

The Life of Christ

*Sponsored by:
The Christadelphians*

*Learn to Read the Bible Effectively
Life of Christ Seminar
Week 4 - Preparing for the
Messiah's Ministry*

SECTION 10

The Ministry Begins

At the age of 30, Jesus came to John for baptism. 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)

So now Jesus made the journey from Nazareth in Galilee, specifically for the formal beginning of His public life of ministry.

All four Gospel writers record the baptism of Jesus: Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23; John 1:32. All four record 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 were baptized, confessed their sins.

Without such a confession of faith and repentance, a baptism was invalid, as far as John the Baptist was concerned. Matthew, chapter 3, verses 5-12, provides a burning indictment by John, of those who perceived baptism as simply a means to escape the wrath or judgement of God, without any change or repentance in themselves.

The self-righteous Pharisees and the Hellenizing Sadducees presented themselves before John for baptism. The former considered themselves as holy, superior, and apart from all others. (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 baptize such individuals would be to baptize those who were ignorant of its meaning. He, therefore, refused them baptism. They saw themselves as descended from Abraham, and, therefore, people of privilege. He saw them as a "generation of vipers," who needed desperately to depart from the thinking of the flesh and show repentance in their lives. It remains true today that, unless repentance exists, baptism should still be refused.

It is upon this solemn note, the need for denial of the flesh, 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. Despite their blood relationship, he and Jesus had not grown up together. It is possible that they may not have met often, for later John told the Pharisees: "I knew Him not" (John 1:31).

Putting this background together with the brief accounts in the four Gospels, we can reconstruct the scene, using Matthew's record as the basis.

"Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? 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." Matt: 3:13-15

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, of course, was "I am sinless."

John's response to this is quite logical. In other words, "in that case I have need to be baptized of you, for not even I can claim to be sinless. Why do you come to me?"

Why Should Jesus be Baptized?

Since Jesus was sinless, one might 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 fulfill all righteousness.*"

By this act, Jesus associated Himself openly with the sinners He came to save. By it He proclaimed the essential oneness of His nature with theirs. Jesus was declaring a recognition and disowning of the source from which sin comes: - - - the flesh.

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 set forth what was true of His whole life - He "was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:25)

The Response from Heaven

The record describes how, when Jesus was baptized, He "...went up immediately from the water..." (Matt: 3:16), whereupon remarkable events are described. 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 the Gospel writers, that this dove was a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit or Power

coming upon Jesus. Jesus' Father 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, and ended abruptly with his death at the hands of Herod.

But he did receive his sign and was able to boldly declare who Jesus was:

“And John bore witness saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And 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.’ And I have seen, and have born witness that this is the Son of God.” John 1: 32-34

In addition to this sign, the Bible record confirms that God did manifest His Spirit in visible form on another occasion, when He was endowing men with it. All 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.

Acts 2:1-4

“And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues, as of fire, distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...”

And so, 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 fulfillment of prophecy from the prophet Malachi. Malachi foretold the work of both John and Jesus and includes these words:

“...test me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.” Malachi 3:10

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 witness has set His seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent, speaks the words of God; for He gives

the Spirit without 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 fulfillment of the prayer recorded in Isaiah's prophecy:

"Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down..." Isa. 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 surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession." Psalm 2:7, 8

The voice further said *"...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 chosen One in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."* Isaiah 42:1

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.

"...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." John 3:5

SECTION 11

The Wilderness Temptation

The Lord's public work lasted 3 and a half years. John verifies this by recording four Passovers (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 12:1). His struggle against the sinfulness of all mankind began with His introduction to the nation.

When Jesus was baptized, God publicly acknowledged that He was His Father. (Luke 3:22) At that point, He became empowered with His Father's Spirit - the creative and limitless power of God was now available to Him to manifest His Father and bring the light of life to this sinful, condemned world of darkness.

"...for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3: 34-36

Three Gospels record the temptation. (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1-13). Both Matthew and Luke provide details relative to the temptation that Jesus faced during this period in the wilderness, after His baptism. Luke's phrase, "all the temptation" (chapter 4:13), better rendered as "every temptation", makes it clear that his record is concerned more with every kind of temptation by which men are provoked to sin. 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: (Mark 1:12)

"And immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness."

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 He was driven. Through the wonder of God's word, we are privileged to witness the conflict and the final decision. 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 the need to take a long hard 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 provide lessons for us.

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 into 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). Some (ex. Josephus) have suggested that it was after the invincible champion of the Philistines, Goliath, had presented his challenge for 40 days that he was slain by the valiant David (1Sam.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 fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy about the Messiah:

"Thou doest make Him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, and also 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 second 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." There 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 fulfillment of the Scriptures that point forward to that wonderful future, and 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 impelled to go into the wilderness by 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 for presentation as the first born. (Luke 2:25-27)

We also learn that all 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 days lengthened into weeks, His physical needs 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 He was made in all points like His brethren, and His victory shows that He triumphantly withstood the assault of sin. 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 gave welcome and encouragement to these ideas. Sin never developed, as every inclination to evil was overcome. The record of God's Word testifies to these two points.

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” Hebrews 4:15

“For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” Hebrews 2:18

In the record of Jesus' experience in the wilderness, we find that a powerful message is being given to us through His own personal example. The more we allow fleshly instincts to occupy our thoughts, the greater the danger of compromise, and the desire to make terms with it is the first sign of defeat. 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, and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:16, 17,

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

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [lust of the flesh], and that it was a delight to the eyes [lust of the eyes], that the tree was desirable to make one wise, [pride of life], she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” Genesis 3:6

The temptations of Jesus are presented on 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 as the Son of Man, humanity’s representative, was to triumph at the points at which all other men fall.

In this way the record portrays Jesus as the second Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. Eve desired at first to fulfill God’s law (Gen. 3:2,3) but she came to believe that she could be like God. (Gen. 3:5) So, believing the serpent instead of trusting in God, she fell, and Adam fell with her.

The first temptation of Jesus was more subtle than it appears.

“...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:

“...It is written, ‘man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceedeth out of 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. He would later exhort His disciples:

“Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’...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 faith by committing His needs into the hands of His Father, and showed 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, it still had to be successfully challenged. Jesus was tempted to 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 indeed 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. Matthew 4:7

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

This quotation, used by Jesus, provides another echo back to a time of trial in the wilderness. When Moses, during the final months of the period in the wilderness, 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 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 Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways.”**

Jesus was committed to going the way His Father appointed. Any other way would be a faithless rebellion, and would be to tempt or try God – to put Him to the test. 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 publicly 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 is the Father's way, and in this way, Jesus **was** kept by angels, who were even now waiting to minister to Him in the wilderness.

But first would come the final trial, to consider forsaking the way of God and accepting temporal rewards of the flesh. 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 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 the flesh. With the supreme and relentless discipline of spirit, Jesus banished the temptation:

“Begone Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.” 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 follow and serve only His Father. He would not follow the ways of men, worshipping the things of this world - the broad highway that 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 rigors of the wilderness to tempt us to make stones into bread. Most people live by bread alone, and do not discover until too late that all is vanity and vexation of Spirit. It is a supremely important lesson that a life in Christ is more than meat and the body is more than raiment or clothing.

“For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is life not more than food, and the body than clothing?” Matthew 6:25

The Temptations Renewed

But in later days temptations were to return, always defeated by Jesus' resolute devotion to His Father's will.

“And when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” Luke 4:13

How many times Jesus was assailed with such allurements during His ministry, it is impossible to say, but several 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.

The student is invited to trace these 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 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 had once believed in Him, were now the adversaries, tempting Him to take His rightful place immediately. Jesus could have accepted this greatness, but instead He went up into a mountain, not to contemplate the kingdom He might have, and its glory, but to seek in prayer the strength to thrust the temptation away – again!

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, thus turning their bitterness to awe. Instead, He quietly evaded them and got away. (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, as He appealed to His Father to **“let this cup pass.”** But once again, devotion to His Father's will, immediately stifled this thought and He declared that His Father's will was to prevail. (Matthew 26:39)

In that same garden, His word about 12 legions of Angels, alert to save Him from His enemies, was no dramatic flourish, but literal truth. He knew, without a doubt, that He had but to speak the word and His Father's support would have been there. But this

calling upon Divine help would have frustrated the Divine purpose, so He meekly allowed Himself to be taken. But the thought obviously was in His mind. (Matt. 26:53-56) And on the cross, He had to listen to the taunts and jeers of men, as they mocked Him with the challenge: Matthew 27:41-43

“...The Chief Priests also, along with the Scribes and Elders, were mocking Him, and saying, He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; Let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, I am the Son of God.”

What tremendous temptation did these adversaries present, for Jesus knew that He could have done what they said. Yet if He had come down, He would have failed in following God’s will, and through disobedience, He would not have saved anyone.

In Matthew, chapter 16, verses 1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees are the adversaries, tempting Him 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 faithful Peter was at one point classed as Satan by Christ, when the disciple sought to persuade Him to leave out all thought of rejection and suffering, and to ensure for Himself the crown which was His by right. 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 fashion:

“But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s”

Some of the records, such as this one, emphasize very much the loneliness of Jesus at times 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: Luke 22:28

“Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations”

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

The source of the Temptation?

Reading the Gospel record of Christ’s temptation, many have concluded that this Satan confronting Jesus in the wilderness was a personal, supernatural devil, the primeval rebel against the supremacy of God.

A second consideration put forward by some is that Satan 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 to test or question him. As custodians of the law, it

was their function to test the credentials of anyone claiming to speak on behalf of God. They had sent a deputation to John the Baptist for this purpose (John 1:19-28). Some feel that they would treat Jesus in this same manner.

A third consideration is that these thoughts 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 yet untested.

In considering these three alternatives, there are certain factors that we should consider:

Mark states that all three temptations took place in the wilderness, so 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. Even so, there is no mountain in the area, or even in the world, that is high enough to overlook all the kingdoms.

Also, 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.

A personal, super-human devil, could present no challenge to Jesus, as He would recognize him for what he is. 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 on this promise.

Certainly, in any case, the temptation had to be real, and ultimately HAD to arise in Jesus' heart and mind, or it would be no temptation at all. The third scenario seems most likely, and most consistent with Scripture.

Regarding this, we invite you to consider what the Bible has to say about such tempters and temptation in general. Review these Biblical statements at your own leisure, comparing them against related Biblical references, and 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, it can be seen from a concordance, to mean pagan idols. Example, Psalm 106:37,38.)

In all the Old Testament, God never warns His people against a supernatural monster which tempts them to sin. Man, alone, is held responsible for his sins.

Genesis 6:5 “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Isaiah 59:2 “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”

The New Testament does use the word “devil” from a Greek word “Diabolis” meaning a “false accuser”; or “slanderer,” and is sometimes used of human beings.

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

1 Timothy 3:11 “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers (Diabolis), sober, faithful in all things.”*

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 our English Bibles, it is rendered as “adversary” or transliterated as, “Satan.”

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

1 Kings 11:25 “So he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon...”

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

These three uses of the original words do not suggest that devil or Satan is the name of a supernatural being.

In the temptation of Christ, the words “devil” and “Satan” are used interchangeably.

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

Mark 1:13 “And He was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan...”

The meanings “false accuser,” “slanderer,” and “adversary” would certainly describe the nature of the temptations. Other records in the New Testament tell us who or what Jesus was contending against all during His ministry and His crucifixion. Example:

Hebrews 2:14 “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil;”

We are told, here, that Jesus shared our flesh and blood nature in order to destroy the devil which had the power of death. Note: Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death...”

Numerous Scriptural records define for us exactly what has the power of death.

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

Romans 7:8 “But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind...”

Romans 7:11 “For sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.”

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

James 1:15 “...when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

James, among others, defines the source of sin.

James 1:14 “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”

Mark 7:21-23 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, Deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

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

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

Finally, we might look at what Jesus did destroy in His death.

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

Hebrews 10:12 “But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.”

Romans 8:3 “...God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.”

From these verses, one can see that the battle that Jesus was fighting was with His own flesh and blood nature, which tempts us to please ourselves instead of God. The human desires which were conquered in the temptation were destroyed at Calvary. This was done 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, and its temptations, which 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. Examples:

Wisdom is personified as a woman:

Proverbs 9: 1,2 “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table;”

Proverbs 3:13-18 “How blessed is the man who finds wisdom...she is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand...she is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.”

Sin is personified as a master and a King.

John 8:34 Jesus said - “...I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”

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

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

1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are Christ’s body...”

2 Corinthians 11:2 “...I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”

Riches are personified as a master.

Matthew 6: 24 “No man can serve two masters... ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

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 turned into sin because of Jesus’ association with His Father and His knowledge of the ways and Word of God. God’s counsel was always with Him, guiding Him to distinguish immediately between right and wrong, - - - rejecting evil instantly.

We have been provided with the written Word of God. If it is a daily meditation, it will keep us closer to God and 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 from Him, even for a time. Psalm 1:1-3

SECTION 12

The Apostles

The disciples of Jesus were not selected all at once, but in ones and twos. The first of them were disciples of John the Baptist, who directed them to Jesus. As the disciples continued with Jesus, their knowledge of God's Word greatly increased. They learned from Him that true discipleship requires that a man must put God first in His life. As time progressed, it was necessary to select from among the disciples, twelve men, who would be especially charged with the responsibility of preaching and upholding the truth of the Word. These men were called the Apostles. It is John's Gospel which provides detail regarding the call of the first disciples.

His record would indicate that a change had come over John the Baptist's preaching after the baptism of Jesus. It is reflected in the Baptist's increasingly abrupt negatives to a deputation who had been sent from the Pharisees to inquire concerning his identity:

"Who are you?" - - - "I am not the Christ."

"Are you Elijah?" - - - "I am not"

"Are you the Prophet?" - - - "No." John 1:19-21

It would appear that he was now determined to stand back in the shadow of the revealed Messiah, simply identifying himself as:

"...a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord..." John 1: 22,23

Now that Jesus had been made manifest to him, he minimized the importance of his form of baptism, which does not purify, but simply prepared men's hearts for the reception of the Christ. (John 1:26)

The deputation departed. The destiny of Israel depended upon the nation's recognition of the Messiah when He came. The gulf between the Baptist and the leaders was a tragic indication of the coming conflict which was to lead to the death of the Prophet, the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, and centuries of suffering for the Jewish race.

It was the day following this confrontation that Jesus emerged from the path along which He had disappeared six weeks before. He came fully prepared for the world and its sin. His armour had been tested and approved.

John had beheld Jesus then, and he knew Him. The divinely appointed sign at Jesus' baptism left no doubt in the Baptist's mind, but at the very moment of recognition, Jesus had departed into the wilderness.

Once again confronted by the Messiah, John knew that his work of preparation was over. All that remained for him to do was to direct men from himself to their Saviour.

*“...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”
John 1:29*

This was his declaration to all those who had followed him to this point. Jesus was the one through whom men would be reconciled to God – identified as the Lamb of God!

In Eden, Adam was told that fig leaves could not cover his sin - only coats of skins (i.e., only a divinely provided slain Lamb, would be capable of this.) Genesis 3:7, 21.

Lambs were slain to deliver Israel's first born when those of Egypt were destroyed. (Exodus 12:12, 13) Lambs were offered every morning and every evening as daily burnt offerings. (Numbers 28:3,4)

The nations destiny centered on the slain Lamb. To the thoughtful Israelite, aware of his nation's history and ritual, no higher tribute could be paid a man than to call him “the Lamb of God.”

The First Disciples

Another day passed. The Baptist was standing with two of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and probably John, the writer of the Gospel record. The absence of identification in this narrative is characteristic, for John never refers directly to himself, or his brother, or his parents, in his Gospel account. (e.g., John 13:23; 19:26) Seeing Jesus, the Baptist once again identified Him as the “Lamb of God.” (John 1:35-37)

Jesus apparently carried on walking, and these two disciples began to follow Him. The last glimpse that John ever had of Jesus was as He walked away that day with two of John's own disciples moving to overtake him. They followed Him because He was declared to be the “Lamb.” (Bible echo - Revelation 14:4)

We see Jesus turn and wait for them, asking them “What do you seek?” Their response, in asking where He dwelt, revealed their desire to know more about Him, to share His company, to prolong this time with Him. He invited them to **come and see**, and they stayed with Him the whole day.

We can only imagine what stirred their hearts during that time, and the instruction that they received. They obviously became very excited about their association with Jesus, and wanted to share their discovery with their loved ones. The two of them went off in search of their brothers, Andrew, seeking his brother Simeon, and John, his brother James. Once again, we observe this characteristic of John's record in not mentioning

himself or his family by name. Read carefully, and we find the subtle reference to John's seeking for James, when he says that Andrew "found his own brother first." (John 1:41)

The words tumbled out of Andrew as he said to Simon, we have found the Messiah. Simon went with him without hesitation.

Simon was at once made aware that he was in the presence of the Lord, for without any formal introductions, Jesus told Simon that He knew him already: "You are Simon," (John 1:42). Jesus went on to say that Simon would be called "Cephas" (or Peter) which is translated as a "stone."

The experiences of life, in service to His master, would make their mark upon Simon. His name, like his nature, would change. His eager, impetuous, disposition would eventually be replaced by the rock-like stability that he ultimately displayed.

Bible Echoes

Jesus now had four followers, Andrew, Peter, John, and James.

No matter how limited their education was, Jewish children were taught about the Prophets and Law through the Synagogue as they were being brought up. It is interesting to consider what prophetic Scriptural echoes they might have perceived regarding Jesus in even the short time that they had heard about Him and known Him. Here are six suggested echoes that when reviewed will enhance the picture of Jesus that develops as we proceed through the Gospel narrative. See: Isaiah 11:1,2; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 53:6; Isaiah 40:1-11; Malachi 3:1; Malachi 4:5. As you read these passages try to relate them to the lessons so far presented in this course.

Further Disciples are Called

Yet another day followed, and Jesus determined to leave Judea and go into Galilee, some 50 or 60 miles to the north. Before He left, Jesus found Philip. We are told, simply, that He said "Follow me." Whatever else occurred, Philip was so enthused that he found his friend Nathanael, proclaiming to him:

"We have found Him of whom Moses and the Law, and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph." John 1:45

Although skeptical, Nathanael went with him, accepting Philip's invitation to "**come and see.**" Nathanael's doubts were removed as, before He even spoke, Jesus recognized him and told him what he had been doing when Philip found him. Nathanael's response was instantaneous:

"Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." John 1:45-49

But Jesus pressed the point even further, telling Nathanael that he would see even greater things than these, and then added:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John 1:51

In this statement, Jesus was providing a foreshadowing of the great glory that was to arise out of this simple beginning. Even now, power has been given to Jesus (Matthew 28:18; 1 Peter 3:22), but He is to come as judge, (John 5:27), with God’s Angels (Matthew 25:31), who will assist Him in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Nathanael received this foreshadowing along with the word that he would be there to share in the day of Christ’s glory.

So the Church of Christ began, six sincere men, in humble circumstances, with no religious standing, but an earnest longing for the Messiah.

The Final Selection of the Twelve

As Jesus went forward, His words and His works attracted men to Him, and slowly but surely the band of disciples grew, as when Matthew left his tax booth at Capernaum. (Luke 5:27-29). The final gathering of the twelve Apostles developed slowly over the early period of Jesus’ preaching.

As we look at the records in Luke, chapter 5, verses 1-11, Matthew 4:18-22, and Mark 1:16-20, we see that some of the earliest disciples had returned for a time to their occupations as Jesus continued His work of preaching and miracles.

Luke 5, verse 1, sets a scene for us. Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret preaching to a multitude who were pressing in around Him.

Simon and Andrew, James and John, were working close to the lake shore, within hearing of Jesus. They had fished all day, but had caught nothing. They were occupied in washing and mending their nets.

To escape the press of the crowd, Jesus boarded Simon’s boat and requested him to move off the shore a bit so that He could teach the people from the ship.

When He had finished speaking, He instructed Simon to move the boat out into deeper water, and again set down the nets.

The result was a miraculous catch of fish, which astonished the four disciples, and left Simon Peter overcome with a sense of unworthiness. Jesus demonstrated to them that from that time forward they were to become fishers of men, sharing in His work of spreading the Good News from God.

The lesson that they were taught deeply impressed them. It should not be lost upon us. The most important ‘work’ for us to do is to share the Gospel message with others.

As time passed, more and more people, men and women, attached themselves to Jesus as He went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, working among them by miracles and signs.

With time passing, the need arose to plan for the future. If the work upon which Jesus was engaged was not to die out, others would have to be especially taught and charged to keep it alive.

These men were to be the Apostles. An Apostle is “one sent,” or a “messenger,” whereas a disciple is “one taught” or “a learner.”

The task facing Jesus was to take from among His disciples, twelve Apostles - one for each of the Tribes of Israel. It was a difficult task, and the whole of the night before, He spent alone in prayer upon the mountain. Even the Son of God did not make difficult decisions without seeking the blessing of His Father. We, too, should endeavour to make our decisions only after consulting God, and seeking His will.

Luke, chapter 6, verses 12 to 16, gives a concise account of this selection. When it was day, Jesus descended from the mountain, and called to Him His disciples and from them He selected twelve Apostles.

Bible Echo and a Foreshadowing

Joshua, a type of Christ, had taken 12 stones out of the river Jordan as a token that the people of Israel were now dedicated to the task of turning the land of promise into a Kingdom of God. After they had crossed over, he replaced the stones with twelve new stones set in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the feet of the Priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. (Joshua 4:1-9)

Now, the greater Joshua, Jesus, had chosen His twelve, the first being Peter (a stone). These twelve, who also came new born out of a Jordan baptism, were to become the foundation stones of a new Jerusalem. (Foreshadow - Revelation 21:14)

The Twelve Apostles

By comparing the lists of names given in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; and Acts 1:13, with Luke 6:14-16, it may be seen that they are grouped in 3 lots of 4 each (see below). Some things that may be noted from these lists deserve special mention:

- 1. Simon Peter always appears first, and Judas Iscariot last.**
- 2. Bartholomew appears to be the name given to Nathanael.**

3. The term “Kananite” in “Simon the Kananite” does not mean “Canaanite.” It comes from a Hebrew word “Kineah” meaning zeal, and describes the same person as “Simon Zelotes” (i.e. Simon the Zealot).
4. Eleven of the twelve came from Galilee. Only Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor, coming from Judah. Iscariot is “Ish Kerioth,” meaning man of Kerioth, i.e. in the southern border of Judah. (Joshua 15:25)

FOUR LISTS OF APOSTLES OF CHRIST in the order listed by the writers				
Matthew 10:2-4		Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:12-19	Acts 1:13
Simon	brothers	Simon	Simon	Peter
Andrew		James	Andrew	James
James	brothers	John	James	John
John		Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip		Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew		Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas		Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew		Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James son of Alphaeus		James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus		Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananaean		Simon the Cananaean	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
Judas Iscariot		Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

- Each list is different, showing that one writer did not copy from the other.
- Even the two lists by Luke are different.
- Each list has the same framework, showing that the disciples were organized into three ‘teams’ of four members each.
- ‘Team one’ was the inner circle consisting of two sets of brothers.
- ‘Team two’ may have handled arrangements such as meals.
- The New Testament writers came from ‘Teams one’ and ‘Team two’.
- Judas came from ‘Team three’.

Growth in Christ

An Apostle may be different from a disciple, but he never stops learning. The difference between him and a disciple is in the charge committed to him. When Jesus selected His Apostles, He went with them to a level spot on the hill, where they and the rest of the disciples sat around Him - the multitudes who had come to hear Him and to be healed also being present and listening - and He delivered to them the instruction known as The Sermon on the Mount, which will be considered in later sections.

LESSONS FOR US

There is tremendous encouragement for each one of us as we consider the record of Christ's gathering of His early followers. We note that as soon as they became interested in following Him, He turned to them, prepared to offer them guidance and instruction, inviting them to go with Him. We, today, are invited to seek Him and learn of Him through the Gospel Word, in the full confidence of knowing that an eager desire to learn of His truth will be rewarded with understanding.

We should also take note of the record regarding the eagerness with which these early followers desired to share the wondrous blessing of Jesus with their friends and those around them.

“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.” Matthew 7:7,8

SECTION 13

Transformation

In reviewing the final selection of the twelve Apostles, we moved forward in time through Christ's ministry. In this section, we go back to the days immediately following the calling of His first six disciples.

Jesus and His disciples left Bethabara, where John the Baptist was, and went to Cana of Galilee, where He performed His first miracle. This was on the third day following the call of Nathanael. Following His visit to Cana, He went down to Capernaum with His family and disciples, staying there for a few days (John 2:12).

Following this He went to Jerusalem to observe the Passover for what was to be the virtual commencement of His public ministry. There, He cleansed the Temple, and performed many miracles, which led to the visit of Nicodemus. In this section, we consider these events and their meaning. Only John records this period and series of events. (John 2: 1-25; 3:1-21)

John, throughout his Gospel never refers to the miracles of Jesus by any other word than "sign." He only records eight such signs in his entire Gospel and all of them contain special meaning when we investigate their symbolism. All eight could be looked upon as enacted parables. In this manner, the first miracle as a sign at the wedding feast in Cana.

Water into Wine

While in Cana, Jesus and His disciples were invited to a wedding. His mother, Mary, was also there. Her concern about the fact that they ran out of wine would suggest that she was probably a relative of the family involved in the wedding. In those days, in the land of Israel, it was customary for the marriage feast to last for some days. Hospitality was extended on a lavish scale. To fail in this regard was considered to be a disgrace.

As John describes it, when this situation arose, Mary went to Jesus saying to Him: "They have no wine." (John 2:1-3)

We find here a reminder of the second wilderness temptation over again, involving the use of the power of the Holy Spirit to create some sensation which would attract attention and present Him with an eager audience of listeners.

Jesus' response would appear to be a refusal to comply with her request: "Woman...my hour has not yet come." She nevertheless instructed the servants to follow His directions.

It was necessary for Jesus to remind her that His Father was directing His course of life, not his mother. From John's further narrative, we can deduce that Jesus knew that it was in Jerusalem that He would make His first public impact. This would be a foreshadowing of His final hour in Jerusalem when He would be crucified, and of the time when He will return once again to Jerusalem in glory at the end of the age to assume His throne and to establish His Father's Kingdom.

However, Jesus does not fail Mary, but He makes it clear to her that His actions will always be independent of the slightest human attempt to influence them. They will be a holy submission of a Son to His Father. On that day in Cana, the crisis would be averted and the feast would proceed joyfully, not because of the pleading of a woman, or the honour of a bridegroom, but to manifest the glory of the Son. (John 2:11)

We should note in passing, that there is no harshness in addressing His mother as "woman." It was often used in expressions of courtesy and respect, and in tenderness. Indeed, Jesus would use it again when He looked down upon His mother, in caring concern, from the cross.

He instructs the servants to fill the six stone water pots with water. They would then draw some out and take it to the head waiter, who proclaims it to be the finest of wine.

Only the servants and Mary would have been aware of this miracle of transformation, and yet John, in concluding this account, states that with the manifestation of His glory, His disciples believed in Him. (2:11)

One might ask how they could appreciate the miracle and have it confirm their belief in Jesus, unless they witnessed it? The Greek word for "servants" smoothes out this difficulty. It is not necessarily a word normally used for servants in the domestic sense. This same Greek word is used in later New Testament writings in reference to those who serve or minister in the Church. (e.g. Romans 13:4; Phil. 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Romans 16:1) It is quite probable that Jesus' six disciples were the "servants" who filled the pots with water.

There are several significant points about this incident and the way John records it, which help us to seek out and understand the full meaning from this simple narrative as recorded in John 2:1-11:

- 1. This wedding occurred on the third day - the creation day on which the earth appeared out of the water and first gave forth its fruit (Genesis 1:9-13). In a sense, it was a demonstration of God's power to bring life from the dead (compare 1Cor. 15:4).**
- 2. There were six water pots, and six is a number symbolic of man, who was created on the sixth day. (Gen. 1:26-31). Add to this, they were "stone water pots," that is they were earth products, intended to represent human beings. (Compare 2Timothy 2:20; 2Cor. 4:7)**
- 3. The water pots were used by the Jews for purification purposes, which had to do with cleansing the outside man, but could not cleanse him within, that is, morally. (Cp. Mark 7:3, 4, 15, 20-23; Matthew 23:25-28)**

4. The miracle served to manifest Jesus' glory, where glory has the meaning of "standing" or "reputation," that is, what a man stands for.

In Jesus's view, external things were relatively unimportant. He was more concerned with the change, or transformation, that must take place within men and women. Not so much how they wish to appear to others, but what they are within themselves. By association with Him, individuals would be transformed within.

Finally, in this first sign from Jesus, we find both an echo, and a foreshadowing. On the sixth day man was created, and God gave Adam his bride. It is quite fitting, and is certainly an echo, that the first miracle of Jesus was performed on a wedding day and that it involved six earthenware pots and six disciples. Christ, will be the ultimate bridegroom, receiving His bride (the Church).

Utilizing the symbols of water, earthenware pots, and the number six, He caused a transformation manifesting, through water, a change within these vessels. The change into wine represents the fruit of the spirit as well as of the vine. Jesus said:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit." John 15:1, 2

In this first miracle or sign, we also see a foreshadowing of the great and coming day of the Lord, when Jesus is the bridegroom, who will be presented with His bride, the Church. The members of that Church will have been transformed through His blood, and will become bright and clean in righteousness:

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And He said to me, write, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And He said to me, these are the true words of God." Revelation 19:7-9

The Cleansing of the Temple

In the second chapter, John records that it was a very purposeful Jesus who went to Jerusalem (2:12-25). He knew that the Temple was being badly misused by those who were greedy for gain, and who were in league with a corrupt priesthood (cp. Micah 3:11,12; Isaiah 10:1-4) Some centuries before, the prophet Malachi had acted as a herald to Nehemiah, at a time when Israel needed purifying and deep inward purging. The people of that time were careful in performing their religious exercises, but lacking true faith in God, all their efforts related to an outward cleansing. In these human vessels there was no inward transformation.

When Jesus came to the Temple, it was evident He had in mind a special mission, for the record says that He "found" in the Temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves as well as money changers seated at their tables. He was looking for them!

The advent of Christ meant a purge. It could not have been otherwise. Wherever self-interest and fleshly ambitions direct men's lives, the coming of Christ will mean a sweeping away of everything which opposes God's way.

In Jesus' time greed, and injustice of those responsible for the worship of God prevailed over the activities in the Temple. It was necessary for the people to bring offerings and it was convenient that they should be readily available. It was important too that the Temple levies should be required in the form of a standard half-shekel coin, since thousands of Jews came from all parts of the Empire.

Arrangements were, therefore, made for the sale of animals, and the exchange of foreign currency. However, the Levites and high priestly families inappropriately found this a source of immense profit, and led to the abuse of the people who came to worship.

Those who did not purchase their sacrifices in the Temple courts were not immune from the avarice of the Priests because they had to submit them to the inspection of qualified examiners who were authorized to charge for examining each animal. These examiners could increase their revenues by receiving bribes when they found any real or imaginary faults in the animals submitted to them.

At every turn, the devout Jew was made to pay for his piety, and the Sadducean priesthood waxed fat on the proceeds. It was bad enough that those greedy of gain should be in the Temple at all. What was worse was that their market had been set up in the Court of the Gentiles, the only part of the Temple to which a Gentile seeking to know God was allowed to enter. But no Gentile could find God in this raucous, babble of voices. This was a grievous thing in the eyes of Jesus, who was set forth from the outset as "a light to lighten the Gentiles." (Compare Luke 2:32; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)

It was a crime that Israel, "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), and, therefore, God's light-bearer, should withhold the light from the Gentiles. These desecrations, mingling with the noise of literally hundreds of animals, driven through the seething mass of worshippers, must have made a scene of pandemonium.

It was therefore a very purposeful Jesus, who came to the Temple on this occasion. His scourge of small cords, His voice of authority and His commanding presence, were enough to send the animals and their owners scurrying. He flung tables aside, scattering piles of money. There were also large quantities of birds. These, the poor people's offerings, were, of course, in baskets and cages. Owners were bidden to take them away. In His righteous indignation at this flagrant abuse of the sanctity of the Temple and the laws of sacrifice, Jesus declared His position as the Son of God:

"...stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." John 2:16

He was asserting His God-given authority in His Father's house.

The Law of Moses commanded all Israelites that at Passover "...there shall be no leaven found in your houses..." (Exodus 12:19). This is an instruction, which, in every generation, has been generalized and symbolized among the Jews to mean the removal of

all forms of dirt and corruption. So, always, just before Passover, Jews everywhere ‘spring cleaned’ their houses. This custom continues to this day among many Orthodox Jews. Before the Passover celebration begins, after a formal search of the house (foreshadowing the fulfillment of Zephaniah 1:12), one small heap of dust, deliberately left, is swept up and thrown out, and then the feast begins.

At this time, then, what the Jews were doing in their own homes, Jesus proceeded to do in His Father’s house, the Temple. Within this framework, we see an added significance in the use of the word, “found,” by John. (John 2:14)

Bible Echo and Fulfillment

In this abrupt and dramatic appearance in the Temple, effectively announcing the formal beginning of Jesus’ public ministry in Jerusalem, we find an echo and fulfillment from Malachi, and an echo and foreshadowing relating to one of the Psalms.

Any Jew present that day in the Temple, who was familiar with the Scriptures, should have recognized the sign that was taking place before them. John the Baptist was certainly a well-known public figure, who had openly proclaimed his position as the herald and had announced the arrival of the Messiah. Could anyone who witnessed the scene that day, and who was looking for fulfillment regarding the coming of the Messiah, have not seen the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1:

*“Behold, I am going to send my messenger and He will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, **will suddenly** come to His Temple...”*

And in the overturning of the tables, and in the scattering of the money, further echo from Malachi emerges:

*“...He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.”
Malachi 3:3*

In Jesus’ anger over these conditions in the house of God, an echo from Psalm 69 is unmistakable:

“For zeal for Thy house has consumed Me...” Psalm 69:9

In this same Psalm 69, we see also a significance in Jesus driving the animals for sacrifice out of the Temple. Without these, what offering could the people of Israel bring? The answer is in Psalm 69, which presents David as a figure of Christ foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus. Attention is drawn particularly to verse 29:

“But I am afflicted and in pain; may Thy salvation, oh God, set me securely on high.”

Jesus was to be the ultimate sacrifice. From that day in the Temple forward, Jesus was as good as crucified. The Chief Priests would see to that. Following these events in the Temple, Jesus performed many signs, and many believed in His name (John 2:23).

Jesus gave abundant evidence of His authority to those who had eyes to see, and while the great majority of the people living in and around the city were too afraid of the priests to acknowledge Him, a few precious friendships were probably formed in those early days. Many believed because they saw His works, but it was a superficial acknowledgment of His power, and that is never the best reason for following Christ. Jesus, who knew all men, did not “entrust Himself to them,” (John 2:24). He knew that their allegiance had its source in wonder, not in belief, and He acted towards them accordingly. Jesus would soon prepare to leave Jerusalem.

Nicodemus

Before He did so, however, an eminent Pharisee, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to see Him secretly. The Sanhedrin had three leading members: Its president, called the teacher of the law; a vice-president, called the father of the house of the law; and a second vice-president, called the wise one. It might be inferred from the words of Jesus during this discourse with Nicodemus, that this night visitor filled the first of these offices:

***“...Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?”
John 3:10***

If this is the case, it would have caused a great sensation in Jerusalem, if it became known that such an important and influential religious teacher had chosen to consult this new Prophet from Galilee.

Nicodemus immediately acknowledged Jesus as a teacher and that God must be with Him in order for Him to accomplish the miracles He was performing. Jesus replied to Nicodemus that God must be with everyone who has a desire to be saved:

***“...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit,
he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” John 3:5***

Jesus then goes on to tell him that “no one has ascended into heaven.” Jesus then predicts His own crucifixion, “the Son of Man must be lifted up,” (An echo to Moses and the serpent raised on a pole, Numbers 21:9).

Only through the change, represented in baptism and belief in Jesus, could people have eternal life. (John 3:13-15)

Nicodemus came to realize this message ultimately and did believe, but it was easy for him to do so. He was personally involved with those attending Jesus’ body following the crucifixion (John 19:39).

A Summary

If we consider these three events recorded by John, the miracle at Cana, Jesus' appearance in the Temple, and the visit by Nicodemus, we see an overall theme presented and discover the reason that John included them in his record in this manner.

We find in these events the recognition of a need, followed by a change in our nature through conversion into Christ, symbolized by cleansing through baptism, and through the gracious Spirit of God, into the birth, death and resurrection of Christ.

This is the basic premise of the good news of God's Word presented throughout the New Testament, and it is all signified by John, in principle, in the beginning of his Gospel.

Shortly after this, Jesus departed from Jerusalem into Judea, where He spent time with His disciples. John describes how they and John the Baptist were performing baptisms during that period. The Gospel writer confirms the Baptist's acknowledgment of Christ's position and his own necessary decline. (John 3:22-36)

LESSONS FOR US

In these very early days in His ministry, Jesus showed to us the basic elements required for us to achieve salvation in Him.

We must recognize our need, in that we are all sinners, and that we can only be changed through Him. Through Him we can be cleansed of the results of our sinfulness. But we cannot do it ourselves. It is dependent upon God's grace and our participation in Christ's sacrifice. In order to partake in this, we must desire to forsake our sinful ways, and to be reborn spiritually. In our repentance, we symbolically share in His life, death and resurrection through the waters of baptism and the Spirit of God.

“Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; For He who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,” Romans 6: 4-8