

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

Matt 3:1-17, Mat. 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-13, Luke 3:21-22, Luke 4:1-13, John 1:19-34

By Troy Crain

1. Luke determined the beginning of John's ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1-2). We know that Jesus began his earthly ministry shortly after John. Luke gives a reference point of "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar."¹ "Tiberius succeeded to the throne after Augustus died in A.D. 14."² However, most scholars believe that the actual time that Luke meant was not upon the death of Augustus, but when Tiberius was elevated the "co-emperor" with him, that is, A.D. 11. If this is the case, the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign began in A.D. 26, and Jesus' baptism took place in late 26 or early 27.³
2. The ministry of John fulfilled the prophecies of both Isaiah and Malachi, (Isa. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1). However, Matthew, Luke, and John attribute the prophecy to Isaiah, the more prominent of the two prophets. Mark, on the other hand, just attributed the prophecy to "the Prophets."
3. John's dress resembled that of Elijah the Tishbite (2 Kings 1:8). His food consisted of locust. This is "the desert locust, a migratory phase of the grasshopper, of the family Acrididae, even today commonly eaten by the poorer people in Arabia, Africa, and Syria."⁴ As this word was used in the Old Testament, the locust is "a ceremonially clean insect, so eatable; a swarming insect, desert migratory locust, in the mature wing stage."⁵ According to Leviticus 11:22, the Israelites were permitted to eat the locus.
4. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who came out to witness the baptism of John. "Pharisaioi, from an Aramaic word *peras* (found in Dan. 5:28), signifying

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes will be taken from the NKJV.

² Thomas D. Lea, and David Alan Black, *The New Testament Its Background and Message*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 96-97.

³ *ibid*, 97.

⁴ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 39.

⁵ James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Hebrew Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2001), 746.

“to separate,” owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public.”⁶ Following their return back to Judea from the Babylonian captivity, there were two groups of religious people among them. One group determined to follow only what was written Law of Moses. They were called Zadikim, the righteous. The other group added the constitutions and the traditions of the elders, as well as other rigorous observances, to the Law and voluntarily complied with them. They were called Chasidim or the pious. The Sadducees and Karaites were derived from the Zadikim; while the Pharisees and Essenes derived from the Chasidim.⁷ The Pharisees believed strongly in the existence of both good and evil angels, and to the expectation of the Messiah. According to Josephus, the Pharisees numbered more than 6000 during the time of Christ and were bitter enemies of Jesus and His cause.⁸

5. The Sadducees were the other religious group that arose after that return to Judea from the Babylonian captivity. They were in direct opposition to the Pharisees and Essenes. “The origin of the name and its meaning are really unknown, but the most satisfactory theory is that the sect was derived from Sadok or Zadok and constituted a form of sacerdotal aristocracy.⁹ Sadok is the high priest who was appointed by Solomon to replace the disposed Abiathar (1 Kings 2:35). The Sadducees were small in number with limited influence among the people and were rationalistic in their thinking. From their connection with the priests, they were more or less, men of position and wealth. “They were worldly-minded and had only a superficial interest in religion.”¹⁰ Their theology was in direct contradiction to the Pharisees in at least four different areas. They denied these basic tenets: (1) resurrection of the body; (2) immortality of the soul; (3) the existence of spirits and angels, and (4) divine predestination, they affirmed free will.¹¹
6. The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of His public ministry. The Gospels do not specifically state the reason for His baptism, Jesus likely insisted on undergoing

⁶ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 470.

⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), G5330.

⁸ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), G5330.

⁹ Zodhiates, G4523.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Strong, G4523.

the rite in order to identify with the people of God who repent. The three persons of the Trinity were present at the baptism event.

7. Following His baptism, Jesus was immediately sent into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The order of the temptations is different between Matthew and Luke. Explanations of the differences are conjectural at best, however, most scholars agree that Matthew's order is chronological, while Luke may have changed the order of the final pair of temptations to climax the testing in the Jerusalem temple. The temptations could have been inward and mental, outward and physical or a combination of both.¹² The main emphasis in each temptation appears to be Jesus' personal relationship with God. Satan poses the little word "if" in Matthew 4:3, not to indicate that he didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God, but he assumes that as a Son of God, He shouldn't have to tolerate physical deprivation as Jesus was going through. Jesus knew the lesson was designed to teach Him the lesson of Deuteronomy 8:3. Christ refused to fall into the devil's trap and seek immediate gratification. Following Matthew's order, in the second temptation, Satan now questions Jesus' absolute confidence in the protection that has been promised by the Father in Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus refused to fall into the devil's hand by once again quoting from the book of Deuteronomy 6:16. He pledged Himself totally into the hand of God and to a relationship of trust with His Father. Finally, according to Matthew, the devil makes a direct assault on Jesus' loyalty to the Father. Would Christ bow down to him and receive all the kingdoms of the world, or would He insist on doing things the hard way, which is the way the God instructed Him to go? Jesus refused to take the easy way out and quoted from Deuteronomy again, chapter 6 verse 13. "Jesus quoted sections of Scripture in which the nation of Israel faced temptations and failed. At the outset of his mission God's Son faced the same tests and succeeded."¹³ It is because of trials such as these that equipped Jesus to be a merciful and faithful high priest who can help us in our time of need (Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16).

¹² Lea and Black, 181.

¹³ Lea and Black, 182.

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