Jesus in the Gospels

Disciple
Second Generation Studies
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Reading’s Promise

When we think about it, there’s nothing quite like reading. Unfortunately, we seldom do think about it. However, since reading is such a vital part of disciplined Bible study, it is worth a few moments to think about what can happen when we read Scripture. But first consider a few simple aspects of reading itself.

Thinking About Reading

All of us learned to read; few of us recall how we did it. Yet we should not take for granted the ability to read, to understand someone else’s marks on paper or screen, and to say the marks into words that we may not have heard or seen before. The more we do think about reading, the more awesome this ability becomes—especially when we recall how many things can happen as we read or as a result of reading: We acquire information; we meet ideas that had not occurred to us; we remember what we had forgotten or overlooked; we simply enjoy an author’s way with words; at times we disagree with what we are reading. And sometimes we do not understand but keep on reading, hoping the next page will be more comprehensible.

From the time we began to read, the kind of writing before us affected how we expected to respond. The child does not expect the same experience from the rhyme of a Dr. Seuss book as from the plot of a fairy tale, nor does a parent expect the same reaction to a letter from a daughter halfway around the world as to an owner’s manual. Knowing what to expect from the writing is a condition for reading profitably.

Expectations are not the only thing we bring to our reading, whatever the text. We bring habits of thought, convictions about what is right and wrong, curiosity, physical conditions such as poor vision, or a sense of urgency (“I’ve got to get this read before ...”). In other words, we bring ourselves—the selves that have been built up across the years, the selves we are because of where we live, our gender, and our skin color.

Reading can help us see better who we really are, as well as who we aren’t and perhaps want to be. Self-discovery is an important aspect of reading, especially when we read literature with substance.

The fact that we most often read sitting down, whether in a comfortable chair or at a desk, does not mean we are passive. Reading can be taxing as well as exciting. Not just because unfamiliar words or complex sentences demand sustained attention, but also because in reading we are engaging the person who wrote what we read—and perhaps letting the author engage us as well. Underlining and writing comments in the margins are ways of conversing with what the writer has written. When talking with a person directly, we can say, “I’m not sure I understand; what do you mean?” The person spoken to can respond, but the author cannot; so we put a comment or question in the margin to record our part of the conversation. Sometimes we still don’t get it until later. Then the book or essay opens up, perhaps unexpectedly, and we too open up to what it says. Significant reading is like that.

Reading Scripture

All the preceding observations about reading apply also to reading Scripture. The distinctive character of the Bible, however, suggests that a few additional observations are appropriate.

To begin with, unless we read to someone, we normally read silently, to ourselves, by ourselves. But Scripture was written to be read aloud, even when it was read alone. We cannot skim when reading aloud. The slower pace allows us to attend to all the details. Reading aloud also invites us to use the voice to emphasize certain words, to distinguish questions from statements, as well as the words of one speaker in the story from those of another person. By reading the text aloud, especially the Gospel stories that report exchanges between Jesus and his hearers, we become interpreters. Indeed, since the stories in the Gospels had been told and retold for years before they were written down, the person who today reads these stories aloud is a successor of the early Christians who first told these stories.

Furthermore, Scripture was meant to be read publicly, in the faith community assembled for worship and for instruction. So if we read it as
intended, we will read it in the company of others whether they are present or not. Because the Christian Bible is the church’s book, in reading it we join a community of readers and hearers who repeatedly have pondered it, struggled with it, and have been grasped by its power to change and renew faith and life. This community spans centuries and cultures and now circles the globe as well. Participating in this community provides the occasion to open ourselves to our fellow readers who well may understand our shared Scripture in ways that would not occur to us.

Some of us read all sorts of things—newspapers and magazines, novels, “how to” books, poetry, jokes, to name a few—in keeping with our interests, tastes, or desire to know. Usually we easily understand their subject matter. When we read Scripture, however, we often have difficulty knowing what it says and what it means. That experience should neither surprise nor dishearten us. Like all good literature, the Bible often discloses its meanings to those who stay with it long enough to get something out of it. Curiously, what we get out of it may or may not be what the author put into it, for what the author put into it is not always obvious. Still, the author’s efforts can help us grasp the subject matter more clearly, at least clearly enough to know that our understanding is moving in the right direction.

In the long run, what matters most is not whether we have grasped something of the subject matter but whether the subject matter has somehow grasped us. When the Bible’s subject matter grasps us, we find ourselves confronted by something that challenges and changes us. We cannot require our reading of Scripture to produce such an experience, but we can be open to it. And then, if we are grasped, we will be surprised by the gift.

**Reading the Gospels**

The subject matter of the Gospels is Jesus, not just the man himself but also the meaning of a whole event whose center is Jesus. And that event includes Jesus’ relation to the Jewish religion he inherited, to the circle of disciples around him, and to the early Christians who believed in him after his death and resurrection—including those whose understanding of Jesus is built into the Gospels they wrote about him. The Jesus of the Gospels is not a detached figure but a person whose meaning cannot be separated from his impact on his contemporaries and on those who believed in him later.

Reading the Gospels attentively is essential if we are to grasp their subject matter. While any piece of writing requires attention, in the case of the Gospels attentive reading means bearing in mind that their purpose is to form their readers by the way they inform them about the subject matter. The Gospels achieve their purpose when we grasp enough of what they tell us about Jesus that we can be grasped by him. That is the promise of reading the Gospels.
A Word to the Reader

Before You Begin

1. Jesus in the Gospels differs somewhat from the four phases of Disciple Bible study, for it looks more closely at the Gospel texts. The title of this study suggests why this is so: We will be looking at Jesus in the Gospels. This focus requires attention to details.

2. Sometimes the first three Gospels (the Synoptics) report what Jesus said and did in almost the same way and in the same setting, but at other times they tell the same story differently or in a different setting; so too, nearly identical words of Jesus sometimes appear in different settings. We will use these differences to detect some aspect of what each Gospel writer wants to highlight about Jesus. When the Gospel of John tells the same story as the Synoptics, we will look at it briefly as well. But since John’s Gospel has its distinct way of presenting Jesus, we will examine that Gospel at the end of our study.

3. The assigned daily Bible readings usually include passages from the Old Testament that are important to the Gospel readings, sometimes because the Gospels mention what the Old Testament says, and sometimes because the Old Testament passages reveal what the Gospels take for granted. From time to time, readings from the Apocrypha are assigned because they help us understand better the Jewish thought-world Jesus inherited.

Biblical references in the daily assignments generally follow the sequence of the lesson development and so are often not in biblical sequence. Expect to read some passages more than once and some passages several times because meaning can differ according to context.

4. While Scripture quoted here is from the New Revised Standard Version, from time to time other versions are cited as well because differences in translation often signal either different understandings of the Greek text or different words used in the manuscripts. As you read your Bible, watch for small, usually italic, letters of the alphabet that appear within or at the end of biblical verses indicating additional information in footnotes. The footnotes ordinarily appear at the end of the right-hand column in a two-column Bible or at the bottom of the page in a one-column Bible. Occasionally the study manual commentary refers to an alternative translation of a particular verse or mentions verses missing from or added to some manuscripts. You will find that information in the footnotes.

5. Sometimes the lessons quote from early Christian writings not in the New Testament. Such quotations remind us that second- and third-century Christians were producing a growing body of writings alongside and in response to the New Testament.

6. Topics that cannot be treated within the body of the lesson but that are pertinent to the subject matter of the lesson, such as historical information or explanation of a concept, appear as brief notes or in chart form within or near the lesson to which they relate. Not every lesson has such additional information. References to notes and charts by title and page number come within the lessons; for example, Lesson 1 includes the first reference to a note (See “The Gospels,” page 15.)

7. Every field of study develops its own technical vocabulary to make talking about the subject matter more precise. This practice is true also of biblical study. For example, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, used by all New Testament writers, is called the Septuagint. To aid understanding, the study manual includes a glossary of such technical or unfamiliar terms. When such a word appears in a lesson, an asterisk indicates the word is included in the glossary (for example, Septuagint*). After the word has appeared in two lessons the asterisk is dropped.

As You Go

Things to look for. Accompanying each day’s Scripture reading assignments are suggestions of things to look for that will take you deeper into Scripture. The words note, notice, and observe are used often in the suggestions to encourage close attention to detail.

If you note or observe carefully, you may discover things in the texts you might have missed otherwise. You also will make your own observations and find it useful to write them down. (In this study, “texts” refers to what is written in the Bible not to what is written in the study manual, as in “textbook.”) Speaking of the “text” is a way of emphasizing first what is written, not the information it might contain.

Suggestions of things to look for sometimes amount to two or three sentences; other times, several sentences. As the study progresses, the
suggestions increase in length and detail thereby developing and sharpening your ability to read carefully. As you become aware of detail in Scripture ask yourself repeatedly, What am I to make of this? The study manual provides space for recording insights, observations, and questions related to the Scripture. This approach to study of the Gospels requires and involves close reading of the text—not to be done on the run, in bits and pieces, or at the last minute. Scheduling enough time for reading and writing is crucial.

**Study manual format.** The lesson title and the printed Scripture that follows indicate the lesson’s focus. The title of each lesson serves also as the heading for the commentary portion of the lesson in the study manual. Main elements in the study manual format are designated by scriptural phrases.

*“They Have No Wine”* is Mary’s word to Jesus at the wedding in Cana (John 2:3). The words appear in each lesson as the heading for a brief statement about some aspect of the human condition that is addressed, sometimes indirectly, in the week’s study. This statement may not apply to everyone, and it is never a complete description. It intends to be suggestive, to alert the reader to some part of daily life that needs attention.

*“Beginning With Moses and All the Prophets”* is from Luke 24:27, where the writer of the Gospel reports what Jesus said to the two persons he met on the road to Emmaus. “Moses and all the prophets” is a way of referring to Scripture as a whole, which Jesus interpreted in relation to himself. Here the phrase signals that to understand Jesus in the Gospels we must attend also to the Old Testament.

*“Do You Want to Become His Disciples, Too?”* comes from John 9:27 (NIV), where the man whose blindness Jesus had healed asks this question of those who questioned him. Even though that setting differs from ours, the question itself goes to the heart of what this study is about. These paragraphs do not tell you what to do; rather, they are designed to stimulate thoughtful reflection so that you can come to your own conclusions about what your following Jesus calls for.

This section always includes a question or a suggestion requiring written response as a starting point for describing the Jesus you see in the week’s Scripture.

All the prayers come from the Psalms and are quoted from The Contemporary English Version (CEV) published by American Bible Society in 1995. The freshness of this readable (especially aloud) and understandable translation makes it especially useful for prayer. From time to time you may wish to use other translations, as well as use the quoted psalm as a starting point for composing your own prayer.

**Gospel Comparisons.** Daily individual study and weekly group study involve use of three components—the Bible, the study manual, and Gospel Comparisons.

Gospel Comparisons contains selected Gospel portions from the New Revised Standard Version printed in multicolumn format to facilitate the comparing of similarities and differences in Gospel accounts of an event, teaching, or story. The printed selections follow the sequence of Scripture treated in the study manual.

**GC-1** is an example of the symbol that appears in the study manual at the point in any lesson where the Gospel Comparisons is to be used during daily study. (GC means Gospel Comparisons. The first number indicates the lesson and the second number, the Gospel portion to be used at that point in the lesson.) The symbol may appear one or more times in a lesson. A few lessons do not call for use of Gospel Comparisons during daily study. Brief instructions accompany each Gospel portion.

Some Gospel portions are included for use during weekly group study and therefore are not referred to in the study manual. References to their use appear in the leader guide.

**Completing daily assignments.** Follow these steps in completing daily assignments:

First: Look at the biblical references to get a sense of what portions of the Bible you are going to read.

Second: Glance at the suggestions of things to look for to get an idea of what to watch for while reading Scripture.

Third: Read all of the assigned biblical passages for the day and take notes on the passages.

Fourth: Go back and work through the suggestions of things to look for one at a time, writing notes as you note and observe so you can retrieve your ideas for group discussions.

Expect to spend at least forty-five to sixty minutes in daily study on Days 1–5. Allow at least one hour on Day 6 for reading the commentary in the study manual, which often requires looking up additional references, comparing Scripture passages in the Gospel Comparisons, and writing your response to the question or suggestion at the end of the lesson.
A Word About This Study

Jesus in the Gospels focuses on the portraits of Jesus found in the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word in used in the title signals that this study takes an approach different from the familiar “life and teaching of Jesus” approach of reading stories and accounts of what Jesus said and did in order to draw conclusions about their meaning and about who Jesus was. This study looks at the way each Gospel writer presents events and teachings and at the picture of Jesus that emerges in each of the Gospels.

To know who Jesus is, we must study the Jesus in the Gospels. The four canonical portraits—the heart of this study—focus on Jesus himself by the ways they situate him in time and place. The history-rooted Jesus in the Gospels challenges preconceived ideas about Jesus. For those who think of Jesus as merely an intriguing figure from the past, the historical and canonical portraits of Jesus will show them the Jesus who is more than a figure to be memorialized.

Each Gospel has a distinctive angle of vision. Most readers of Scripture tend to read the Gospels and put the stories together into one story—one Jesus. But that one Jesus is not the church’s Jesus. The church has never substituted a single story for the Jesus of the four Gospels. Each Gospel’s way of presenting Jesus and his significance reflects not just the writer’s view of Jesus and events but also reflects what was going on in the writer’s church. These differences in perspective on Jesus provide opportunities to understand and appropriate more than one way of following Jesus.

Reading is not passive. Many Disciple graduates who come to this study will have studied the life and teaching of Jesus or the life and ministry of Jesus, but few will ever have studied Jesus in the various ways the Gospels present him. This approach to study of the Gospels requires and involves the participant in close reading of the text. The Bible discloses its meanings to those who stay with it long enough to get something out of it.

Think of preparation in terms of commitment not convenience. Jesus in the Gospels takes critical scholarship seriously and therefore requires of participants skill in comparing and analyzing various Gospel passages, and biblical knowledge that enables participants to place particular New Testament passages about Jesus in their Old Testament context. In other words, participant preparation is rigorous.

Disciple graduates will recognize that an increased amount of time is required for daily study because of the detailed reading called for in daily assignments. Completing daily assignments will involve use of the Bible, the study manual, and Gospel Comparisons.

Bring appropriate expectations to this study. What may participants expect of this study? Participants may expect to gain a fuller understanding of and appreciation for the four Gospels as richly textured portraits of Jesus.

Participants may expect to see the varying portraits of Jesus as opportunities to understand and appropriate more than one way of following Jesus.

Participants may expect to gain appreciation for Jesus; for the complexity of Jesus’ historical time and place; and, in particular, for his Jewishness.

Participants may expect to be confronted weekly by Jesus and summoned to deeper allegiance and loyalty to Jesus.

Participants may expect that this study of Jesus, while taking critical scholarship seriously, will enrich rather than impoverish their understanding of Jesus.

Participants may expect to understand what is at stake in doctrinal claims about Jesus that have roots in Scripture.

Participants may expect to converse more seriously than in the past about their Christian heritage in Jesus, to be able to take a stand—this is what we believe.

Participants may expect to continually confront the question, What constitutes my fellowship?

In terms of approach to study, participants may expect daily disciplined reading and study of Scripture with growing attention to detail.

Participants may expect regularly to use their Bible, their study manual, and their Gospel Comparisons together in daily study.

Participants may expect to learn anew that the Old Testament permeates the whole Bible, that the Gospel writers and Jesus relied on the Old Testament; it was their Scripture, the only Scripture they knew.

Participants may expect to be surprised, to be shocked, to be made uncomfortable, to be stretched, to be awed, to be comforted, and to experience hope and peace.
The Study Manual

The study manual guides daily study and preparation for the weekly group session. All lessons have the same elements each designated by a scriptural phrase. While these main elements always appear in the same sequence in each lesson, they function like the interwoven strands of a web. This function reflects the rhythm of the study that involves moving back and forth among the Bible, the study manual, and the Gospel Comparisons.

The Format

- The lesson title and printed Scripture that follows indicate the lesson’s focus. The lesson title serves also as the heading for the commentary portion of the lesson in the study manual.
- “They Have No Wine” is the heading for a brief statement about some aspect of the human condition that is addressed, sometimes indirectly, by the week’s study. It intends to be suggestive, to alert the reader to some part of daily life that needs attention.
- “Beginning With Moses and All the Prophets” is the heading for the reading assignments and suggestions of things to look for during each day’s study. The scriptural phrase signals that to understand Jesus in the Gospels requires attending also to the Old Testament.
- “Do You Want to Become His Disciples, Too?” is the heading for the response section of the study manual. The paragraphs here are designed to stimulate thoughtful reflection about the discipleship Jesus calls for. This section always includes a question or a suggestion inviting a written response as a starting point for discussing the Jesus in the week’s Scriptures.
- The prayers printed in the study manual at the end of each lesson all come from the Psalms and are quoted from The Contemporary English Version. The psalm can be a starting point for participants to use in composing their own prayers each day and is used to conclude the group session each week.

The “So Then” section of the lesson commentary highlights information, ideas, and perspectives presented in the lesson and helps the reader begin to see connections between the biblical passages studied and their lives. Each week, through “So Then,” readers will come to understand how the biblical material challenges the way they think or act and how the perspectives of the Gospel writers connect with, inform, and inspire their own perspectives.

Although this section varies in length according to the lesson content, it generally functions as a summary of the emphases and teachings in the lesson. Sometimes “So Then” draws together insights from more than one lesson because the information needs to be seen as a whole to be thoroughly understood. Sometimes this section will simply restate the main points in the lesson; other times it invites questions, stimulates curiosity, challenges readers’ thinking, or draws implications for their lives.

Reading thoroughly “A Word to the Reader” on study manual pages 6-7 before beginning the study is an important first step for leaders and group members alike. Information on those pages should be discussed as part of every group’s orientation.

Things to Look For

Accompanying each day’s Scripture reading assignments are suggestions of things to look for that will take persons deeper into Scripture. The words note, notice, and observe are used often in the suggestions to encourage close attention to detail. One way to think about these three words is to start with the word see in the sense of look or use your eyes. Note, notice, and observe all imply using the senses, taking in everything the words you are reading have to deliver. And bringing both curiosity and imagination to the acts of noticing, noting, observing will result in new insights. To notice is to give attention, even respectful attention, to the Scripture being read. Note implies a careful and deliberate getting in mind what is being seen and read. Couple with that idea another definition of note—to write down or make note of. That action goes along with note in the sense of seeing or observing. To observe is to be aware, to look attentively, to direct one’s attention, to detect what is there in the words being read.

One way to fill note, notice, and observe with meaning is to look at some examples of how the words are used in Scripture. Think of all the different ways of understanding what the word is saying in each passage. For example, consider these verses: “And the Lord took note of Hannah” (1 Samuel 2:21); “Take note, I have told you beforehand”
(Matthew 24:25); “God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them” (Exodus 2:25); “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Luke 6:41); “Look at the heavens and see; observe the clouds, which are higher than you” (Job 35:5); “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). For every biblical passage you read, note, notice, observe it as though you had not seen it before.

Suggestions of things to look for sometimes amount to two or three sentences; other times, several sentences. As the study progresses, the suggestions increase in length and detail thereby developing and sharpening persons’ ability to read carefully. The study manual provides space for recording insights, observations, and questions related to the Scripture. This approach to study of the Gospels requires and involves close reading of the text—not to be done on the run, in bits and pieces, or at the last minute.

A helpful sequence of steps for completing daily assignments and working with the suggestions of things to look for appears in a yellow-tinted block on study manual page 7.

Gospel Comparisons

Gospel Comparisons is a companion to the study manual. It contains selected Gospel portions from the New Revised Standard Version printed in multicolored format to facilitate the comparing of similarities and differences in Gospel accounts of an event, teaching, or story. The printed selections follow the sequence of Scripture treated in the study manual.

\[\text{GC 1-1}\] is an example of the symbol that appears in the study manual at the point in any lesson where the Gospel Comparisons is to be used during daily study. (GC means Gospel Comparisons. The first number indicates the lesson and the second number, the Gospel portion to be used at that point in the lesson.) The symbol may appear one or more times in a lesson. A few lessons do not call for use of Gospel Comparisons during daily study. Brief instructions accompany each Gospel portion.

Some Gospel portions are included for use during weekly group study and therefore are not referred to in the study manual. References to their use appear in the leader guide. (For complete information about using Gospel Comparisons, see Gospel Comparisons pages 4–7.)

Biblical References

Bible studies indicate biblical references in various ways. The following examples indicate how the biblical references in this study are to be understood:

**Chapter and verse**
- Matthew 1:1-2 means read Matthew Chapter 1, Verses 1 through 2.
- Matthew 1:1-2, 4, 6-8 means read Matthew Chapter 1, Verses 1 through 2, Verses 4, and Verses 6 through 8.
- A hyphen is used between verses in sequence as in Matthew 1:1-2.
- Commas within a reference separate verses within the same chapter as in Matthew 1:1-2, 4, 6-8.
- A semicolon indicates a change of chapter or a change of book as in Malachi 3:1-5; 4; Mark 1:1-8; 6:7-29.

**Chapters through chapters**
- Matthew 1-2 means read the first verse of Chapter 1 through the last verse of Chapter 2.
- A dash is used between chapters as in Matthew 1-2 and a hyphen is used between verses as in Matthew 1:1-2.

**Portions of more than one chapter within a book**
- Matthew 1:1-4:4 means begin reading at Matthew Chapter 1, Verse 1 and read all the way through Chapter 4, Verse 4.

**Portions spanning two books**
- 2 Chronicles 36:22-23–Ezra 1:1-4 means read 2 Chronicles Chapter 36, Verses 22 through 23 (which ends the book) through Ezra Chapter 1, Verses 1 through 4 (which begins the next book).

Sometimes biblical references within the lesson commentary include the name of the book as well as numbers indicating chapter and verse and sometimes only chapter and verse numbers. The first reference to a particular book lists the name of the book and chapter and verse numbers. If several references to that same book follow, only chapters and verses are listed, not the book name. When a reference is to a different book then the book name is included. When you come across a reference without the name of the book, you can trace the references back to the first mention of the book to know if you’re reading in the right book.
Gifted by the Spirit and Tested by the Choices

Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

(Hebrews 2:18)

They Have No Wine

We are so vulnerable, so open to the lure of choices we suspect are wrong and to the attraction of what we know is not right. We can even give good reasons for doing what is not good. To a large extent, the choices we make, and the patterns and habits of our choosing, determine the sort of person we become because choices test us. Making the right choice is rarely easy.

Beginning With Moses and All the Prophets

This week we study the stories of Jesus’ baptism and temptation. We also consider why it is important to remember Jesus too was tempted, as well as what he had to say about temptation itself.


Note how closely the first three Gospels link Jesus’ baptism and temptation. Observe also that John has no temptation story, and think about the difference this omission makes in the way you picture Jesus.

Day 2  Deuteronomy 6:4-19; 8:1-16; Psalms 2; 91; Isaiah 42:1-4; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1-2; 2 Kings 5:1-14

Observe how today’s readings from Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah are used in the stories of Jesus’ baptism and temptation. Note also that in Luke 4:16-30 Jesus refers to the stories in First and Second Kings.
Day 3  Genesis 25:27-34; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 12:3-17
As you read the passages from Hebrews, remember the same Greek word means “tempt” as well as “test.” What temptations do we resist if we heed the exhortations in Hebrews 12:12-17?

Day 4  Exodus 32:1-6; Numbers 21:4-9; 25:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; James 1
Note how alert Paul and James are to the reality of temptation. In 1 Corinthians 10 see how Paul uses Israel’s disobedience as a series of negative examples in order to warn the Corinthians against their temptation to idolatry.

(2) To what temptation does Peter succumb in Luke 22:31-34?
(3) Note the different renderings of the same Greek word in Mark 14:38: “temptation” (RSV, NIV); “time of trial” (NRSV); “test” (REB).

Day 6  Read and respond to “Gifted by the Spirit and Tested by the Choices” and “Do You Want to Become His Disciples, Too?”

Prayer Concerns
Gifted by the Spirit and Tested by the Choices

Given the sort of person John was and the sort of message he had, his baptism of Jesus is a remarkable fact. After all, John sought to save people from the wrath of God by calling them to repentance and baptism. Why would Jesus respond positively to such a mission? Even more remarkable is what the four Gospels say also happened: The Spirit came to Jesus at his baptism. In addition, the first three Gospels say the heavenly voice declared him to be God’s Son. Each Gospel—as well as several gospels not in the New Testament—tells the story in its own way in order to express what the writer wanted to emphasize. The differences in these accounts make it difficult to know exactly what happened (what a video camera might have recorded). Also remarkable is the fact that in all three Synoptic Gospels the newly baptized Jesus must encounter Satan before he begins his mission.

Accounts of Jesus’ Baptism and Temptation

Mark 1:9-13. Mark’s account is so brief our attention is riveted on what the Evangelist wants us to know. The focus of the story is not on the baptism itself but on what happened as Jesus emerged from the water. (Immersion is assumed; Christian art portrays the baptism by affusion [water poured on the head] because artists could hardly paint the immersed Jesus.) Jesus saw the heavens “torn apart” (literally, “split”). A split sky signals that a revelation is about to occur (as in Revelation 4:1). And here the disclosure is both visual and auditory—seen and heard. Jesus, like John, is silent because the story is interested in what happened, not in what they think. He receives the gift of the Spirit and accepts what the voice says. The Spirit is power, for it “immediately drove him out into the wilderness” where he met Satan and “the wild beasts.” The abrupt change from a high moment to a low one could hardly be expressed more vividly.

The climax of the scene is the voice from heaven (that is, God’s voice) announcing Jesus’ relation to God in two statements, both derived from Scripture. The first (“You are my beloved Son,” Mark 1:11, REB) quotes a line from Psalm 2:7 that originally was God’s word to the king on the occasion of his enthronement as indicated in the next line, “This day I become your father.” That is, from now on, the king enjoys a special relation to God and also is expected to obey God as a son is supposed to obey his father. The second statement, “in you I take delight,” comes from Isaiah 42:1, where God says, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom I take delight” (REB). Mark’s use of this line is appropriate here because Isaiah continues, “I have put my spirit on him.” (Mark does not quote this line, however; he probably assumes the readers know what Isaiah says.) Thus Mark shows the reader that Jesus now knows himself to be the Spirit-endowed Son designated by God to carry out God’s will; furthermore, he is the “more powerful” one John had proclaimed (Mark 1:7), for Jesus is the bearer of Spirit-power.

That the Spirit is power is shown by the word Mark uses to say what happened next: The Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness, the same word Mark uses to say Jesus “expelled” demons (1:34; “cast out,” NRSV). According to Mark, Satan “tempted” Jesus throughout the forty days in the wilderness, though Mark probably understands the Greek word to mean “tested.” Only Mark mentions the “wild beasts”—perhaps to suggest Jesus was the counterpart to Adam: In Eden Adam failed the test; in the wilderness Jesus passed it. The beasts might also suggest a place of danger and vulnerability. In any case, Mark implies (but does not describe) a conflict between Spirit-power and Satan-power. Having won this conflict in the wilderness, Jesus continues his victory in the first act of his ministry: He expels an unclean spirit, one of Satan’s agents (1:21-28). In contrast with Mark, the Gospel of John reports no exorcisms and reports no wilderness test either; compared with Mark, both Matthew and Luke understand the wilderness test as triple temptations.

In Eden Adam failed the test; in the wilderness Jesus passed it.
Matthew 3:13–4:11. What we notice first in Matthew’s account is that Matthew, assuming the greater baptizes the lesser, reports that John resisted Jesus’ request for baptism and wanted Jesus to baptize him instead. John consented, however, when Jesus said, “It is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Every word in this reply is significant. Jesus did not say he was required, for whatever reason, to be baptized; nor did he imply he knew he did not need John’s baptism “with water for repentance” (3:11) because he was sinless. Instead, he said it was “proper for us”—that is, in keeping with God’s purpose for both of them, because in this action each did what was right for him. Jesus did not keep aloof from those who were baptized “confessing their sins” (3:6) but identified with them, even though he had no sins to confess. Recall that repentance is wholehearted turning to God and God’s will. Since the Godward turn was to be at the core of Jesus’ appeal, Matthew’s story implies Jesus did not ask anyone to do what he had not done. He too turned his life Godward. So it was “proper” for Jesus to be baptized along with others turning to God, and it was “proper” for John to baptize him.

Interestingly, in Matthew John does not connect his baptism with forgiveness of sins, for Matthew omits Mark 1:4. In Matthew forgiveness is linked to Jesus’ death. Only in Matthew’s account of the Last Supper does Jesus say, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out...for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

Matthew uses Mark’s account of the baptism but makes subtle changes. The heavens are “opened” (not “torn apart,” “split”), and Jesus sees “the Spirit of God” (not simply “the Spirit”) descending. And the voice does not address Jesus as in Mark but makes a public announcement—“This is my Son”—implying John too hears it.

The noncanonical Gospel According to the Hebrews* describes the baptism somewhat differently. “When the Lord ascended from the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him and said to him, ‘My son, in all the prophets I was waiting for you, that you might come, and that I might rest in you. For you are my rest; and you are my firstborn son, who reigns forever.’” What the Synoptic accounts of the voice imply—the gift of the Spirit to Jesus fulfills the prophetic words—here is made explicit. Some paintings of Jesus’ baptism include a small fountain overflowing with water—an attempt to show what this noncanonical gospel says.

Matthew uses Mark’s brief report of Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13) to frame the report of the temptations (notice how part of Mark appears at the beginning [Matthew 4:1] and the rest at the end [4:11]); but in doing so Matthew also makes some changes. The Spirit does not “drive” Jesus but “led” him into the wilderness “to be tempted.” In Matthew, the temptations apparently began after Jesus had fasted and “was famished,” suggesting this hunger made Jesus vulnerable to the first temptation. In Matthew the angels “waited on” Jesus after the devil had left him. In other words, he faced the diabolical one hungry and alone. In Luke, the angels are not mentioned; Jesus does not benefit from their service at all.

Luke 3:21–4:13. Luke gets John off the stage (3:19-20) before reporting Jesus’ baptism. Nothing is to distract the reader from Jesus and the Spirit. In fact, the baptism doesn’t even get its own sentence, as in Mark. Instead, it is simply mentioned as one detail of the setting for what is important in this Gospel—the coming of the Spirit and the word of the voice: “Now when all the people were baptized [implying that as far as Luke is concerned, John’s preparatory ministry has now been completed], and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying [a new detail], the heaven [singular] was opened” (3:21). Luke makes it clear he is not reporting a vision (as in Matthew and Mark) but an event. To underscore the reality of this event, Luke says, “The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.” At this point Luke inserts the genealogy. But instead of beginning with Abraham and coming forward (as in Matthew), it begins with Joseph and runs backward all the way to Adam, who also was “son of God.” In doing so Luke suggests Jesus is significant for the whole of humanity.

Luke too connects the temptation story with Jesus’ baptismal experience: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,” where he was tempted throughout the forty days. He fasted the whole time and so “was famished” (Luke 4:1-2). We probably should understand Luke to mean the temptations reported next actually took place during the forty-day period. Accordingly, the story ends this way: “When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time” (4:13)—leaving us wondering just when that will be. By adding this detail, Luke implies the devil did not accept his defeat. (Does he ever?)

In the meantime, “Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee” (4:14). Mark and Matthew simply assumed Jesus’ Spirit-power, but Luke emphasizes it because the Spirit is the link that ties all these individual stories together.
Remember, for Luke the story of Jesus, like that of the church in Acts, is the story of what the Holy Spirit did.

As mentioned earlier, in Mark Jesus’ victorious conflict with Satan in the wilderness is resumed in the first act of Jesus’ Spirit-empowered mission. Luke too connects Jesus’ first public act with the Spirit but in a completely different way—Jesus’ preaching in his hometown synagogue (Luke 4:16-30), a story Mark and Matthew put much later (Mark 6:1-6; Matthew 13:54-58). Luke’s version of the story is much longer because it is important for the overarching view of both Luke and Acts: (1) It brings to a head the entire narrative to this point, especially beginning at Luke 3:21. (2) It explains the significance of the Spirit’s coming to Jesus, for he reads from Isaiah

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor”

and says these words are now being fulfilled. (Luke 4:18-19 combines Isaiah 61:1-2 with a line from Isaiah 58:6, neither following the Septuagint exactly.) (3) It begins Jesus’ rejection as well, thereby reminding us of Simeon’s prediction in Luke 2:34. (4) By pointing out that in the past Elijah went only to a widow in Sidon (a Phoenician city outside Israel) and that in Elisha’s time the only leper healed was a Syrian, Jesus implies that the Gentiles will benefit from his mission more than his own people. With this story, Luke points ahead to the book of Acts.

The Triple Temptations

Matthew and Luke report the same three temptations; but in each Gospel the temptation story as a whole has a different climax because the sequence of the second and third temptation differs, giving each temptation story a different climax. (Go to 53) Two temptations begin the same way, “If you are the Son of God” (meaning, “If you are really the Son of God”). Jesus responds to each temptation by quoting Scripture.

Temptations is the right word for these allurements because they present attractive possibilities. After all, we can be tempted only by what seems attractive, by what holds desirable opportunities, by what promises self-fulfillment or self-enhancement, and by what suggests a shortcut to a goal. We are not tempted by something (or someone) in which we have no interest. In temptation the bad conceals itself in the guise of a possible good. If its badness were obvious, it would be far less attractive; it might even be repellant. In temptation, the choices we face do not come labeled “good” or “bad,” nor do they come graded (“this is better than that”). Because temptation appeals to something already in us, the response to it discloses who we really are as well as what we will be as a result of the choice. We are not surprised, then, that the tempter began by saying, “If you are the Son of God.” By saying “if” instead of “because,” the devil first tempts Jesus to doubt who he is, who God’s voice said he is. We miss the story’s impact if we simply watch Jesus repel the devil; the story can alert us to the words that often begin our own temptations, “If you are a disciple.” The story can also point us to Jesus’ way of handling temptation.

We impoverish our reading of Scripture by assuming it has but one meaning; then we easily lapse into arguing over what that meaning is. Frequently, however, the biblical text invites us to discover meaning not only in what is said but also in what is suggested and implied. Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’ temptations clearly offer meaning beyond the obvious, especially when we pay attention to details. Every word counts; there are no “throwaway lines.”

Matthew alerts his readers to multiple meanings in Matthew 2:15, where he quotes Hosea 11:1:

“Out of Egypt I have called my son.” In Hosea this line refers to Israel’s coming out of Egypt in Moses’ day. Matthew claims this verse is actualized when the infant Jesus, after staying in Egypt, is taken to Nazareth, implying the Israel story will give us clues to the Jesus story. But Matthew also tells the Jesus story in ways that remind us of Moses. This dual meaning—Jesus as Israel and Jesus as Moses—is evident when we look closely at Matthew’s temptation story.

Only Matthew says that Jesus fasted “forty days and forty nights” (Matthew 4:2). In the Old Testament, only Moses and Elijah fasted “forty days and forty nights” (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8); and the report of Elijah’s fast on the way to Horeb (Sinai) recalls Moses’ fasting at Sinai. Further, Jesus overcomes the first temptation by quoting...
from Deuteronomy 8:3, where God reminds Moses of Israel’s experience: God “humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna… in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” The angels who “waited on” Jesus afterward remind the reader that Israel also was fed wondrously with manna and that an angel had provided food for Elijah during his travel to Horeb.

Likewise, Jesus’ response to the second temptation in Matthew quotes from God’s command to Israel, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah” (Deuteronomy 6:16). According to Exodus 17:1-7, the Israelites, having camped at a waterless place, demanded that Moses give them water, and Moses in desperation cried out to God, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” God told him to strike the rock, and water flowed out. Moses “called the place Massah [meaning test] and Meribah [meaning quarrel], because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” Even though Matthew’s temptation story does not quote this question, Matthew probably assumes it, for it expresses precisely the issue in the temptation, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” from the pinnacle of the Temple. Indeed, the devil tempts Jesus to do so by quoting Scripture (Psalm 91:11-12), implying, “Let’s see if this really is true.” What is more tempting than to find a detail in Scripture that might justify a choice that actually dares God to do something so stupendous it shows everyone we really trust God and God is really trustworthy?

The way to world power climaxes the temptations in Matthew. Only in Matthew does this test occur on “a very high mountain” where “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” are visible. The Evangelist doesn’t need to be told that no mountain in the wilderness is high enough for such a view, not even if the earth were flat. The point probably reflects the assumption that this temptation depends on seeing the world’s glory, not simply imagining it, because it is attractive first to the eye, then to the will. Here may also be an echo of Moses on Mount Nebo, where God showed him “the whole land” (Deuteronomy 34:1). But while God promised, “I will give it to your descendants” as was promised to Abraham, the devil promises to give it on the assumption (true? false?) it is his to give, which Jesus is to acknowledge by worshiping the devil (“All these I will give you, if you will fall down [prostrate yourself] and worship me,” Matthew 4:9). What Matthew assumes, Luke makes explicit (Luke 4:6-7). Jesus is not seduced, but responds with “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him,” a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 6:13, which is part of what God said to Israel in Deuteronomy 6: “When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore… to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses…, hewn cisterns…, vineyards and olive groves…, take care that you do not forget the Lord.” As the obedient Son of God, here too Jesus shows himself fulfilling the command given to Israel.

In Matthew the angel’s word to Joseph implies Jesus will be God’s Son (Matthew 1:20-23), and in Luke Gabriel says so explicitly (Luke 1:35). But that sonship was made effective only by Jesus’ obedience, his resolute commitment to make choices in accord with the deepest, and so most difficult, dimensions of God’s will for Israel, also God’s “son.” Nor was it enough for Matthew and Luke to report that at the baptism God said Jesus was Son of God; they also show us that for Jesus being Son of God means obedience in a moral task with moral choices. If that was the case even for Jesus, it is no less true for his followers.

Matthew and Luke did not include the story of Jesus’ temptations simply to inform us about what went on privately between Jesus and the tempter, for elsewhere they show little interest, if any, in Jesus’ inner life until his agony in Gethsemane. This silence about Jesus’ inner life and struggle makes the temptation story all the more significant, even if the Evangelists did not explain that significance. But we can surmise, for precisely in Gethsemane Jesus urges the sleepy disciples to pray they may be spared “the time of trial” (as he instructed them to pray in the Lord’s Prayer). In Mark and Matthew Jesus gives the reason this prayer is needed: “The [human] spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38). Whatever be “the time of trial,” we dare not assume our flesh is strong enough to withstand the tempter’s lure.

**Looking Beyond the Gospels**

The Gospels remind us that although Jesus was “born of the Virgin Mary,” as the creeds put it, and gifted by God’s Spirit and the words of the voice, he was also truly human, so human that he was vulnerable to demonic distortion of his vocation. Occasionally some people have argued whether in reality Jesus could have been tempted, and so could have sinned or not. The issue was formulated crisply in Latin: *posse non peccare* (possible...
not to sin) or *non posse peccare* (not possible to sin). Matthew and Luke clearly assume Jesus’ temptations were real. They also imply that had that not been the case, Jesus’ call to follow him would have been hollow, for who can follow one who is invulnerable to temptation, who cannot lose, and who has not learned the cost of obedience? The author of the letter to the Hebrews understood this need well: “Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (Hebrews 2:18). Fortunately, the text does not say how he helps, for that is something each follower can discover.

Hebrews, which interprets the risen Christ as the high priest who represents us before God, goes on to say, “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested [or tempted] as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:14-16). The author surely did not think that in the Judean wilderness Jesus had faced every kind of temptation faced by Christians in the cities of the empire. In fact, it is not obvious this author was thinking only of Jesus’ wilderness experience; he might have had in mind also Jesus’ test in Gethsemane—or even his whole life as a test of obedience. Nor does Hebrews ask us to imitate Jesus whenever our temptation coincides exactly with his. Instead it asks us, precisely the vulnerable ones, to be bold in asking Jesus for help because as our representative before God he too was once vulnerable.

**So Then**

Whether we focus on Jesus’ wilderness experience as a test (as in Mark) or as triple temptations (as in Matthew and Luke), we face our own temptations, beginning with the temptation to explain how the Gospel writers knew what had gone on in the wilderness. They never report that Jesus mentioned his experience to his disciples or that he regarded his responses as examples for them to follow. Nor do they satisfy our curiosity about what went through Jesus’ mind at his baptism and what followed. Pursuing such questions is a way of seeking Jesus behind the Gospels rather than in them.

The real challenge of the stories of Jesus’ baptism and wilderness experience is not to figure out what really happened but rather to discover what they tell us that is significant for the ways we understand Jesus, the Jesus whose disciples we want to be.

We can begin by pondering the fact that in Matthew and Luke Jesus begins his ministry with the temptations behind him. Their Jesus story has no reference to any ongoing struggle in Jesus’ mind, no wrestling with alternatives, because the issues were settled before he began his lifework. A look at the issues in these temptations suggests how remarkable this portrayal is—using his status as Son of God to preserve his life (stones to bread), forcing God to preserve him from death (jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple), gaining sovereignty over the world (by worshiping the devil himself). Although neither Evangelist actually says so, both tell the story of Jesus’ mission in such a way that the consequences of Jesus’ wilderness experience are evident throughout. None of his wondrous deeds are for his own benefit. He does not force God’s hand or test God’s faithfulness but entrusts himself and his mission to God’s hands, even unto death. He never acknowledges the devil’s sovereignty over the world but challenges it by his wholehearted devotion to God and by his acts of power. In short, the story of Jesus’ temptations serves as the lens through which we are to read these Gospels.

The same is true of the baptism story. Not only does it tell us that Jesus is the Spirit-empowered Son of God; it also implies that he who joined those who acknowledged their sins (by accepting John’s baptism) would be prepared to eat with the despised tax collectors, consort with the downtrodden, and heal the sick even on the sabbath, for his wholehearted resolute obedience to God had been acknowledged by the voice at the Jordan and confirmed by the gift of the Spirit.

What then are we to make of the statement in Hebrews that Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are? To point out that as far as we know, he was not tempted by what our beautified language calls “substance abuse,” lust for sexual gratification, suicide, faithlessness in marriage, or cheating on his income tax report is to evade the issue.
Precisely here we are tempted to rely on such observations, correct as they are, in order to conclude that our temptations have nothing to do with his; and besides, he was the Son of God. On closer examination, however, the issues Jesus faced appear also in what we face, though they appear in current garb. If we say Jesus really doesn’t touch our situation because he was God’s Son and we are very human, we should go on to ask, Just how human did he have to be in order to understand us? Are we more human than he? So where did Jesus find the right way to respond to temptation? In Scripture that pointed him to God. And he didn’t have to look it up first; he knew his Scripture because he knew his God. Is there a better way to deal with temptation?

**Do You Want to Become His Disciples, Too?**

Choices test our loyalty and form our character. Temptation is experiencing the lure of wrong choices. The disciple is no more exempt from choices than the Master was. Actually, becoming a disciple is choosing a life of choosings in order to be a disciple.

*In what ways does the tempted/tested Jesus challenge and comfort you?*


**Prayer**

Please listen, LORD, and answer my prayer!

I am poor and helpless.

Protect me and save me because you are my God.

I am your faithful servant, and I trust you.

Be kind to me! I pray to you all day.

Make my heart glad!

I serve you, and my prayer is sincere.

You willingly forgive, and your love is always there for those who pray to you.

Please listen, LORD! Answer my prayer for help.

When I am in trouble, I pray, knowing you will listen.

(Psalm 86:1-7, CEV)
How to Use Gospel Comparisons

Gospel Comparisons offers selected Gospel portions from the New Revised Standard Version printed in multicolumn format to facilitate comparison or side-by-side reading of biblical passages. Gospel Comparisons is a companion to the JESUS IN THE GOSPELS study manual and functions both in daily individual study and in weekly group study.

Gospel Comparisons is not a book of parallel passages only, though many of the Gospel portions included here are parallel in the sense that they report almost word for word particular events, stories, or teachings. Readers can look closely at the differences in such accounts and consider what the Gospel writer intended in the change, addition, or omission of a detail. But Gospel Comparisons is broader than a book of parallels both in purpose and in content. It includes also Gospel portions that allow comparing unlike accounts or teachings in order to detect the distinctive angle of vision from which each Gospel writer is presenting the Jesus in his Gospel. For example, C.4. prints the “birth stories” from Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2, each different in what is reported and in the way it is reported. In these differences, the reader finds clues to what Matthew and Luke each wants to emphasize about Jesus.

Books of parallel passages usually align verses that are parallel and omit surrounding verses. Because context is often critical to understanding a Gospel portion, Gospel Comparisons prints verses in sequence, so the verses that may be similar from Gospel to Gospel are kept in context.

Function of Gospel Portions

Selected Gospel portions function in various ways. Many printed passages respond to suggestions of things to look for in the daily assignments. Some Gospel selections serve several of a week’s suggestions of things to look for beyond the suggestion or day identified by the symbol. In a few cases whole chapters from Gospels are printed for a particular purpose. Accompanying instructions or instructions in the leader guide indicate how those passages are to be used. Other Gospel portions are provided to facilitate quick comparing of passages mentioned in the study manual commentary, thereby reducing the amount of flipping back and forth among the Gospels in the Bible. Some Gospel portions expand information in the study manual; for example, references on a chart become printed passages in Gospel Comparisons.

Page Design

Most Gospel portions appear on a two-page spread, sometimes with two or three Synoptic Gospel portions being compared; occasionally a passage from John appears along with Synoptic passages on the same two-page spread in order for the reader to hear another voice (see C.4. example).

The printed passages generally are presented in the order or sequence in which the Scripture is treated in the study manual. For instance, if the lead passage in a lesson is from Mark then the passage printed from Mark usually appears in the first column of a two-page spread in Gospel Comparisons. Portions of other Gospels to be compared appear in the second and third columns. When a Gospel portion requires more than one column,
run-overs on subsequent pages repeat the order of the portions on the first page (see 18-1 example). So, if the selected Gospel portions on the first page are in this sequence—Mark, Matthew, Luke—then any run-overs from those passages appear on the next page in the same sequence.

Scripture references for printed passages appear at the top of the columns on the first page of the two-page spread. References are not repeated at the top of any run-over columns on the second page, nor does the word continued appear.

The lead passage in most lessons is from Mark. When a lesson’s lead passage is from Matthew rather than Mark, Gospel Comparisons places the Gospel portion from Matthew in the first column of a two-page spread. So too when the lead passage of a lesson is from Luke. John is the lead passage in Lessons 23–30, so the printed portion from John appears in the first column of a two-page spread.

Now comparison is from the angle of John as a unique Gospel and the differences in the Synoptic Gospels.

Occasionally as many as four to six single-column passages appear on a two-page spread (see 14-1 example). In such case, the Scripture reference for each passage appears at the top of a column.

From time to time the page design varies because the Gospel portions themselves dictate a particular arrangement of the Scripture to be read and compared. When that happens, the accompanying instructions make clear the order in which to consider the passages.

Color

While color enhances eye appeal of the pages, color here aids quick visual comparison of Gospel accounts (see 3-1 example, page 6). The same selection of colors repeats in sequence throughout Gospel Comparisons thereby reducing confusion over what message colors are sending. Color generally guides the direction of the comparing.

Symbol and Instruction

GC 3-1 is an example of the symbol that appears in the study manual at the point in any lesson where the Gospel Comparisons is to be used during individual daily study. GC means Gospel Comparisons. The first number indicates the lesson and the second number, the Gospel portion to be used at that point in study and preparation. The symbol may appear one or more times in a lesson and in numbered sequence. Occasionally the same symbol appears
Gospel Comparisons symbol in a daily assignment or lesson commentary usually relates to a particular suggestion, the printed passages often serve other suggestions of things to look for in the day’s or week’s assignments. The instruction at the top of the first page of a two-page spread in Gospel Comparisons connects with the instruction in the study manual and at times gives additional information if additional work with the passages is intended. Sometimes the instruction block also indicates how to interpret the use of color in a particular selection.

Individual daily study or weekly group study always moves among three components: the Bible, study manual, and Gospel Comparisons. Picture the study scene: The Bible is open, the study manual is open, and when the symbol for Gospel Comparisons appears in the study manual, Gospel Comparisons then is opened. Work moves among these three components as suggestions of things to look for are indicated and comparison of passages is called for in the study manual. Have at hand a highlighter (or highlighters of different colors) for noting or marking similarities, differences, things that surprise or are unusual. The words note, notice, and observe involve more than simply looking at and reading the words. They call for some response from you—of what strikes you as important in the passages you read. Of what you wonder about or question. A generous amount of white space is provided for writing down thoughts, questions, insights as you make comparisons between and among the various Gospel reports. Those notes will come in handy in group discussion during the weekly meeting.

more than once in the same lesson, indicating that the same Scripture passages may serve different functions for different parts of the lesson. A few lessons do not call for use of Gospel Comparisons during individual daily study.

Some Gospel portions are included in Gospel Comparisons for use during weekly group study and therefore are not referred to in the study manual. They are identified in Gospel Comparisons by the lesson number followed by a G; for example, 10-G indicates that the particular passages printed there will be used during the weekly group meeting so they do not require attention during daily study. Instructions for their use appear in the leader guide and are identified there by a symbol that bears the letters GC, the lesson number, and the letter G; for example GC 10-G.

Instructions for using Gospel Comparisons appear in the study manual, Gospel Comparisons, and/or the leader guide. While the
Mark 1:9-13

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Matthew 3:13–4:2

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”


21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.
Mark 4:1-10, 13-20

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 “Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” 9 And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables.

13 And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”

Luke 8:4-9, 11-15

4 When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: 5 “A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. 7 Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. 8 Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

9 Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant.

11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. 14 As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. 15 But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.”
Instructions
Matthew and Luke report the same three temptations. Identify the
temptations in each Gospel. Observe that the sequence of the second and
third temptation differs giving each temptation story a different climax.

Matthew 4:1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the
wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted
forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was
famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If
you are the Son of God, command these stones to
become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is
written,
‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes
from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and
placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying
to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself
down; for it is written,
“He will command his angels
concerning you,”
and “On their hands they will
bear you up,
so that you will not dash your
foot against a stone.””

7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not
put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high
mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the
world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him,
“All these I will give you, if you will fall down
and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with
you, Satan! for it is written,
‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels
came and waited on him.


1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from
the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilder-
ness. 2 Where for forty days he was tempted by the
devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and
when they were over, he was famished. 3 The
devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not
live by bread alone.’”

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in
an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the
devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory
and all this authority; for it has been given over to
me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then,
will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus
answered him, “It is written,
‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and
placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying
to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself
down from here, 10 for it is written,
“He will command his angels
concerning you,
to protect you,”

11 and
“On their hands they will bear
you up,
so that you will not dash your
foot against a stone.””

12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the
Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had
finished every test, he departed from him until an
opportun time.
Jesus in the Gospels

Leader Guide

Disciple
Second Generation Studies
5 Gifted by the Spirit and Tested by the Choices

Coming Together (30 minutes)

- Gather with prayer.
- Sing or read the words of a hymn.
  “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” or Stanza 2 and 3 of
  “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”
- Prepare to view video.
  Presenter: Susan R. Garrett, professor of New Testament, Louisville
  Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
  Listen for how testing of the righteous was understood in Mark’s time and
  for the role and purpose of God and of Satan in Jesus’ temptations.
- View Video Segment 5 Part I.
- Discuss after viewing:
  How were trials of the righteous understood in Mark’s time? Why
  was Jesus tempted right after he was baptized? What was God’s role
  and purpose in Jesus’ being tempted? What role did Satan play? What
  was the outcome of Jesus’ having endured temptation? What can we
  draw from Jesus’ example when facing temptation?

Beginning With Moses and All the Prophets (45 minutes)

- Focus on the baptism and temptation accounts in the Day 1 Scriptures.
  (1) In groups of three or four using [CC-31], notes made on daily readings,
  and study manual pages 42–44, identify differences in the three Synopt-
  ic accounts. What do those differences say about what each writer wants
  to emphasize about Jesus? What did you observe about the link between
  the baptism and the temptation? What more is there to the link than
  closeness on the page? What emphasis is Luke making both in the way
  he records the genealogy and in his placement of it between his account
  of the baptism and the temptation?
  (2) Look next at John’s account of the baptism in John 1:29-34. How
  does it compare in tone and intention with the Synoptics’ accounts? Scan
  John 1:1-18 to get in mind the content and sequence of John’s presenta-
  tion of Jesus. Then talk briefly about the Jesus John presents. Why do you
  think John did not include a temptation story? What difference does that
  make in the way you picture Jesus?
- Luke gives special emphasis to the Spirit as is evident in his story of
  Jesus’ preaching in his hometown synagogue. In groups of two review
  Trace the buildup of tension resulting from Jesus’ comments after read-
  ing from Isaiah. What message was Jesus sending by each comment?
  What message did his listeners hear and why did they react so strongly?
  What angle on Jesus is Luke emphasizing in his references to the expe-
  riences of Elijah and Elisha? What is important in Luke 4:16-30 about
  the coming of the Spirit to Jesus?
Temptation is talked about in different ways in the Day 5 readings. In groups of four using GC53, hear persons’ responses to comparing Mark’s and Luke’s interpretations of the parable of the sower. How do the differences in detail affect the telling and the impact of the story? How does the parable address temptation? Where is temptation present in the passage about Jesus in the garden? To what temptation does Peter succumb in Luke 22:31-34?

Gifted by the Spirit and Tested by the Choices (45 minutes)

Study the three temptations reported by Matthew and Luke. In groups of four, using GC53 and ideas from “The Triple Temptations” on study manual pages 44–45, identify the three temptations one at a time in each Gospel. Say what the issue is in each temptation. Then consider Jesus’ responses to the temptations. Referring to notes on Day 2 readings, describe the source and situation from which Jesus drew Scripture for his response to each temptation. What is the connection in the temptation experience between Jesus and Israel? Looking again at GC53, hear persons’ observations about the difference in sequence of the second and third temptations. What difference, if any, do you think the sequence makes in how each writer wants to present Jesus? What does the sequence say about the lure of temptation? How does the difference in climax in the accounts affect your understanding of Jesus?

Read silently the paragraph under “They Have No Wine” on study manual page 40. The Old Testament passages from Days 3 and 4 illustrate the points made in that paragraph. Work in two groups on the passages one at a time: Identify the persons and situation in the passage, the choices being presented, the choices made, and the reasons for the choices made. Then say how the persons and the actions in the passage illustrate particular points made under “They Have No Wine.”

Now hear guidance the New Testament offers us in our vulnerability to temptation. Read aloud Hebrews 2:18 on study manual page 40. Form three groups: Group 1—Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 12:3-17; Group 2—1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Group 3—James 1. Invite each group to review the assigned passage(s) identifying statements of guidance, support, and assurance that can help persons facing temptation. In the total group hear what each group discovered. What temptations do we resist if we heed the exhortations in Hebrews 12:12-17?

Do You Want to Become His Disciples, Too? (20 minutes)

The issues Jesus faced appear also in our temptations though in different forms. Recall the three issues in Jesus’ temptations. Then discuss this question: In what forms, shapes, guises, words do those same issues confront us? Jesus settled the issues before he began his ministry. In what sense can disciples also make choices that settle issues?

What do the stories of Jesus’ baptism and temptation tell us that is important for the ways we understand Jesus?

In pairs hear each other’s written response to the question on study manual page 47, In what ways does the tempted/tested Jesus challenge and comfort you?

Going Forth (10 minutes)

Preview Lesson 6. Hear prayer concerns.

Pray in unison the prayer on study manual page 47.

View Video Segment 5 Part II.