

When Did Jesus Go into the Desert?

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 06 January 2015 11:58

I was asked this question on a Sunday when we were studying John 1. Did Jesus go into the desert immediately after being baptised? I was not going to write this information as an article, until I was persuaded otherwise by one of our church members, who reminded me that atheists and pseudo-Christians will use any excuse to oppose scripture.

The question being dealt with is: When did Jesus go into the wilderness, given that there appears to be a discrepancy between the information given in John 1 and the other Gospels? We will see that there is no discrepancy at all.

The answer is ridiculously simple – which is why I initially did not want to publish it as an article. Yet, if people are so ignorant as to believe the Bible is contradictory, there is a need to publish it! We will look at the other texts first, before looking at John 1.

This short article will look at the evidence to reach a biblical conclusion...

Matthew 3:16

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:”

Followed by

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” (4:1)

‘Then’, tote, means ‘then’ or ‘at that time’. This can be immediately, or shortly afterwards, or even in the future. So, was His departure into the desert immediately after His baptism, or some time afterwards? We find the answer in the next section.

Mark 1:9-13

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“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.”

According to this text Jesus was ‘driven’ into the wilderness by the Spirit, as soon as He had been baptised: ‘immediately’, euthys, means in this text, straight away. This answers the question above.

Luke 3

Though this text speaks of the baptism of Jesus, it does not mention that he immediately went into the wilderness. This is left to the next chapter, 4:

“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,”

Note that Luke does not tell us when Jesus went into the desert, whether it was straight after His baptism or otherwise. This could, in theory, leave a gap between baptism and entering the desert. However, the import seems to be that Jesus went into the desert very soon after His

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baptism.

What, then, does John say about this? He says nothing at all!

John 1:29-34

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.”

Now, some (always looking for a way to scoff at scripture) would claim this is a contradiction, because the other Gospels tell us clearly. But, there can be no contradiction where there is no mention! Read the account above in John. All we are told is that the Baptist saw Jesus on the river bank and said He was the Lamb of God.

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There is a clue in the Baptist's words: "And John bare record" concerning the dove landing on Jesus. We are NOT told this happened when John saw Him on this occasion. The following day, John again saw Jesus on the bank and pointed Him out to the Jews. This was when two of the Baptist's disciples immediately followed Jesus. The day after that Jesus moved on. In other words this could NOT have been the time when He entered the desert for 40 days – especially as the marriage at Cana also occurred at about that time and Jesus began His ministry after that.

Conclusion

There is no point of contention, either in the record or in biblico-theological terms. Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree on when Jesus went into the desert. But, John does not mention the baptism at all, so when the Baptist saw Jesus on the bank it had to be AFTER Jesus had returned from the desert. This agrees with scripture, which tells us that Jesus more-or-less followed the path of the Baptist when He (His disciples) also began to baptise. This is why the Baptist saw Jesus again on the river bank.

There is no way at all that the four Gospels disagree or contradict each other. And they do not! John simply did not mention the baptism or Jesus' time in the wilderness. So there cannot be a contradiction!

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