

Baptism and the Temptations



SABBATH—APRIL 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 3:1–14; Romans 6:1–6; Luke 3:21, 22; Luke 4:5–8; Isaiah 14:13, 14; Luke 4:9–13.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Holy Spirit came down on him [Jesus] in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven. It said, ‘You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you’ ” (Luke 3:22, NIV).

AS WE SAW LAST WEEK, LUKE GIVES A LIST OF FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO RULED DURING HIS DAY. We believe he does this to show that his story about Jesus and John is as real and as historical as these powerful leaders.

But there is another important reason to name these mighty men of power and influence. It is to show a sharp difference between them and the humble man of the wilderness, John the Baptist. John the Baptist was God's chosen messenger who was to “prepare the way” for the most important event in all human history so far—the coming of Jesus, the world's Savior. How interesting that God chose not one of the world's “great” men to open the way for the Messiah (Chosen One; Jesus) but one of the “lowlier” ones instead.

Bible thinkers put all these historic leaders together and give us a date close to A.D. 27 or 28 for the start of the ministry (work done for God) of John the Baptist and Jesus. It is about the same historical time frame of these Roman Empire leaders that Jesus was baptized and received the blessing of Heaven as God's “beloved Son” (Luke 3:22). Luke establishes this fact right at the start, even before he gives his readers the “orderly report” of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD (Luke 3:1–14)



Baptism, or burial by water, is an outer symbol of an inner change.

DEFINITIONS

1. repentance—the process in which a person is sorry for his or her past sins and decides to change his or her life for the better with the help of the Holy Spirit.
2. immersion—dipping something fully underwater.

In Luke 3, John appears to do his very special and important work in salvation history. When John preached, he did not use flattering words to please the crowd.

Read Luke 3:1–14. His words are filled with important truths for all of us. What points can you learn from what John is saying here?

Repentance¹ is not just an empty idea. It is a way of life. The word comes from the Greek word *metanoia*, which means a change of mind, and this leads to a new life.

To “baptize” means to dip fully in water. Immersion² has a deep meaning. Even before the time of John, the Jews had understood baptism to mean full water “burial.” It was a common practice when new Gentile (non-Jews) believers chose to join the Jewish faith.

In inviting Jews to be baptized, John the Baptist was setting forth a new principle (important rule): baptism is an event that announces to the public that a person has given up his or her old sinful ways and is preparing for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist introduced a symbolic act of giving up sin and leading a holy life as citizens of heaven. This new life was about to begin with Jesus. John was quick to add that he was baptizing only with water, but the One who was to follow him “ ‘will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’ ” (Luke 3:16, NKJV). So, an important point is made: baptism as an act of “burial” in water symbolizes (stands for; means) an inner change. This is the change that would later be sealed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 6:1–6. What spiritual lessons is the apostle (teacher and leader) Paul giving in connection with the act of baptism? Note the comparison he makes between the act of water “burial” and rising out of the water with dying to sin and living for righteousness (goodness and truth). How real has this new life in Christ been to you?

“YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON” (Matthew 3:13–17)

In Luke 2:41–50, we read the famous story of Joseph and Mary losing Jesus in Jerusalem. What is interesting is Jesus' answer to Mary when she scolds Him (verse 48). Jesus' answer shows that He realizes He is the Son of God. “ ‘Why were you looking for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn't [did not] you know I had to be in my Father's house?’ ” (verse 49, NlrV). As the next verse says, Joseph and Mary did not understand fully what Jesus had said to them. To be fair, how could they? Even the disciples, after years with Jesus, still did not fully understand who He was and what He was to do.

For example, after His resurrection (return to life from the dead), Jesus was talking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. One of them was talking about Jesus. He had said that Jesus “ ‘was a prophet [special messenger]. He was powerful in what he said and did in the eyes of God and all of the people’ ” (Luke 24:19, NlrV). Of course, Jesus was much more than a Prophet. Even then the disciples still did not understand who He was and what He had come to do.

Read Matthew 3:13–17; John 1:29–34; and Luke 3:21, 22. Why is Jesus' baptism so important?

At His baptism, Heaven supported the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus wanted baptism not because He needed it. Instead, He wished to set an example for others (Matthew 3:14, 15). Three important things stand out about the baptism of Jesus: (1) the Baptist's announcement, “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29, NKJV); (2) the Holy Spirit's leading in Jesus' life for His mission ahead; and (3) the heavenly announcement that Jesus is the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased.

Think about it: the perfect Son of God, the Creator of the universe, was baptized by a lowly human person, all part of the plan of salvation. How should Jesus' willingness to be lowly and humble help us to be willing to humble ourselves whenever we need to be?



John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

NOT BY “BREAD ALONE” (Luke 4:4)

“Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted [led to feel a desire to sin] for forty days by the devil” (Luke 4:1, 2, NKJV). He was born for a God-commanded mission. He began His mission at His baptism. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then He went into the wilderness to prepare for the work ahead.



Doubting God’s Word is the first step in giving in to temptation.

The temptation in the wilderness was an important battle in the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). This battle has been going on ever since Satan’s rebellion (war) in heaven. In the wilderness, the Savior became weak from 40 days of fasting, and the future ahead looked dim and hopeless. Then Satan took personal command in his attack against Jesus. “Satan saw that he must either defeat Jesus or be defeated. The issues of the battle between them were too important for Satan to trust to one of his angels. Satan must handle this battle himself.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 116.

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

Bread is not the most important issue here. Yes, the 40-day fasting in the wilderness made the Savior very hungry. And Satan used Jesus’ hunger to try to trick Him into sinning. But Satan knew that Jesus is the Creator of the universe. Jesus Himself created the universe out of nothing. So, making bread out of stone was not an issue. The important issue is found in this part of the verse: “ ‘If You are the Son of God.’ ” Only 40 days before, the voice from heaven announced that Jesus was truly the Son of God. So now should Jesus doubt that heavenly announcement? Doubting God’s Word is the first step in giving in to temptation. In heaven Satan challenged the authority of Jesus. He tries to do the same here, even if he does it in a much more “hidden” way than he did it in heaven.

How can you learn not to fall into Satan’s traps to get you to doubt God’s promises?

“WORSHIP ME” (Luke 4:5–8)

Read Luke 4:5–8. Why would Satan want Jesus to worship him? What was the important issue?

Only God has the right to be worshiped. His right to be worshiped is the one thing that forever separates the creature from the Creator. One of the issues in Lucifer’s rebellion against God in heaven is that of worship. Isaiah described Lucifer’s ambition well in Isaiah 14:13, 14: to be above heaven, to glorify (raise the honor of) his throne above the stars of heaven, to be like the Most High. He tries to rob the authority that belongs only to the Creator.

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

Satan was trying to pull Christ’s attention away from His authority as God. Satan also was trying to tempt Jesus with “honors” and glory (praise and riches) for no greater price than just to get Jesus to bow to him. Satan was trying to get the authority and worship from Jesus that he failed to get in heaven.

Notice how Christ replied to the tempter with disgust. “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan!’ ” (verse 8, NKJV). Worship and the service that goes with it belong to the Creator God alone. Here again the Word of the Lord comes to His help. Did not the Holy Spirit say through Moses, “ ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God. . . . You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him’ ” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, 13, NKJV)? Being firm in following God in faith and obedience is the best answer to Satan’s lies and tricks.

Any of us can face temptations to make our faith weaker, even in “small ways.” For example, in your job, your passing of a college examination, or your promotion may demand a compromise³ in regard to Sabbath. At what point can you make a deal? When is the price ever right?

DEFINITIONS

3. compromise—give up something to get something else, to make partial surrender.

CHRIST THE VICTOR (Luke 4:9–13)



Jesus defeats Satan's temptations through the power of the Bible.

DEFINITIONS

4. grace—God's gift of mercy and power that He gives us to overcome sin.

Luke and Matthew reverse (switch) the order of the second and third temptations. The reason is not clear, but this is not important. The important point is the full victory of Jesus over Satan, according to both Gospels. Another important point is that Jesus Christ was tempted as we are, but He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). With victory over each of the temptations, victory over Satan, and with the Word of God in His mouth and prayer, Jesus comes forth to preach the kingdom of God and to begin the Christian era (period).

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

Satan takes Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem, the most holy place in Jewish history. The temple where God lives among His people becomes the place for Satan's battle with Jesus. "If you are the Son of God" is once again the challenge. Watch what Satan says: *If God is really Your Father, and if Your mission is at His command, throw Yourself down from the top of the temple. Surely, if all that is true, God will not let You get hurt.* Satan then quotes the Bible: "God will tell his angels to take care of you. They will catch you in their arms" (Luke 4:10, CEV).

Satan knows the Bible but twists it. His plan is to lead Jesus to put God to the test. God has already promised that His angels would protect Jesus, as long as Jesus was doing the Father's will. The same is true with Daniel and his friends. Jesus answers Satan again by using the Bible. He says that it is not for us to put God to the test (verse 12). Our duty is to place ourselves in God's will and let Him do the rest.

Note four important biblical teachings on temptation: (1) no one is free from temptations; (2) when God lets temptations come to us, He also gives grace⁴ and strength to overcome; (3) temptations do not come the same way every time; and (4) no one is tempted beyond his or her strength to withstand them (1 Corinthians 10:13).

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Suppose Joseph and Mary had stayed their minds upon God by thinking about God and praying. Then they would have realized their holy and serious responsibility. And they would not have lost Jesus. By one day’s neglect they lost the Savior. But it cost them three days of search and worry to find Him. So with us; by idle talk, evil speaking, or neglect of prayer, we may in one day lose the Savior’s presence. And it may take many days of sorrowful search to find Him and to regain the peace that we have lost.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 83.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Temptation in itself is not sin. The Bible says that in a way, it is possible for temptation to lead us to holiness. To be tempted is one thing. But to fall into sin is another. At the same time, what is our responsibility about doing all that we can to avoid temptation?
- ② Bible thinkers and philosophers (those who study truth) often talk about what they call a “metanarrative.” A metanarrative is a grand story or theme, with other minor (small) stories included. To put it another way, a metanarrative is the background in which other stories and events happen. As Seventh-day Adventists, we see the great controversy as the “metanarrative” or background for what has been happening, both on earth and in heaven. What verses in the Bible show us that the great controversy is going on? And what verses help to explain what is going on in the world?
- ③ What are some of the most powerful Bible verses that promise us victory over the temptations that come our way? But, why, even with these promises, is it still so easy to fall?
- ④ One of the daily studies this week said the following: “Doubting God’s Word is the first step in giving in to temptation.” Why would that be true?
- ⑤ In what ways can idol worship be much more than just simply bowing down and worshiping something other than the Lord?