

Sonship Involves the Supernatural

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THE TEMPTATION of Jesus is to be understood against this background. Satan did not challenge Jesus with the words, "If you are the Messiah," but "If you are the Son of God." Satan recognized that Jesus, as the Son of God, could call upon angelic aid to assure personal safety. The temptations have to do indeed with Jesus' messianic office, but with the messianic office that is grounded in his sonship.

That sonship involves a supernatural element is further supported by the recognition of Jesus by the demons. Mark records that at the very outset of his ministry, a demon-possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum saw Jesus, recognized him, and cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24).

Recognition by the demons was immediate and direct. It was not grounded upon observation and interpretation of Jesus' words or deeds; it was not acquired, inferential knowledge; it was rather intuitive recognition of a supernatural kind. A comparison of this incident with Paul's experience with the demon-possessed girl in Acts 16 gives support to this interpretation. The expression "the Holy One of God," is not a known messianic title nor a common primitive Christian designation of Jesus. Its background is the designation in the Old Testament of God as the Holy One.ⁱ The demoniac recognized in Jesus the presence of a supernatural person.ⁱⁱ

(A Theology of the New Testament by George Eldon Ladd, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977 [1974], 164-165, Text and Paragraph Structure Modified)

ⁱ Cf. Isa. 40:25; 57:15.

ⁱⁱ Cf. also the meeting with demons in Lk. 4:41; Mk. 3:11; 5:7.