

Baptism *and the* Temptations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 3:1–14; Rom. 6:1–6; Luke 3:21, 22; Luke 4:5–8; Isa. 14:13, 14; Luke 4:9–13.*

Memory Text: “And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased’ ” (*Luke 3:22, NKJV*).

As we saw last week, Luke provides a list of great historical dignitaries to, we believe, help show that his account of Jesus and John is as real and as historical as these powerful men.

But there's another important reason to mention these mighty men of power and influence. It is to contrast them with the humble man of the wilderness, John the Baptist, God's chosen messenger who was to “prepare the way” for the most significant event in all human history so far: the coming of Jesus, the world's Redeemer. How interesting that God chose not one of the world's “great” men to herald the Messiah but one of the “lowlier” ones instead.

Scholars put all these historic personalities together and give us a date close to A.D. 27 or 28 for the start of the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus. It is within the historical time frame of these Roman Empire luminaries that Jesus was baptized and received the benediction of Heaven that He is God's “beloved Son” (*Luke 3:22*). Luke establishes this fact right at the outset, even before he presents to his readers the “orderly account” of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 11.

Prepare the Way of the Lord

In Luke 3, John appears in his unique and crucial role in salvation history. Whatever else one could say about John’s preaching, he was not sugarcoating his words in order to please the crowd.

Read Luke 3:1–14. His words are filled with important truths, not just for those within earshot but for all of us. What points in particular can you take from what John is saying here?

Repentance is not just a theoretical notion. It is a way of life. The word comes from the Greek *metanoia*, which means a change of mind, and this leads to a new life.

To “baptize” means to dip or immerse fully in water. Immersion has a profound meaning. Even before the time of John, the Jews had attached meaning to baptism by immersion. It was a common practice when Gentile proselytes chose to join the Jewish faith.

In inviting Jews to be baptized, John the Baptist was setting forth a new principle: baptism is an occasion to publicly renounce one’s old sinful ways and to prepare oneself for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist thus introduced a symbolic act of renunciation of sin and consecration to a new way of life as citizens of the Messianic kingdom, which was about to be inaugurated. John was quick to add that he was baptizing only with water, but the One who was to follow him “ ‘will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’ ” (*Luke 3:16, NKJV*). Thus, a crucial point is made: baptism as an act of immersion in water is only an outer symbol of an inward change—a change that would eventually be sealed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 6:1–6. What spiritual lessons is the apostle Paul drawing out of the act of baptism? Note the comparison he makes between the act of immersion and rising out of the water with dying to sin and living for righteousness. How have you experienced the reality of this new life in Christ?

“You Are My Beloved Son”

In Luke 2:41–50, we read the famous story of Joseph and Mary’s losing sight of Jesus in Jerusalem. What’s especially fascinating is Jesus’ response to Mary when she rebukes Him (*vs. 48*). Jesus’ answer is an affirmation of His divine self-consciousness, that He is the Son of God. “ ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’ ” (*vs. 49, NKJV*). As the next verse says, Joseph and Mary didn’t grasp the implications of what Jesus had said to them. In all fairness, how could they? After all, even the disciples, after years with Jesus, were still not totally certain of who He was and what He was to do.

For example, after His resurrection, Jesus was talking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. One of them, in referring to Jesus, had said that Jesus “ ‘was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people’ ” (*Luke 24:19, NKJV*). Jesus, of course, was much more than a prophet. Even then they still didn’t grasp who He was and what He had come to do.

Read Matthew 3:13–17, John 1:29–34, and Luke 3:21, 22. What is the significance of Jesus’ baptism?

At His baptism, Heaven attested that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus sought baptism not because He needed it as part of a postrepentance process but to set an example for others (*Matt. 3:14, 15*). Three important factors stand out concerning the baptism of Jesus: (1) the Baptist’s proclamation, “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*); (2) the Holy Spirit’s anointing Him for His mission ahead; and (3) the heavenly proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased.

Think about it: the spotless Son of God, the Creator of the cosmos, was baptized by a mere human being, all part of the plan of salvation. How should this amazing condescension on His part help us to be willing to humble ourselves whenever the occasion warrants it?

Not by “Bread Alone”

“Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (*Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV*). Born for a God-ordained mission, commissioned to the task at His baptism, equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus the Christ retreated into the wilderness to contemplate the task ahead.

The temptation in the wilderness was a significant battle between Christ and Satan in the great controversy, which has raged ever since Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven. In the wilderness, when the Savior was weak from 40 days of fasting, when the journey ahead looked bleak and weary, Satan took personal command in his attack against Jesus. “Satan saw that he must either conquer or be conquered. The issues of the conflict involved too much to be entrusted to his confederate angels. He must personally conduct the warfare.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

Note what Satan said to Christ: “‘If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread’ ” (*Luke 4:3, NKJV*). **What is Satan trying to do in this account that reflects what he attempted to do in heaven?**

Bread is not the central issue here. Yes, the 40-day fasting in the wilderness must have made the Savior hungry, and Satan used that circumstance as bait. But Satan knew that Jesus is the Creator of the universe. To Him who created the universe out of nothing, making bread out of stone was not an issue. The crucial point in the temptation is found in its preface: “ ‘If You are the Son of God.’ ” Only 40 days before, the voice from heaven attested that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and now should Jesus doubt that heavenly assurance? Doubting God’s Word is the first step in yielding to temptation. In heaven Satan challenged the authority of Jesus; he does so here as well, even if in a much more subtle manner than he tried in heaven.

How can you learn not to succumb to Satan’s attempts to get you, as he tries with all of us, to doubt God’s promises?

“Worship Me”

Read Luke 4:5–8. Why would Satan want Jesus to worship Him? What crucial issue was at stake here?

Worship is the sole prerogative of God. It is the one factor that forever separates the creature from the Creator. One of the issues in Lucifer’s rebellion against God in heaven is that of worship. Lucifer’s ambition was well summarized by Isaiah 14:13, 14: to ascend to heaven, to exalt his throne above the stars of heaven, to be like the Most High. It was an attempt to usurp the authority that belongs only to the Creator and never to any creature, no matter how exalted.

In this context we can better understand what is happening in this temptation. When Jesus was about to set out on His mission to redeem the world back to God’s ownership and authority, Satan took Him to the top of a mountain, provided a panoramic view of all the kingdoms, and offered them to Him for a simple act: “ ‘If You will worship before me, all will be Yours’ ” (*Luke 4:7, NKJV*).

Satan was trying to divert Christ’s perspective from His divine priority and to entice Him with pomp and glory for no greater price than just a bow. He was trying to get here, again, the authority and worship that he failed to get in heaven.

Notice how Christ dismissed the tempter with utter contempt. “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’ ” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). Worship, and the service that goes with it, belong to the Creator God alone. Here again the Word of the Lord comes to His help. Did not Inspiration say through Moses, “ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God. . . . You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him’ ” (*Deut. 6:4, 5, 13, NKJV*)? Absolutely resolving to follow God in faith and obedience is the ultimate answer to Satan’s lies and tricks.

Any of us can face temptations to compromise our faith, even in “small ways.” Your job, your passing of a university examination, your promotion, demands a compromise in regard to Sabbath. At what point can you make a deal? When, if ever, is the price right?

Christ the Victor

Luke and Matthew reverse the order of the second and third temptations. The reason is not clear, but that need not detain us. The crucial point is the ultimate victory of Jesus over Satan, proclaimed by both Gospels. The significant factor that emerges from study of the temptations is that Jesus Christ is a real Person—tempted as we are but without sin (*Heb. 4:15*). With victory in each of the temptations, with His triumph over Satan, with the Word of God in His mouth, and connected with Heaven’s powerhouse through prayer, Jesus emerges to proclaim the kingdom of God and to inaugurate the Messianic age.

Read Luke 4:9–13 and Matthew 4:5–7. In the first two temptations, Jesus used the Scripture to overcome Satan’s enticements. Now, in the third, Satan does the same and quotes the Scripture to test whether Jesus really takes the Word of God seriously. What is happening here, and how does Jesus respond?

Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, the most sacred place in Jewish history. The city of Zion, the temple where God dwells among His people, becomes the avenue for Satan’s confrontation with Jesus. “If You are the Son of God” is once again the preface. Watch what Satan says: *If God is indeed your Father, and if your mission is indeed at His bidding, throw yourself down from the pinnacle. Surely, if all that is true, God will not let you get hurt.* He then quotes Scripture: “ ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you’ ” (*Luke 4:10, NKJV*).

Satan knows the Scripture but misinterprets it. His tactic is to lead Jesus to put God to the test. God has indeed promised the protection of His angels, but only within the context of doing His will, such as in the case of Daniel and his companions. Jesus answers Satan decisively again by using Scripture, declaring that it is not for us to put God to the test (*vs. 12*). Our duty is to place ourselves in God’s will and let Him do the rest.

Note four major biblical teachings on temptation: (1) No one is free from temptations; (2) when God allows temptations to come to us, He also provides grace to resist and strength to overcome; (3) temptations do not come the same way every time; and (4) no one is tempted beyond his or her strength to bear (*1 Cor. 10:13*).

Further Study: “If Joseph and Mary had stayed their minds upon God by meditation and prayer, they would have realized the sacredness of their trust, and would not have lost sight of Jesus. By one day’s neglect they lost the Saviour; but it cost them three days of anxious search to find Him. So with us; by idle talk, evilspeaking, or neglect of prayer, we may in one day lose the Saviour’s presence, and it may take many days of sorrowful search to find Him, and regain the peace that we have lost.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 **Temptation in itself is not sin. In the biblical sense, temptation has the potential to affirm the possibility of holiness. To be tempted is one thing; to fall into sin is another. At the same time, what is our responsibility about doing all that we can even to avoid temptation?**
- 2 **Philosophers and theologians often talk about what they call a “metanarrative,” a grand overarching story or theme in which other stories occur. To put it another way, a metanarrative is the background, the context, in which other stories and events unfold. As Seventh-day Adventists, we see the great controversy as the metanarrative or background for what has been happening, not only here on earth but in heaven as well. What texts in the Bible show us the reality of the great controversy and how it helps explain what is going on in the world?**
- 3 **What are some of the most powerful Bible texts that promise us victory over the temptations that come our way? Why, though, even with these promises, is it still so easy to fall?**
- 4 **One of the daily studies this week made the following statement: “Doubting God’s Word is the first step in yielding to temptation.” Why would that be so?**
- 5 **In what ways can idolatry be much more subtle than bowing down and worshiping something other than the Lord?**

The Witness of a House Church

ZHANG WEI,* CHINA

Zhang Wei was no ordinary citizen. He had served faithfully in the Chinese army, and as a well-respected individual he served as mayor of his village.

There came a time, however, when Zhang Wei decided to move to a large city where he could earn more money in construction.

One day as he was walking along a city street, something caught his attention—he heard singing coming from the ground level of a large apartment building. Drawing closer, he looked through the open windows and saw people singing and praying together.

Soon someone stepped outside of the apartment and invited Zhang Wei to come in. Claiming to be Buddhist, Zhang Wei was somewhat reticent to step inside; but as he was curious to learn more, he finally decided to enter this Seventh-day Adventist house church.

He noticed that many of the people had Bibles, and he wanted to learn more about this unusual book. Happily, the Adventists shared with Zhang Wei some of their most treasured Bible truths and prayed with him.

Zhang Wei often returned to the Adventist house church. One day, the subject of healthy living came up, including diet.

Explaining the biblical laws of clean and unclean meats, the members told Zhang Wei that pigs were unclean and that often the animals were infested with worms.

Not believing them, Zhang Wei decided to conduct a little experiment. Many people worked at the same construction site, and the company cook would sometimes purchase an entire pig to feed the crew.

Curious to see how unclean the pig was, when no one was looking Zhang Wei quickly took a knife and sliced the animal open—and found the swine's flesh crawling with worms from head to hoof. Shocked and disgusted, he never ate pork again.

Before long, Zhang Wei accepted all of the Bible truths and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After his baptism, however, the pastor encouraged Zhang Wei to return to his home village and let his light shine for Jesus.

Zhang Wei returned to his village where he began an Adventist house church with just one person—himself! But he started sharing the things he had learned from the Bible with others, and soon the church grew.

Today, the county where Zhang Wei lives has six Adventist churches, and three neighboring counties each have churches due to the prayers and powerful witness of Zhang Wei.

* *Not his real name.*