

Chapter 4

CHARACTER OF GOD 2

JESUS' BIRTH, BAPTISM, AND TEMPTATION

Introduction: The aim of this study on the Character of the Son of God, Jesus, the Messiah, the Second Person of the God-Head, is that you may be able to know the real Jesus, and that in knowing Him you may have eternal life through faith in Him. In order for our faith to be solid and unshakeable, each of us must find the answer to the following questions about Jesus:

- ❖ **Are you the one?** *"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3)*
- ❖ **Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?** *...Jesus... asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"... "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15)*
- ❖ **Who are you, Lord?** *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. (Acts 9:5)*

SECTION 1. JESUS' BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE.

- I. Jesus' birth took place in Bethlehem, the town in Israel where David was born. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth in northern Israel. An amazing sequence of events had to take place for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, 65 miles (three days' journey) to the south. A census and registration was ordered by Caesar in late 5 BC or early 4 BC. Joseph had taken Mary to be his wife, and even though she was pregnant and about to give birth she traveled with him on the journey to Bethlehem in Judea. While they were in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to a son and they named him Jesus.
 - A. Tradition indicates that Mary might have been 17-18 years old at the time of Jesus' birth. Joseph was probably 35-40 years old and was a carpenter living and working in the village of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. These were simple people, but God entrusted them with a significant role in His divine plan.
 - B. The story of Jesus' birth begins with the angelic announcement to Mary and then later to Joseph that God had chosen her to be the virgin mother of the Messiah, God's son.
 1. Mary's response to God's proposal: "May it be to me as You have said." This response created a real dilemma. Mary was an unmarried girl who became pregnant. She put her reputation and her future on the line to say yes to God's redemptive purpose. (Luke 1:38)
 2. The situation Joseph faced: The girl he was engaged to was pregnant. What should he do? After deciding on a course of action that indicated his gracious nature, God's angel appeared to him and told him to take Mary as his wife. Joseph did what the Lord commanded him. Joseph was a righteous man, a good man. He put grace before law, mercy before judgement. (Matthew 1:24, James 2:13)
 3. This story shows us the importance of responding in obedient faith even when we don't fully understand why. It is of utmost importance to learn the voice of God,
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to know and trust Him, to know His character and nature.

- II. In accordance with Jewish law, Joseph and Mary took Jesus, their first-born son to the Temple to dedicate Him to God when he was 40 days old.
- A. Going to the Temple for the dedication. (Luke 2:22-39)
1. They took Jesus to the Temple when the time of their purification was complete. (Eight days after birth Jewish males were circumcised, 40 days after birth first-born males were to be dedicated to God. Eight days was the medically optimum time for circumcision, 40 days allowed for the ceremonial purification of the mother after giving birth.)
 2. Joseph and Mary were poor at this particular time, as indicated by their dedication offering. Possibly this was because they were living temporarily in Bethlehem and Joseph's business was far away in Nazareth. (According to the Levitical law pigeons or turtle doves were the acceptable offering for the poor when dedicating a first-born son, a lamb and dove were specified for those who could afford it.)
- B. The encounter with Simeon. (Luke 2:25-35)
1. Simeon was an old man, described as righteous and devout. He was looking forward in faith for the coming of the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to redeem His people. Simeon had a revelation from God that he would live to see the Christ. On this particular day, moved by the Spirit, he went to the Temple.
 2. As he waited in the Temple that day he saw Joseph and Mary, a peasant couple, come into the Temple courts and he recognized by the Spirit that the 40 day old child in Mary's arms was the promised Messiah. Simeon took the baby in his arms and began to praise God. Then he prophesied over the child Jesus, and blessed Mary and Joseph.
 3. Simeon said he could now die in peace because he had seen the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah and God's personal promise to him that he would live to see the Messiah.
- C. The meeting with Anna the prophetess. (Luke 2:36-38)
1. Anna was an 84-year-old widowed prophetess, who Luke describes as staying continually in the Temple, serving God day and night with fasting and prayers. We need to respect devout, praying widows whose ministry is to pray and intercede!
 2. She came up to them at that very moment, recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, and gave thanks to God. She began to tell other like-minded people what she had seen.
 3. The tragedy today is that there are devout praying Christians who want revival, people who want God to fulfill His promises, but don't want change; people who want a move of the Holy Spirit, but don't want to change the format of the service; people who want growth, but not new people; people whose prayers may have moved the hand of God but who fail to recognize God's answer and even resist in

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when it comes. Thank God Anna recognized the answer to her prayers. What about you?

- D. Joseph and Mary's response to the encounters with Simeon and Anna.
 - 1. They marveled at the things which Simeon spoke. There had been much to marvel at in the past few months: visits from the angel Gabriel, revelation in dreams, Elizabeth's prophecy, shepherds visiting the stable, and now prophecies and praise from two old people in the Temple.
 - 2. They fulfilled the requirements of the Law and then went back to Nazareth in Galilee. God had chosen parents for His Son who would not be swayed by events and circumstances, either positive or negative, but who would get on with the important business of raising Jesus in an environment of practicality and faith.

III. The visit to the Temple when Jesus was twelve years old. (Luke 2:41-50)

Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast every year. Their devotion to God and His laws was above average for Jews of their day. When Jesus was twelve He was with them on the annual trip. It was customary for boys to begin to prepare to take their place in the religious community the following year. After the feast was over, they started out on the three-day journey home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. They assumed he was with relatives in their group. When they missed Him, they returned to Jerusalem and spent three days looking for Him. They found Him in the Temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Everyone was amazed at His understanding and His answers.

- A. Mary, in her concern as a caring and worried mother said, "Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I were anxiously searching for you."
- B. Jesus' reply, "Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know I had to be in My Father's house (...about My Father's business)?," shows that already at twelve years He was beginning to feel the weight and responsibility of the purpose for which He had been born.
- C. They didn't understand what He was saying to them. They had lost the edge of spiritual awareness. Twelve years earlier, they were on the cutting edge of spiritual experience. Now Mary was perhaps 30, Joseph 48, and in the routine of life (business, kids, responsibilities) they had forgotten about Divine Purposes (Angelic visitations, prophecies, dreams and visions seemed so long ago and far away). How long does it take you to lose the edge?
- D. Joseph and Mary were in a rut. They were still devoutly religious and faithful to the Jewish laws and customs, but they needed to be reminded who Jesus was and who they were in God's purposes.

IV. Jesus was growing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:40, 51-52)

- A. He went down to Nazareth and was obedient to them. He attended synagogue school and worked in the shop. The annual trips to Jerusalem continued. He continued to spend time in the Temple on His visit to the City. Joseph died sometime in the next 18 years and Jesus took the responsibility of carrying on the trade and supporting His family. Mark 6:3 names His brothers and says that He had sisters also.

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He was obedient to Joseph and Mary. Can you submit to and obey people in authority who seem to be less gifted, spiritual, or intelligent than yourself?

- B. Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:40, 51-52)
 - 1. Jesus grew. The process of healthy life involves growth. Growth takes time. What you're looking for is steady progress, not leaps and bounds.
 - 2. Jesus became strong (AV "strong in spirit"). You are a spiritual being. How's your spiritual growth and development? Is your faith growing strong? Are you strong in spirit? What do you feed and exercise most?
 - 3. Jesus was filled with wisdom. Jesus did not merely acquire knowledge. Education is important, but the quality of wisdom has more to do with values than with information. Wisdom is gained through insight and experience.
 - 4. Jesus grew in favor with God and man. Jesus was not only godly, He was good. It is important that we develop a balance of piety and practicality. It is important that we live in such a way that we demonstrate character as well as spirituality.

SECTION 2: BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar-- when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene-- during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the Word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert.** (Luke 3:1-2)*

- I. Background and Introduction: The story of John's ministry.
 - A. The Word came to John in the wilderness. John the Baptist was not part of the religious establishment. He was not part of the political system of the Jewish religious system and was therefore perhaps more open to the voice of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 3:1-2)
 - 1. John's message was powerful and confrontational. John began to declare the need for repentance from sin and sins. (Luke 3:7-9)
 - 2. John's message was personal. John named the sins and the sinners and very specifically pointed out what they needed to do in response to his message. Repent, turn from the sin, receive God's forgiveness. (Luke 3:11-14)
 - 3. John's message was preparatory. John declared that his primary purpose was to prepare the way for the Messiah to be introduced and that as Messiah's role increased, his role would decrease. (Luke 3:16-17; John 3:30)
 - B. John Baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.
 - 1. It was at the baptism of Jesus that John saw the sign of the Holy Spirit fulfilled and

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knew Jesus was the one he was preparing the way for. (John 1:32-34)

2. John declared that Jesus was the Messiah and began to transfer the loyalty of his followers to Jesus. (John 3:30)

C. John was put in prison for his faithfulness to his calling and his uncompromising message confronting sin. (Luke 3:20)

1. John had times of doubt and anxiety in the prison. At one point he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the One?" (Luke 7:18-23)
2. Jesus acknowledged John's greatness. Greatness is not always measured by outward signs of success. John's successes seemed to be diminishing, but his greatness in God's sight didn't change. (Luke 7:24-28)
3. John's uncompromising faithfulness cost him his life. Sometimes obedience and faithfulness brings blessing, other times it requires sacrifice. (Matthew 14:1-12)

II. The Baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)

A. Baptism was not an uncommon practice among the Jews and even some other religions of the day. Moses had introduced symbolic washing for the priesthood and for those being cleansed from defilement or sickness.

1. John introduced a Baptism of Repentance, signifying that one had acknowledged and turned from his sin, and was forgiven and cleansed by God's grace.
2. Jews and Gentiles alike were responding to John's message and receiving his baptism.
3. John hesitated to baptize Jesus because he recognized Jesus' sinlessness and superiority to himself. (Matthew 3:14)

B. Jesus insisted that John baptize Him *"to fulfill all righteousness."* (Matthew 3:15)

1. Jesus was acknowledging John's role as the forerunner who would prepare the way for Him and as the fulfillment of prophecy.
2. Jesus was acknowledging that His ministry and John's message were fulfilling the same purpose. There was no competition for disciples or conflict in their messages.
3. Jesus was acknowledging His submission to God's divine purpose.

C. The manifestation of the Godhead at Jesus' baptism. (Matthew 3:16-17)

1. The Father was well-pleased. The voice of the Father speaking from heaven, expressing His approval of His Son's submission and obedience.
2. The Son was submitted. Jesus yielding to the will of the Father, acknowledging

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His submission to God's great plan of redemption and His willingness to take His place in its fulfillment.

3. The Spirit was abiding or remaining on Him. The Dove, representing the anointing of God's Spirit and power, resting upon the Lamb, representing the submissive and gentle nature of Jesus, the servant king.

III. The Desert Temptation of Jesus. (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-14)

A. "The Spirit sent Him out into the desert.." Mark 1:12

1. Sometimes the desert or wilderness experience comes immediately after a "Jordan River" experience. Times of severe testing can follow immediately on the heels of times of great blessing. The same Holy Spirit that rested on Jesus to anoint Him for service sent Him into the wilderness to be tempted and tested by Satan.
2. The wilderness is a place of dryness, hunger, and thirst. Sometimes the hunger is through fasting (Spiritual Discipline) and sometimes through divine circumstance. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."
3. You can't judge righteousness, yours or others', or determine God's approval or someone's spirituality by present experience of blessing alone.
4. In times of blessing don't cling to or trust in the blessing itself. "And it came to pass..." Seasons of blessing come and then they pass. Seasons of wilderness testing come and then they pass.

B. It was the Spirit of God who "Sent - Led - Drove" Jesus into the Wilderness. It was not a result of sin or error or a lack of faith that caused Jesus to be in the wilderness. It was a necessary part of His preparation for service.

1. There is Divine purpose in the Wilderness experience. Think of Moses who spent 40 years in the wilderness as a fugitive from Egyptian justice in order to prepare for leading Israel 40 years in the wilderness in preparation for entering the promised land. Consider David who spent his youth in the wilderness of Judea with his father's sheep to prepare for developing into a great warrior and leader of men while in the wilderness as a fugitive from Saul's madness and jealousy. Elijah regained his strength in the wilderness and returned to anoint his successor and the next king. John the Baptist learned to hear and obey the voice of God in the wilderness.
2. The same Holy Spirit that blesses, anoints, and empowers can also lead you into dry, difficult, challenging situations. Blessing does not always indicate approval and dryness and testing does not always indicate disapproval. Sometimes the testing prepares us to be able to handle the blessing.

C. He was sent into the Wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. (See James 1:13-14)

1. The wilderness is a testing ground, and sometimes a battleground.

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- a. The word used for tempted is the Greek "*Pirazo*" which means "proved, tested, examined." This is testing to determine strength or quality.
 - b. The idea of being tempted here is not so much the idea of "Are you a saint or a sinner?" "Are you good or bad?", but rather "Are you ready, willing, and committed to the purpose for which God has created and called you?"
2. Jesus was tempted by Satan.
- a. Satan is an old devil and you may be a young Christian. Don't rely on your own knowledge, wisdom, or strength to fight the battles of temptation. (2 Corinthians 2:11)
 - b. Jesus met temptation in the strength and authority of God's Word. God's Word is the Sword of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17)
- D. Satan tempted Jesus in three areas. We can expect to face the same kinds of temptations and testings in our own lives. It's not a sin to be tempted! (Hebrews 4:15)
1. **"Turn Stones to Bread"** (Luke 4:3-4)
 - a. Jesus was hungry. He had natural needs and He was tempted to use the power and anointing to meet His own needs. (Matthew 27:40)
 - b. Jesus had a sense of purpose that was stronger than His own personal desires and needs. (Mark 10:45)
 - c. He responded to temptation with God's Word. (Luke 4:4)
 - d. Lesson: God's will is more important than personal gratification, comfort, or success. (Matthew 26:39)
 - e. There is a danger in the extreme application of the principle of making declarations or "confessions" of scriptures. Perhaps the greatest danger is in focussing on personal blessings, needs, or desires rather than on Divine Purpose. (Matthew 26:53)
 2. **"Worship Me"**: Satan promised Jesus all the same things that His Father had promised Him. He could have these things without the pain and the sacrifice if he would bow to the false authority of evil instead of the legitimate authority of good. (Luke 4:5-8)
 - a. He was tempted to use a short-cut to gain His goal. Why go through all the suffering and sacrifice of doing things God's way when you can have it all without pain or effort?
 - b. He was tempted to put achievement before principle. To take an easier route to a desired end. God's will must be done God's way.
 - c. He was tempted to give up heaven for earth. Many times we are tempted

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to sacrifice the eternal for the temporary. (Philippians 2:10-11)

- d. He responded with God's Word properly applied. (Luke 4:8)
 - e. Lesson: God's will is only to be done God's way. There are principles of authority, loyalty, and relationship that are more important than just achieving goals, developing ministries, and being successful.
 - f. There is a danger of getting our eyes on someone or something other than Jesus. Worshipping a leader, worshipping a doctrine or emphasis, worshipping a ministry. Worship God, not a man, not a plan.
3. **"Prove Yourself."** (Luke 4:9-12)
- a. His identity and being were called into question. Often in times of dryness and testing we can become uncertain of our identity and our relationship with God.
 - b. He was tempted to use His power to prove something about Himself.
 - c. Satan even used scripture to tempt Jesus. (Luke 4:10-11)
 - d. Jesus used God's Word properly, not out of context. This is an area of caution for those who tend to extremes of "positive confession" without regard for the quickening of the Word by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 4:12)
 - e. Lesson: Satan uses God's Word out of context to confuse and deceive those who are not firmly grounded in truth. Satan still questions your identity and attempts to throw doubt on who you are in Christ.
 - f. Satan will still attempt to use deceiving spirits to get believers involved in petty questions and points of doctrine and miss the whole emphasis of God's Kingdom and purpose.
- E. Even when it seems you are alone and forgotten in the Wilderness of Testing, God is with you and His angels are standing by. But some things you just have to deal with until they are over. (Matthew 4:11, Mark 1:13)
- F. Don't let down your guard when you have won a battle, because it is a war, not just a battle. (Luke 4:13)
- G. Jesus returned from the wilderness testing in the power of the spirit. (Luke 4:14)
- 1. The intended result of temptation is overcoming. God does not intend for us to yield to temptation and be overcome by it. He has made provision for us to resist temptation and defeat Satan's attacks. (John 16:33, 1 John 5:4)
 - 2. The intended outcome of battle is victory. God does not intend for us to be defeated in battle. He has made provision for our victory. (1 Corinthians 15:57)
 - 3. Jesus was approved and anointed before the wilderness testing, but He was empowered in the wilderness.

- a. God uses tested and tried vessels to contain the precious treasures of His Kingdom.
- b. We are tested and proven so that we can be vessels of honor for the Master's use. (2 Timothy 2:21)

IV. How does God's Word tell us to deal with Temptation?

- A. Pray. We are to pray that we may avoid temptation whenever possible. (Matthew 6:13; Matthew 26:41)
- B. Flee. We are to know ourselves well enough to flee those temptations that we are most susceptible to. God's Word does not tell us to resist temptation, but to flee temptation. (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9)
- C. Use the Word of God. Jesus met each test and temptation with the words, "It is written." You must know the Word of God to use the Word of God. (John 14:26)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 4 Character of God 2: Jesus' Birth, Baptism, and Temptation

1. When you consider the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ: The visit of the Angel to Zechariah, Elizabeth's pregnancy, the visit of the angel to Mary, the angelic dream of Joseph, and the subsequent responses and actions of all the individuals involved, what character qualities of these four individuals do you feel were key in God's choice of them to bring His Son into the world and introduce the Kingdom of God?
2. After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John, and after the Holy Spirit was resting or abiding on Him, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Why do you feel He was tempted to sin when He had His Father's approval and the Holy Spirit's anointing? Why was it important that He experience these temptations? Do you feel that He could have actually yielded to these temptations and sinned?