

CHAPTER 23 – Part 1, pages 265-266
Jesus's baptism and temptation

In response to some of the comments on the evaluations, the study guides will include references to the Bible references that have been combined in THE STORY. These references can also be found at the end of the book on pages 406-407. THE STORY is not a paraphrase. It is Today's New International Version word-for-word everywhere that is not in *italics*. To make the reading easier, some sections from different gospels are combined and some long speeches by Jesus are left out.

John's ministry (Matthew 3:1-6)

Matthew portrays John in a way that might have reminded his first readers of the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8.¹ John's basic message is about the "kingdom of heaven," that is on the way. Matthew's wording: "kingdom of heaven" means exactly the same thing as "kingdom of God" found elsewhere in the Bible. This is not "heaven" where Christians go when they die; "the kingdom of heaven" is the renewed creation that will replace the world polluted by human sin. The "kingdom" will be fully present when Jesus returns to earth but it began to break into this world when Jesus began his ministry of renewal and reconciliation.

John's practice of baptism was a ritual washing ceremony signaling that people had given up their old ways of thinking and acting ("repented" and "confessed their sin") in preparation for the "kingdom of heaven/God." John's practice was not typical in the Judaism of his time. Jews did a lot of ritual washing in which they immersed themselves in water (in a *mikvah* or ritual pool), but they did not "baptize" each other.

¹ The prophet Malachi had said that Elijah would be sent to prepare God's people for "the day of the LORD." Malachi 4:5.

Jesus's baptism (Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus himself was baptized by John. In the first written Gospel, Mark, that is a simple statement, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." (Mark 1:9). ²

Right here you should be saying, "Wait a minute!!" Why did Jesus want to get baptized? Did he have sins to confess? What do you think it means when Matthew's Jesus answers this question with "to fulfill all righteousness?" What is the point of Jesus's baptism?

Jesus's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11)

The Gospel of John does not mention Jesus's temptation by "Satan" or "the devil." Mark mentions it but does not describe it. Matthew and Luke (4:1-13) both describe a dialogue with "Satan" (Hebrew for "the accuser") or "the devil."

The first temptation is **"If you are** the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Note the challenge to Jesus to prove that he really is who God said he was when he was baptized.³ Later Jesus will turn five loaves of bread into enough to feed 5,000 people. Why do you think Jesus refuses produce miraculous bread now?

The second temptation in Matthew is "throw yourself down" from the highest point of the Jerusalem temple. The indentations in THE STORY text show that the devil is quoting Scripture (Psalm 91:11-12).

Have you ever been tempted to jump off a high place without a bungee cord? Why did this suggestion tempt Jesus? What would he have gotten out of it? What does Jesus's quotation of Deuteronomy 6:16 mean?

² The secular uses of the Greek word *baptizo* included "dip" or "drown." Early Baptists switched from sprinkling and pouring the water on the candidate to immersing the person completely. In addition, leaning the candidate down backward into the water symbolizes what Paul called being "buried with Christ in baptism." (Romans 6:4)

³ This will come up again at the crucifixion in Matthew 27:40. **"If you are** the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

The third temptation in Matthew is to “worship me [Satan]” in order to gain “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.”

In literature (e.g. the legend of Faust) and in real life today, people are in fact tempted to worship Satan in exchange for power and/or riches that no one else has. But sometimes even Christians attribute great worth to (i.e. “worship”) fame and money in order “to reach more people.” Is there anything wrong with that? Is there a connection between the message of the gospel and the strategies we use to spread it?

These temptations/tests are not just for show. The New Testament writers insist that they were real (Hebrews 4:15-16). This is also shown by the final sentence “and angels came and attended/waited on/served him.” Jesus needed to recover after these difficult tests.

Thoughts on Christian maturity

In 1 John 3:1 the following is said about Christians: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” Have you ever been in a circumstance or a period of time that made you wonder if you really are a deeply loved child of God in whom God takes great delight? Notice that in the STORY we just read, God says this about Jesus **before** Jesus has defeated the temptations of Satan or done any miracles or teaching. God is delighted **because** we belong to God.

Satan desperately wants to make us forget this so that we will become discouraged, or react immaturely when things don’t go our way, or get tired of trusting God and take control of our own lives. Many of the behaviors that get in the way of our ministry as Christians arise out of insecurity. A prideful, overbearing person may be covering up insecurity.

If you feel safe in the group you are meeting with, please share about this with each other.

This week, try carrying a card with you that says, “I am a dearly loved child of God” and look at it once a day.