

Jesus, the Animals, and Moses in the Wilderness

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Vital Church Maritimes Conference, Truro, NS, 14 October 2021

1 Mark's Prologue (1:1–15)

¹ The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight;’”

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

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 [*peirazomenos*] by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

2 Temptation and Arrest (Mark 14:32–52)

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial [*peirasmon*]; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled.

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⁵¹ A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

3 Two Scholarly Views

Richard Bauckham argues: “If we ignored the context of Mark 1:13, we might classify Jesus, in terms of the Jewish traditions we have examined, simply as the individual righteous person who is at peace with the wild animals. But Jesus in Mark’s prologue is no mere individual. He is the messianic Son of God. When he resists Satan in the wilderness, he does so, not as merely an individual righteous person, but as the messianic Son of God on behalf of and for the sake of others. Similarly it is the messianic peace with wild animals that Jesus establishes. He establishes it only representatively, in his own person, and so the objection that a restoration of paradise should not be located in the wilderness is beside the point.”¹

But compare Ulrich Mauser: “The temptation is only a subsidiary element belonging to the wilderness theme. Moreover, a temptation in the sense of a test is not reported in Mark. All he does say is that Jesus was in and through the wilderness confronted with the power of Satan.... In the prologue, the Evangelist simply sets the stage—Jesus and Satan are going to be the main actors in the commencing drama and their encounter alone is the fact emphasized in 1:13.”²

Mauser summarizes: “Thus Jesus’ way from the beginning of his ministry to Gethsemane is depicted in the Second Gospel as an uninterrupted confrontation with the devil’s might. His way is, indeed, a way of temptation and the statement of the prologue is verified—he is driven by the spirit into the wilderness, tempted by Satan. This whole way is characterized by Christ’s victory over evil, but at the end the confrontation assumes a deadly aspect. The hour has come when the Son of man falls into the hands of sinners and is thus handed over to the power of evil, which in his crucifixion seems to be triumphant over him. The way through the desert seems to come to an end in a grave, as did the march of the rebellious Israel in the wilderness.”³

¹Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 130.

²Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its Basis in the Biblical Tradition*, SBT 39 (London: SCM, 1963), 129–30.

³Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 132.

4 From the Law and the Prophets

4.1 Isaiah 11:6–9 (but cf. 13:21; 34:9, 14)

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

4.2 Exodus 3:1–12

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness [‘*aḥar hammiḏbar*’], and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹² He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”