



WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

9:30 am Bible Class—all ages
10:30 am Sunday Worship
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class

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Mark's Look at Christ's Temptation

(and What It Teaches Us About Bible Study)

(Part 2)

To return to our example, the reason that Mark 1 might not have come to mind when you thought about Christ's temptation is that his record of the event is only two verses long (Mark 1:12-13). In studying the account comparatively with Matthew and Luke, you would discover only three points of uniqueness: 1) Mark is the only author to note that the period of temptation was "immediately" after Jesus' baptism; 2) Mark uses a more forceful word to describe the imperative to go into the wilderness than the other authors, stating that the Spirit "drove Him into the wilderness"; 3) Mark adds that while He was in the wilderness, He "was with the wild beasts [animals – ESV]." You would also find that a lot is not found in Mark's account; notably, none of the three specific examples of temptation included by Matthew and Luke are included by Mark.

What can be gained though by reflecting solely on what Mark includes? Here are some observations that came to mind as I reflected on the text:

1. Christ's temptation immediately followed His baptism. We can expect major decisions for God and major acts of obedience on our part to be met with great temptation.
2. Temptation itself is no sign that God is not pleased with us. Jesus was greatly tempted immediately following the Father's affirmative words, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 11).
3. Temptation is actually a part of God's design for us. Christ was driven towards temptation, not away from it. While it is Satan that did the tempting (and that reflection is also important – see James 1:13-15), it is clearly God who overruled the process. This should make God's promise to find a way of escape even more real to us (1 Corinthians 10:13).
4. We are never alone when we are tempted. Christ was "in the wilderness" and "with the wild beasts" – terms used to emphasize being alone – but "angels ministered to Him." Neither Mark nor Matthew (Luke omits this detail) tell us exactly how this angelic ministry worked, but we are told elsewhere that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). God not only overrules temptation, but also appears to be actively involved in helping us get through it by means of His angelic host.
5. No specific reason is given for Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, but it is significant that His period of trial preceded the first recorded instance of Him preaching the gospel (Mark 1:14-15). You can't preach the Word of God unless you are prepared to "endure hardship" (2 Timothy 2:3)
6. Mark's brevity and lack of specificity is useful. He allows us to identify with the simple fact that Christ was tempted instead of calling us to focus on specific temptations which might seem foreign to us. Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are" (Hebrews 4:15), but the specific temptations recorded by Matthew and Luke are not likely ones we have been called to overcome.

As you consider the above reflections and add some of your own, how does it compare with a list of reflections you might create after reading Matthew's or Luke's account of the same event? While there might be some similarity, the lists would doubtless be different. Could this have been God's design all along? It's impossible to know for sure, but it certainly is interesting.

In closing, I hope that you can see the value in reflecting on Mark's account of the temptation of Christ. I hope further that you can see the value of systematically studying parallel accounts (accounts recorded in more than one place) by focusing first on what one Biblical author has said instead of rushing immediately to what other Biblical authors have said. There's value in constructing the whole picture provided to us in Scripture, but there's also value in considering each text individually.