

The Baptism of Jesus

3:13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.

3:14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”

3:15 But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him.

People had been coming to be baptized by John because they identified with his message and anticipated the coming of the kingdom he was preaching. Confession of sin and repentance were necessary because sinful man cannot enter the kingdom without having secured forgiveness (Matt. 3:6). For that reason, John’s baptism was called a baptism for repentance.

John had trouble baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were unworthy (Matt. 3:7-10), but now he has trouble baptizing Jesus (the imperfect tense “**tried to prevent**” stresses John’s repeated attempts to stop Jesus; Osborne, 122); if anything, John should be baptized by Him!

Jesus’ reply to John tells us that He saw a God-given appropriateness in being baptized by John, but He doesn’t explain why. Jesus simply said He needed to be baptized to **fulfill all righteousness**.

As we have seen in the earlier chapters of Matthew, “to fulfill” can mean to accomplish the predictions made about Christ in the OT. But it can also mean “to bring to completion”. Here it probably means the latter. Jesus’ baptism played a specific role in Jesus fulfilling His mission and completing all that God had set for Him to do (Osborne, 123). Jesus did not come to confess and repent (cf. Heb. 4:14-15; 7:26-27; 2 Cor. 5:21), rather, He came to fulfill God’s will in God’s way.

The following explains two ways that Jesus’ baptism may have accomplished what God intended:

- If Jesus is to represent the people He has come to save, He must identify with them (France, 120). He had to be like them and experience what they experience. The Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 identifies with the people by suffering for their sins. Isaiah 53:11 even speaks of the Servant as “the righteous one” who will make many righteous (ESV) by bearing their sins. SO perhaps Jesus had to be baptized to fully identify with the people He came to save.
- There is also a moral aspect to Jesus’ baptism as well. Throughout Matthew δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) is used of the conduct that God expects of His people (France, 119). That which was right for every good man was incumbent upon Jesus. In other words, as a man, Jesus did what other good men do (Broadus, 55). He lived out His life precisely as God desired people to live.

3:16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 3:17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

While Jesus was being baptized, **the heavens were opened** and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (cf. Lk. 3:21). The opening of heaven typically indicates that God is acting, and revelation from God will follow.

“The Spirit of God descending as a dove” (3:16) describes the appearance the Holy Spirit took in His descent. Luke 3:22 says, “the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove.” There was an objective reality to what was seen. John 1:32 makes it clear that John the Baptist also saw the Holy Spirit as it was promised he would (Jn. 1:33).

The gospel of John does not record Jesus’ baptism, but John the Baptist explains its significance in John 1:29-34. Jesus was baptized so that He might be revealed to Israel as their Messiah (Jn. 1:31).

John 1:29-34

29 The next day (the day after a delegation was sent from Jerusalem to figure out who John was claiming to be – John 1:19 ff.) **he** (John the Baptist) **saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

30 “This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’

31 “I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.”

32 John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.

33 “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’

34 “I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Though Matthew focuses on the initial alighting upon Jesus, John the Baptist said that the Holy Spirit “abided” or “remained” upon Him (Jn. 1:32). This is significant for two reasons.

First, when the Jews read the OT, they saw the Spirit’s coming as the fulfillment of the promise that the Spirit would be poured out on the great Davidic king (Isa. 11:1 ff.; 61:1; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 151).

Isaiah 11:2 (Isaiah speaking) **“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him. . .”**

Isaiah 42:1 (God speaking): **“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him . . .”**

Isaiah 61:1-2a (The Messiah Speaking; cf. Luke 4:16-21)

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 And freedom to prisoners;

2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD . . .

Secondly, it was also the abiding of the Spirit that gave Jesus the ability to baptize others with the Spirit and fulfill the prophecy of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25, 26.

France summarizes:

The descent of the Spirit of God recalls well-known messianic prophecies in Isaiah which say that God will place His Spirit upon his chosen Servant (Isa.11:2; 42:1; 61:1). This is not to say that Jesus has hitherto been without the Spirit, since Matthew has attributed His birth to the Spirit (1:18, 20). But now as the Spirit “comes upon Him” Jesus is visibly equipped and commissioned to undertake His messianic mission. The one who is to “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (verse 11) must first Himself be endowed with the Spirit. If the coming of the Spirit is to be visible, however, some visual form is needed. (France, 121)

A voice out of the heavens testifies that God is again revealing Himself to man. This is a clear sign of the dawning messianic age (Matt. 17:5; Jn. 12:28; Carson, 109).

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” echoes Psalm 2:7 which is “a coronation psalm for the Davidic king, thereby showing that the anointing of Jesus by the Spirit was a messianic anointing of the King of kings (Rev.19:16)” (Osborne, 125). Jesus’ baptism did not *change* His status. He was always the Son of God, but it *identifies* Him as Messiah and ties Him to the throne of David.

On a superficial level, God’s words **“in whom I am well-pleased”** show that Jesus’ submission to John’s baptism pleased God. But it also ties to Isaiah 42:1 where God says of His Messiah, the Suffering Servant, “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” (also cf. Isa. 61:1).

The baptism of Jesus became a fitting event to begin His public ministry.

The Temptation of Jesus

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

4:2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Matthew 4:1 begins with the word **“then”** which ties Jesus’ three temptations to His baptism. The same Spirit that had descended upon Jesus now leads Him into the desert. Though the temptations came from Satan, the event was under the guidance of God. The baptism declared that Jesus was the Son of God, the King; the temptation proved that He was worthy to rule over the Kingdom of God.

The **wilderness** (desert) was essentially uninhabited land, but was also often associated with demonic activity (Isa. 13:21; 34:14; Matt. 12:43; Rev. 18:2; Carson, 112).

In Greek, the word *πειράζω* (*peirazo*) means either to test or **tempt**. The motive for such testing may be good or evil. In the former, it is often translated as “test,” in the latter case, it is usually translated as “tempt.” “Testing” or “tempting” can reveal or develop character (Gen. 22:1; Exo. 20:20; Jn. 6:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rev. 2:2), or solicit us to do evil (1 Cor. 7:5; I Thess. 3:5; Carson, 112). As in James 1:13 God tests but He does not tempt. In the temptation of Christ, Satan was soliciting Jesus to do evil, but God was testing Him to reveal that what He had just said was true; namely, that Jesus is His beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased. As in the baptism, Jesus aligns Himself with humanity, this time in experiencing temptation. However, unlike Adam and Israel, He emerges victorious. Satan’s three temptations are based on deception, each of them trying to move Jesus to act in self-interest rather than in the interest of the Father.

Key to understanding the three temptations is to realize that Jesus' responses all come from Deuteronomy 6-8, which is part of Moses' address to the Israelites before their entry into Canaan. Moses reminded them of their 40 years of wilderness wanderings that had been a time of preparation by God. During those years they had been learning what it means to obey and trust God. Among the lessons they learned was not to depend on bread alone but on the word of God (Deut. 8:3), not to test God (Deut. 6:13), and not to worship anything or anyone but God (Deut. 6:13). Now another "Son" who has been called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15) is being tested in the wilderness. His forty days of testing corresponds to Israel's forty years of testing in the wilderness, and through His testing He learns obedience and is prepared for what lies ahead.

In short, the temptation shows the parallel of Messiah's life to the nation of Israel ("God's son" – Exo. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1). During Jesus' testing He abstained from food for **forty days and forty nights** (Lk. 4:2), the same length of time as Elijah (I Ki. 19:8) and Moses (Exo. 24:28). However, more significantly, Israel was tested in the desert for *forty* years. "The story of testing in the wilderness is thus an elaborate typological presentation of Jesus as Himself the true Israel, the "'Son of God' through whom God's redemptive purpose for His people is now at last to reach its fulfillment" (France, 128).

"At the same time Jesus' hunger introduces us to a number of ironies to which Matthew more or less explicitly alludes: Jesus is hungry (Matt. 4:2), but feeds others (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:29-39); He grows weary (Matt. 8:24), but offers others rest (Matt. 11:28); He is the King Messiah but pays a tribute (Matt. 17:24-27); He is called a devil, but casts out demons (Matt. 12:22-32); He dies the death of a sinner but comes to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21); He is sold for thirty pieces of silver, but gives He gives His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28); He will not turn stones into bread for Himself (Matt. 4:3-4) but gives His own body as bread for people (Matt. 26:26)" (Carson, 112).

4:3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

**4:4 But he answered, "It is written,
"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

By calling Satan "**the tempter**" Matthew clues the reader into what Satan is attempting.

"**If you are the Son of God**" ties the temptation to 3:17 ("This is My beloved Son"). "The special relationship with God which has just been authoritatively declared at the Jordan is now under scrutiny" (France, 127).

In Greek, the "**if**" phrase is not a statement doubting the sonship of Christ, but is a logical assumption (Liefeld, 863; Carson, 112). That is, Satan is *not* questioning that Christ is the Son of God, rather he is suggesting that it is unworthy for Him to suffer hunger as the Son of God . . . and it is not even necessary - "speak that these stones may become loaves." Surely sonship involves the right to fulfill one's own needs (Broadus, 63).

Jesus' answer to Satan comes from Deuteronomy 8:3. "**It is written**" is in the perfect tense, meaning "it stands written" (Broadus, 64). What was written then is still true now.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus' answer helps us to understand the exact nature of the temptation placed before Him. Eating bread to fulfill need is not in itself sinful. But in this case, it was contrary to the will of God. Satan wanted Jesus to meet His own needs in spite of God's will. Thus, Jesus is not saying that the Word of God is spiritual food that sustains us, as so many interpret it. Rather, *He is saying that doing the will of God as revealed in His word was more necessary than food. Obedience to God's will takes precedence over self-gratification.* "

Jesus use of this OT text shows that He understood His hunger as God's will for Him at that time, and therefore not to be evaded by a self-indulgent use of His undoubted power as the Son of God" (France, 131).

When Israel hungered in the desert, God sustained them supernaturally with manna, but their hunger was to show them that hearing the word of God and obeying it is more important than food (Deut. 8:2-3). God had sustained Jesus by supernatural means as well. But the difference between Israel and Jesus was that Israel demanded bread and died in the wilderness (Exo. 16:1-5). Jesus, the True Son, denied Himself bread and fulfilled the will of God. God's son, Israel, failed, but the Son of God would never fail (Carson, 112).

Both Jesus' and Israel's hunger taught a lesson (Deut. 8:3). Both tests were designed by God (Deut. 8:3, 5; Exo. 4:22) to prove their loyalty and obedience (Matt. 4:1; Deut. 8:2). It was only after they were hungry that they were fed – and then in God's good time, not at their convenience.

4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

4:6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,'

and

"On their hands they will bear you up,

lest you strike your foot against a stone."

4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written,

'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

In the second temptation Satan once more recognizes Jesus' special sonship and tries to use it against Him. As with the first temptation, Jesus' relationship to the Father is under scrutiny.

This temptation takes place in Jerusalem **on the pinnacle of the temple**. This was the highest point, probably the corner of the southeast side of the temple's outer portico that looks hundreds of feet down into the Kidron Valley. Some believe this was a vision, but it is hard to see how Jesus would be tempted to throw Himself off the temple in a vision to prove God's care for Him. How would that really prove anything when Jesus' life wasn't really in danger? At the same time, it is hard to imagine Jesus literally being transported from the wilderness to the temple.

Satan's temptation comes by him quoting Psalm 91:11-12. This is a psalm written to all believers and conditioned upon making the Most High their Dwelling (Psa. 91:9). It promises that if we make God our refuge and take shelter under His wings, God will protect us. Though we may be threatened by dangers along the way, God will give His angels charge concerning us so that no evil will befall us. However, this is not an invitation to deliberately place ourselves in danger in order to obligate God to act and prove that He will keep His promise.

Jesus' reply, "**Do not put the Lord God to the test**" reveals the nature of this second temptation. Satan misapplied scripture in hopes that Jesus would test God. Jesus didn't doubt that God had the ability to save Him from such a fall, but He knew that scripture forbid testing God in such a way. Jesus' response is from Deuteronomy 6:17 but also alludes to Exodus 17:2-7 where the Israelites put the Lord to the test by failing to trust God and demanding water. For both Israel and Jesus, demanding something from God as proof of God's care is wrong. The appropriate response is trust and obedience.

4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

4:9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

**"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."**

4:11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Lastly, Satan offers Jesus **the kingdoms of the world**. In Luke 4:5 it says that Jesus was taken there "in an instant," probably indicating that this time a vision was involved, for there is no literal mountain from which all the kingdoms of the world can be seen. However, it could be a high mountain like Mount Nebo where Moses surveyed the Promised Land. In that case, "all the kingdoms of the world" is not intended to mean every single kingdom in the world.

In Luke 4:6 Satan told Jesus, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to." Jesus does not challenge the claim nor does He accept it. The world is the Lord's and all that it contains (Psa. 24:1), however, Satan *is* called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and this world is said to be under his power (1 Jn. 5:19). That is, Satan is the ruler of this world in a moral sense and the world under his influence leaves God out of its thinking. Therefore, to the extent that God has allowed Satan to exercise his authority, Satan's claim was legitimate. Yet the picture he paints is a distorted view of reality. He only shows the splendor of the kingdoms of the world without showing their sin.

This time Satan's temptation is blatant and the price tag is incredibly high. He offers power by means of worshipping God's rival, a shortcut that bypasses the suffering of the cross. God alone deserves worship and Jesus declares it. The kingdoms of the world will be Christ's, but at another time, in another age (Rev. 11:15).

"**You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve**" is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:13 (the third time Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6-8). In Deuteronomy 6:10-19 God warned Israel that He is a jealous God and will punish the nation severely if they commit idolatry.

With this last temptation Jesus commands Satan to leave. When Jesus takes charge, the battle ends instantly. Nevertheless, Luke 4:13 says, that Satan left Him "until an opportune time." Though Satan had failed, he continued to look for an opportune time to try again. But the pattern of obedience and trust had been established at the beginning of his ministry would continue throughout His life. He had resisted the devil and Satan had fled (Ja. 4:7). He had refused to place Himself in a position that demanded angelic help; He had refused to use His power to satisfy personal need contrary to the will of God, and He had rejected Satan's offer to messianic rule. He had "made the Most High His Dwelling." Only then do the angels come to His aid.

Satan is often pictured by Christians as a superhuman so much more powerful than we are that we have no chance against him. That is not the picture in the NT. Satan was defeated once for all at the cross (Rev. 5:6; 12:11) and “knows that his time is short” (12:12); Armageddon (19:17-21; cf. 20:7-10) is not his final defeat but is only the last act of defiance by an already defeated foe. Satan cannot overpower the believer but can only deceive (12:9; 20:3), and even that is controlled by God (1 Cor. 10:13). The believer can always “resist” him by depending on God’s strength (Ja. 4:7). The “roaring lion” who looks for “someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8) does so via a flood of temptation (Rev. 12:15), from which God will deliver those who trust in him (Osborne, 136).

Though Jesus was victorious He was weak and hungry and angels provided Him with the sustenance He had refused in verse 4. Thus, the angels fulfill their protective role as it was promised in the devil’s quotation from Psalm 91:11 (France, 136).