

## The Temptation of Jesus Mark 1:9-13

### **Slide 1**

A three-year-old entered the kitchen when his mother was busy elsewhere. She had told him not to get into the cookies, but in her absence, he pulled a kitchen chair over to the counter and climbed up on it.

Taking the lid off the cookie jar, he grabbed a cookie and, as he put it into his mouth, his mother entered the room demanding to know what he was doing.

The three-year-old looked at her with big, innocent eyes and said, “I just climbed up here to smell the cookies, and my tooth got caught on one of them.”

It’s easy to laugh at this boy’s struggle with temptation, but temptation is a serious matter. In fact, today we’re going to talk about the temptation of Christ, the most epic spiritual battle in history.

Mark’s Gospel is the shortest and the most direct of all the Gospels which is evident in his telling of the temptation of Christ.

Matthew tells a more-expanded version of the story, spanning 11 verses, while Luke tells it in 9 verses.

Mark’s economy of words is easily recognized as he tells it in only two verses. And yet he manages to tell us some details not found in those other two Gospels.

But Mark’s purpose and audience were different than Matthew’s and Luke’s.

Matthew and Luke concentrate more on three particular temptations which serve as templates on how we can overcome temptation by using God's Word against Satan.

Mark forgoes this practical application and sticks to the main thrust of his Gospel, which is to prove that Jesus, Who is the Son of God, has authority over sickness, the elements, life and death, and most of all, Satan and his demonic forces.

As we work through verses 12-13, virtually every phrase is charged with significance, so let's examine them one by one.

Mark 1:12-13, *"At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him."*

## **Slide 2**

First, notice the words "*At once*," or in some translations, "*Immediately*."

These are Mark's favorite words. Of the 79 times this Greek word translated "at once" or "immediately" is found in the New Testament, 42 are in Mark.

Mark uses the word here in verse 12 to help us see the importance for Jesus to accomplish the task given to Him by God the Father.

As He comes up out of the water, He hears the voice of the Father expressing His approval of the Son and then the Holy Spirit descends upon Him like a dove.

On paper this sounds pretty mundane, but to Jesus it was amazing and must have been emotionally exhilarating. Then, "*At Once*" Jesus is whisked away by the Spirit to face the power of Satan over a 40-day period.

Jesus doesn't get to bask in the joy of that mighty approval and anointing of His baptism experience.

Immediately, He's propelled to the wilderness to take the offensive against temptation and evil instead of avoiding them.

### **Slide 3**

Next, notice the word "sent" in verse 12: "*At once the Spirit **sent** him out into the wilderness.*"

Matthew says that Jesus was "*led*" by the Spirit into the wilderness, but Mark uses a different word.

Mark uses the Greek word *ek-bál-lo* which literally means "*to expel, to drive, to cast or send out.*" He uses it eleven times in his Gospel to describe the casting out of demons.

Certainly, Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness, as Matthew expresses, but again Mark expresses immediacy.

The very first thing the Spirit of God does after Jesus' baptism and anointing is thrust Him into battle with the Devil.

Jesus is propelled into a colossal clash with Satan which lays the groundwork for His future ministry and work on Calvary.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "*Mark's Gospel is the record of this great encounter which climaxed at the Cross. At the outset Jesus established His personal authority over Satan. His later exorcisms of demons were based on His victory in this encounter.*"

### **Slide 4**

Next, notice that He was thrust into the wilderness for 40 days. Now, the wilderness had special significance to the Jews.

In the Old Testament, the wilderness was a place of testing for 40 years. Because of their unbelief, God let them wander in the wilderness for a generation.

But it was also a place where Israel experienced intimate fellowship with God.

Yes, they were sorely tested in the wilderness, yet it was there that God tabernacled with Israel; it was there that God led them by a cloud by day and a fire by night.

It was there that they experienced God's daily miraculous provision for their food; it was there that they received the Law of God.

The wilderness was a place of spiritual preparation and training for service. Elijah and John the Baptizer were spiritually prepared in the wilderness.

After Paul believed in Christ, God led Him to spend three years in the desert to receive his training to understand the Gospel and his part in spreading it.

So, the wilderness was a place for testing, intimate fellowship, training and preparation for active ministry.

In His baptism, Jesus is APPROVED and ANOINTED for service; in His temptation experience, Jesus is ACTIVATED for service through testing.

All three of the Synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell us that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, but Matthew and Luke add that Jesus fasted during this entire time.

Through fasting, He would have experienced intense fellowship with God, yet the length of the fast would increase the intensity of the temptations.

It's as if the Son of God was exposing Himself to the extremes of human temptation to accomplish a cataclysmic victory over Satan and His forces.

### **Slide 5**

In verse 13, notice the phrase *“tempted by Satan.”* This word *“tempted”* is *pe-i-rá-zo*, which means *“put to the test, make trial of in order to discover the kind of person someone is.”*

It's used either in a good sense, as when God tests us through trials to refine us, or in the bad sense of enticement, i.e. to sin by Satan or his demons or our own fleshly desires. Both senses are implied here.

God put Jesus to the test, remember, the Spirit sent Him to the wilderness to show He was qualified for His messianic mission.

But also, through temptation to sin, Satan tried to draw Jesus away from His divinely appointed mission.

Matthew and Luke emphasize three climactic temptations of Christ, but Mark uses a Greek form of the verb *“being”* that implies the temptations were continuous.

John Phillips says, *“Matthew records the intense climax, Mark the daily battle.”*

While Jesus was strengthening His relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and increasing His understanding of His mission and purpose, Satan was constantly tempting Him, constantly engaging Him in spiritual battle.

Just because Jesus was the Son of God and experienced heightened fellowship with the Father in the wilderness, this was no cake walk for Him.

This was spiritual warfare at its highest. Jesus was actually tempted, bearing witness to His true humanity. His adversary was Satan Himself.

According to the Old Testament, Satan, which means “Accuser,” is the head of a vast army of fallen angels called demons. These fallen angels were the one-third of the heavenly host who rebelled against God’s authority.

It’s unlikely that you or I are ever personally tempted by Satan himself. He relies on his demonic minions to tempt and trip us up.

But it was Satan Himself—the personification of evil, the head of the world’s system of wickedness, the archenemy of God—who was the tempter of the Son of God.

He must have used every stratagem possible against Jesus. He must have tried every trap that’s been so successful against mortals like us.

The story of the temptation of Christ is a drama of the monumental battle of the ages that we can’t even comprehend...YET HE WON OUT IN THE END! Not once did He succumb to temptation and give in to sin.

Hebrews 4:15 says, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”*

Somehow, in those 40 days in the wilderness and I’m sure many more times in His ministry, Jesus was tempted in every way that we’re tempted.

Yet He never gave in; He never sinned; He was tempted, “*yet he did not sin.*”

But Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that because Jesus was tempted in every way we’re tempted. He sympathizes with our weaknesses and failures.

He knows what we go through; He understands; He’s sympathetic with our struggle, which is why He’s so quick to forgive us when we confess our sins.

### **Slide 6**

Next, Mark tells us that Jesus was “*with the wild animals.*” This is a detail not mentioned in the other gospels.

The wilderness was the place of the leopard, the lion, the bear, the wild boar, the jackal, serpents, and scorpions. The Spirit couldn’t have chosen a more hostile place for the Son of God to be tempted.

William Barclay says that this phrase was meant to be a vivid detail to add to the grim terror of the scene.

But there is something else: In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul refers to Jesus as the “*last Adam.*”

The first Adam lived in the most beautiful and hospitable place on earth, the Garden of Eden, where fruit and vegetables grew naturally without sweat or toil, where the animals were tame and where life was safe and easy.

In that wonderful environment, when Adam was tempted that one single time, he gave in and brought sin upon the whole world.

Jesus, the second Adam, went out into a dangerous environment where the soil was cursed, where there was no sustenance, where the animals were fierce and ravenous, and where life was harsh and difficult.

In that barren place, when He was tempted many times over the course of 40 days, Jesus resisted temptation every single time and never sinned even once.

That seems to me to be the most logical reason for Mark to include this little detail.

The victory over the curse of sin and the coming creation of a new heaven and a new earth speak of the restoration of God's original plan.

Several Old Testament prophecies of the Kingdom speak of children putting their hands into serpents' holes with no danger of being bitten and poisoned. They also speak of the lion lying down with the lamb.

We focus on our own personal salvation from sin, but the bigger story than redemption through Christ is the restoration of the entire universe.

Restored to the way it was before sin entered this world—sinless, safe, secure, whole, healthy, void of disease and war and famine and danger and pain and death.

### **Slide 7**

Verse 13 ends by telling us that the "*angels attended him.*" This is another detail not in the other gospels. Mark makes a startling contrast: Jesus was with the wild beasts and the angels.

Again, the verb "*was*" at the beginning of this sentence is in a tense in Greek that indicates continuous action.



Continuous action during this entire ordeal, while Jesus was experiencing increasing bodily weakness from fasting so long, and from facing intensifying Satanic attacks.

Yet, while He was increasingly in danger of wild animals and the elements because of His weakened condition, the angels were there ministering to His spiritual needs!

The great fallen angel Satan was there in full force, but so were God's angels. And though it's not mentioned, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were there to strengthen Jesus, too.

This was the greatest onslaught of Satan Jesus would face except for His death on Calvary, but it was also the start of the great victories of Jesus' life and ministry.

After He overcame sin in His wilderness temptation, immediately an empowered Jesus began to cast out demons, heal the sick, exercise authority over the winds and the seas, forgive sins and even raise the dead.

And it all started with a great baptism experience: God's voice booming from heaven His approval of Jesus and the Spirit's anointing.

Then came Jesus' period of horrific temptation, deprivation and adversity—followed by His first great victory over Satan, a bad omen of what was ahead for the Great Accuser!

## **Slide 8**

### Conclusion

What can we take away from Mark's brief telling of the temptation of Christ? **First**, remember that great victories in our lives are often precursors to times of great testing.

The two most awesome experiences for Jesus in His whole ministry were His baptism and the Transfiguration. Both came just before His two most trying trials: His temptation and His crucifixion.

Thank God for every great victory in your life, but when they come, don't let your guard down. Stay alert and be at the ready for battle at any moment.

Peter says that 1 Peter 5:8-9, *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

**Second**, recognize that God uses testings to make us stronger. The same word used for “testing,” as in trials, is used of “temptation” in the Greek.

You have to see the word in its context to know which way the word is meant. But the result of overcoming either sense of the word has the same result: it makes us stronger.

God allows us to experience trials to make us stronger, and when we resist temptation, it also serves to strengthen us the next time we're tempted.

Victory over temptation makes us stronger. God never leads believers into temptation, but if we resist temptation when the enemy attacks, we make ourselves stronger against the enemy and our flesh.

In Romans 6:11, Paul tells us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Then in verse 12 he teaches us not to let sin reign in our bodies so that we obey its desires.

He continues in verse 13, *“Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.”*

Our members are our hands, our feet, our eyes, our ears, and most importantly our minds—the parts of us that actually do the sinning. We must not yield those members over to sin, but to God. That’s the struggle of temptation.

But here’s something you may have missed from Romans 6 that I learned from Jerry Bridges’ book, *The Practice of Godliness*. If we persist in resisting temptation, something remarkable happens.

Paul says further down in verse 19, *“Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.”*

Bridges says that when we repeatedly yield our members as slaves to impurity, it results in “iniquity unto iniquity,” which he says is an idiom meaning “habits of iniquity.”

Rather than doing that, Paul says we’re to yield our members as slaves to “righteousness unto holiness” which means “habits of holiness.”

In other words, repeatedly yielding our members to sin results in HABITS of sin; repeatedly yielding to righteousness yields habits of holiness.

With every victory over temptation, we’re a little bit stronger than before to handle that temptation the next time. But there’s an added benefit: over time, holiness becomes a habit.

**Third:** When you face temptation, you have great resources to call upon to be victorious.

Just as Jesus was ministered to by angels as He endured temptation, angels are there to minister to us as well.

But even more exciting is that if you're truly born again, the Holy Spirit indwells you and is IN you to help you overcome temptation.

So, when facing temptation, don't try to handle it by yourself. You're no match for the enemy!

Only by calling out to God in prayer for help, seeking God's assistance through His Word, which is alive and a powerful spiritual two-edged sword, and listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance, can we successfully resist temptation.

It begins by preparing our heart daily with a time in God's Word where we put on the armor of God in the morning before we leave.

Then it continues during the day by obeying the Spirit's leading and quickly confessing sin.

And it's strengthened by faithfulness to Bible Study and morning worship services which constantly challenge and strengthen our faith.

**Finally**, because of Jesus' resisting temptation, it means that He was a suitable sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins.

When making animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, God said in Leviticus 22:17-24 that the animal had to be without blemish or defect. It couldn't be blind, bruised, crushed, torn or cut.

It couldn't have any broken bones or be maimed; nor could it have any disease, or even a limb that was longer or shorter than the other. Verse 21 says, *"it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable."*

These sacrifices represented the transferring of guilt from the offeror to the slain animal for the forgiveness of sins. But the book of Hebrews teaches that these sacrifices didn't actually forgive their sins.

They were just a temporary covering until THE Lamb of God came to pay the penalty for sin once and for all, negating the need for continued animal sacrifices.

When John introduced Jesus to Israel, he didn't announce, "Behold Israel's King!". No, he said in John 1:29, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*

But the Lamb of God had to be perfect to be an acceptable sacrifice. And because Jesus WAS perfect and free from sin, He could pay the penalty for our sin and satisfy God's judgment against sin.

1 Peter 1:19 says that we were not redeemed by corruptible, or temporary things, but, *"but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."*

If you place your faith in Jesus as your Savior, the guilt of your sin can be transferred to Jesus and you can receive the full forgiveness of all sin.