control. The 3rd member of the Trinity was the power behind all that Jesus did (Lk 4:14, 18). The word **impelled** is forceful meaning *to drive out* or *to compel one to depart*. The verb fits Mark's dramatic style but doesn't imply Jesus was resistant to the Spirit's leading. Rather, it underscores the reality that the Spirit was in control, perfectly leading Jesus to fulfill each element of the Father's plan. Matthew & Luke indicate Jesus went into the wilderness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but Mark is unique in his use of this strong word, **impelled**. Jesus was driven into the desert by the Spirit. If you look down at vss 34, 39, & 43, this same word is used of Jesus casting out demons. But here it's used of the Holy Spirit as sending Jesus into the wilderness. The connotation is that the Spirit compelled Jesus forcefully & Jesus was willingly obedient. The Spirit compelled Him, not against His will, but still drove Him to that place of testing.

Why does Mark, & Mark alone, include mentioning **wild beasts**? Two main schools of thought. A detail recorded only by Mark is that Jesus was with the wild beasts in the wilderness. Since this is understood as Jesus' triumph over Satan, the reference to the **wild beasts** has been interpreted as an element in the paradise motif. Jesus in the midst of the **wild beasts** signifies the victory of the New Adam over Satan and temptation so that paradise is restored in which man is at peace with the animals.⁶ For example, one says,

Jesus was not afraid of being attacked by the leopards, lions, bears, & other wild animals that were all around throughout that wilderness area. Mark says Jesus was with them. They were His

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 61.

*companions. They comforted Him & helped Him. I can picture Jesus, His body cold from hunger, snuggled up between two mountain lions—ministered to physically by the animals.*⁷

I disagree. It seems to me Mark's reference to the **wild beasts** stresses the character of the wilderness. Jesus confronts the horror, the loneliness, and the danger with which the wilderness is fraught when He meets the wild beasts. Their affinity in this context is not with paradise, but with the realm of Satan.⁸ At the time Mark was writing his gospel to Gentile Christians in Rome, they were being thrown to wild animals. Not surprisingly, many surviving Christians were tempted to doubt their beliefs, tempted to hedge their commitment to God. But here they see Jesus facing a threat of His own such as they were facing.⁹ It was an encouragement to them that Jesus too faced **wild beasts**.

Within God's purposes, it was necessary for Jesus to be tempted by Satan himself & to resist him. The word for **tempted** is a neutral term that simply means *to test*. The testing can be good or evil depending on the intention of the one devising the test. Because Satan is the one doing the testing here, it's rightly translated by the word *tempt*. Although the Spirit led Jesus to the place where He'd be tempted, it's important to note that God is never the tempter. Js 1:13 is clear that God cannot tempt anyone. God allowed His Son to be tested for the purpose that through His victory Jesus might demonstrate His absolute power & authority over Satan. Christ's temptation didn't happen by the will of Satan. It was in the will of God & it was another way to authenticate His Son. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, & the Spirit leads us into places where we are tested & tried. 1 Cor 10 tells us: **No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it (13)**. The only way that could be true is if God has some kind of control over our temptations, & He does, complete control.

⁷ Ray Stedman, *Expository Studies in Mark 1-8*, p 32

⁸ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, p 61

⁹ Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God*, p 12

It was Jesus' duty to crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15), **to destroy the works of the devil** (1 Jn 3:8), & to depose the illegitimate **god of this world** (2 Cor 4:4). But would He be able to do that decisively when, after fasting for 40 days, He was physically weak, emotionally drained, & completely isolated? If Jesus was to be triumphant & accomplish what God had given Him to do, He had to demonstrate His victory over the devil at his cleverest while He was at His weakest. He couldn't claim absolute & complete power over sin itself if He didn't demonstrate personal power in defeating Satan Himself. His call to deliver sinners would've been meaningless if He Himself hadn't been able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one. Therefore, His public ministry began by directly confronting Satan who opposes God & all His purposes. All the Son of God had known from eternity was infinite honor, power, & divine privilege. Here, as a man at the moment of His greatest weakness, He was urged by Satan to claim what was rightfully His as the Son of God, but in a way that was contrary to the Father's plan. Would Jesus withstand such intense temptations? Would He endure the test, claim victory over Satan's schemes, & thus demonstrate His deity? Mark's concluding phrase & **the angels were ministering to Him** implies what Matthew & Luke state clearly. That Jesus triumphed over all the temptations Satan brought, emerging victorious from His isolation in the wilderness. The word **ministering** indicates these angels provided Jesus with food. But **the angels** also ministered to Him by their very presence, which served as confirmation that the Father who sent them was still well-pleased with His Son.

Obviously, there's a holy mystery regarding Jesus' temptation. His temptation was real. He wasn't tempted in His divine nature, He wasn't tempted to sin as God, He was tempted as a man. Why is that important? Because God's purpose in trying Him was so that He might overcome Satan as a man. It would be nothing for God to overcome Satan as God, but Jesus had to overcome temptation as a man, as the last Adam, to undo everything the 1st Adam did in the Garden of Eden. Because Jesus has been victorious we can be victorious as well. Jesus overcoming temptation was God's way of strengthening Him in the battle with Satan & against sin. He was the 1st man ever to resist the devil. He was the 1st man who obeyed God completely. There He stands in the wilderness, in our place, representing us, & He succeeds where Adam failed. Because of that, He can now give

strength to us to succeed also. If Jesus had abandoned His humiliation & disobeyed the Father's will & given in to Satan, He'd have demonstrated Himself to be an imposter, another false messiah, who could never have gone to Calvary to die as God's Lamb. The hope of redemption would have ended in failure & defeat. But thanks be to God, Christ's victory led to the salvation of His people & His exaltation (Phil 2:9–10).

It must be understood that this wasn't the only temptation Jesus ever experienced. Heb 4:15 explains He was **tempted in all things**, or at all points in His life, **as we are, yet without sin**. From childhood on, He faced the same enticements to sin that we all experience. Nor would this be the last time He would be tempted. In Lk 22:28, Jesus told His disciples that they were those who **stood by Me in my trials or temptations**. He was again tested in the garden as He anticipated the cross (Lk 22:53). But He was never tempted so intensely as He was in the wilderness. This was Satan's major attempt to cause Him to sin & be discredited as Messiah & Savior. This was a test & authentication of who Jesus was. It was proving the strength He would have, not just to overcome the devil in our place in temptation, but to go all the way to the cross as a perfect Man, & be our substitute, & finish the work of our salvation. There's great comfort here because this means that though sinless, perfect, & holy, Jesus is able to sympathize with our struggles with sin & with temptation, because though He never sinned, He has experienced the temptation to sin to a degree we never will. That is profound, & it is very comforting for us as sinners!

What temptation are you facing today? What temptation have you been subjected to? Maybe you've failed so many times you wonder if it's possible to have victory at all? Yes, it's possible but only through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.