

The Gospel of Mark

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Introduction

The Gospel of Mark was originally associated with Peter and soon was placed in an inferior position to the gospels. It was not written by an apostle and the grammar was very rough so it occupied an inferior position for centuries. It was not until the nineteenth century that its general acceptance occurred. It was then discovered that Mark was the first Gospel to be written and that Matthew and Luke used certain portions of it for their writings. The Gospel is anonymous and tradition was that Mark was closely associated with Peter and it was from him that Mark obtained most of his information. It then became generally accepted that Mark is the John Mark of the NT and the author of this Gospel. It seems that Mark obtained his information from the preaching of Peter that was directed toward the needs of the early Christian community. One strong consideration that Mark was the author is that the early church would not have attributed this writing to someone who was not an apostle unless they had strong reasons to do so. It is difficult to date the writing of this Gospel. Evidence tends to date the Gospel to shortly after the martyrdom of Paul in A.D. 67 or that of Peter in A.D. 64. Mark also writes nothing about the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 or the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70 so the dates of A.D. 64-67 seem the most likely. The Gospel also seems to have been directed mainly toward Gentile audiences and written in Rome.

Chapter One

Mark 1:1-3 NASB

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (2) As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; (3) THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'"

The word "gospel" comes from the old English word "god-spel", which is a translation of the Greek word "evangelion". The Greek word originally meant the reward for bringing of good news but later came to mean good news. In the context of the NT this good news is that God provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mark then created a new word for this Good News: "gospel". Mark first quotes from Malachi 3:1 although he gives credit to the entire quotation as from Isaiah. Mark next quotes Isaiah to show that any understanding of this Good News is rooted in the OT. He quotes Isa 40:3 to show that God first sent a messenger ahead of Jesus who would prepare the way for His coming. Mark does not include a nativity narrative as do Matthew and Luke because he wants to get right at a proper teaching of the Gospel. In the Malachi verse there is a prophetic word made to two messengers: the Messenger of the covenant and the messenger who precedes the Messenger. Mark then gives an account of the beginning of the Gospel that was written first by Isaiah. Peter also quoted from Isaiah in his first letter (1:24, 25). The word "beginning" of Mark 1:1 refers to the Gospel so this

book gives us the beginning of the Gospel that was prophesied by Isaiah. The prediction by Isaiah was fulfilled by Jesus. The main topic is then the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The word does not appear again in Mark until the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi when Mark relates that Jesus told His disciples to deny themselves and take up the Cross for His sake and for the sake of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is likely that Mark read Paul's letter to Rome before he wrote his letter and that letter would have influenced Mark's message.

Mark 1:4-8 NASB

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (5) And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. (6) John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. (7) And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. (8) "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark goes directly to the "meat of the matter" with no preliminary information such as is available in the other Gospels. His goal is to explain the saving facts regarding the ministry of Jesus and their theological meaning for the Roman church. He starts with the ministry of John the Baptist who had been foretold by Malachi and described by Isaiah. Mark was not concerned with writing a biography of Jesus but his emphasis was kerygmatic (teaching) and theological. Peter also began with John (Acts 10:37) in his proclamation of the Gospel. Specifically John began his ministry in the arid area west of the Dead Sea and Matthew gives the location in the Judean desert (3:1). The Qumran sect was in this general area and it is likely that John the Baptist was familiar with them. The Greek language dictates that this baptism was for a repentance that had already occurred rather than a baptism leading to repentance. *Metanoia* (repentance) means a deliberate change of mind with the end result that sins have been forgiven. The direct action by God to an act of true repentance is forgiveness of sin. The preaching of John caused great excitement in the region. Jerusalem is about 20 miles from the Jordan River and about 4,000 feet above it so going there and returning would have been exhaustive travel. The reason his preaching attracted such a crowd was that he was preaching the coming of the Messiah but he did not baptize anyone unless they made a sincere effort at repentance. The people were expecting the Messiah to come and bring them back to power as in the time of David.

John's clothing was typical of a "holy man" like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). Locusts are listed as a clean food (Lev 11:21-22) but don't wait for me to give it a try! Mark does not elaborate on the message of John such as is written in other Gospels: Matt 3:7-10; Luke 3:10-14. Mark states that John knew he was not even worthy to untie the thong of His sandals in preparation for water baptism. Instead Mark focusses the message of John on the coming of the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This baptism would come at Pentecost (Acts 2) in fulfillment of the promise of Christ (Acts 1:5). Mark then minimizes the ministry of John the Baptist to emphasize the importance of Jesus.

Mark 1:9-13 NASB

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. (10) Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; (11) and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." (12) Immediately the Spirit *impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. (13) And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.*

Jesus began His public ministry in about A.D. 27 when He was approximately 30 years old. Not much is known about His childhood and youth that was spent in Nazareth in Galilee. From age 12 to age 30 he had the opportunity to grow up in a small country town without the rush of city life. Immediately preceding His ministry were His baptism, anointing, and His temptations by the Devil. The early church seems to have had some trouble understanding the water baptism of Jesus for He was God and without sin. However the water baptism was necessary to fulfill the plan of the Father for His complete identification with man and his sin. This identification is an important part of the double imputation that would occur as the sins of chosen people were imputed to Jesus so He could take the Father's wrath for those sins and so that the righteousness of Jesus could be imputed to the accounts of those chosen people: "*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" (2 Cor 5:21) Matthew records that John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize Jesus (Matt 3:14) but he did it to fulfill the salvation plan (Matt 3:15). Mark does not record if John saw and heard what was revealed to Jesus but it is indicative of the anointment of Jesus for His mission as Jesus clearly stated by Luke: "*the spirit of the lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the lord.*" (Luke 4:18-19). The Father makes it clear that He is pleased with the function of His beloved Son by letting His voice express this state of pleasure.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to claim that this is the first instance of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus as claimed by some religions. The entire being of Jesus was attended by the operation of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity was involved in this salvation plan from before the foundation of the world. But this event was something new as Jesus was empowered by the power of the Spirit for the totality of His mission from this point until His death. There is no other occasion in the Bible when it is reported that the Spirit came upon someone like a dove to indicate the gentleness and harmlessness of the Son of God. Later Jesus would declare to His disciples that they were to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt 10:16). This manifestation was also a symbol of a sacrifice of the lowest level as the poorest people were allowed to bring a dove as their offering for sin.

The first act of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus was to force Him to go into the wilderness to undergo temptation from Satan. Matthew and Luke also state that He went into the wilderness under the direction of the Spirit but Mark states that the Spirit "impelled" Him to go. He had to go directly into the temptations of Satan that are the same as those that destroy humanity. Note that He was tempted during the entire forty days in the wilderness. Matthew (4:3-11) uses eleven verses to discuss these temptations and Luke (4:3-13) uses thirteen whereas Mark only uses two

verses. The temptations of Jesus are characterized by Matthew and Luke as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life and such are probably also the categories of the temptations throughout the forty days. Mark does not discuss the types of temptations nor does he record the results. Only Mark mentions the wild beasts as he wants readers to understand the fierce nature of the conflict. However Mark does not state that this interaction was as we might expect it to be. Mark only states that Jesus was with the wild beasts. Jesus was not spared any of the environmental dangers that attend to being with Satan in his world but Jesus was recognize as the Ruler of the universe and not attacked by these beasts. It seems that Mark does not want his readers to think that this is the only occasion for Jesus to be tempted by Satan but that Jesus fights against the forces of Satan during His entire ministry leading to His final victory at the Cross and His resurrection. Matthew and Mark write of the ministry of the angels to Jesus following the temptations.

Mark 1:14-17 NASB

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, (15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (16) As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. (17) And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

We must allow for the passing of about one year between the 13th and 14th verses of this Gospel. During that time Jesus had traveled between Judaea and Galilee and given His first teaching and signs as recorded in John. Mark seems to emphasize that only after John had completed his ministry did Jesus begin His ministry of the best news to ever be given mankind after the Fall: *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."* (2 Cor 5:17). A lot of time had passed between God choosing Abraham and the setting up of those people into a land and the ministry of Jesus Christ. But God is the author of time and not limited by it. All that had to be done before the Good News of God was presented to the world had been completed. The Greek word used for time is *kairos* that means a decisive time rather than *chronos* that means some chronological time. Jesus is then stating that the time has arrived that is decisive regarding eternity. One can repent and believe in the gospel so as to enter into the Kingdom or ignore the message and spent eternity in regret. The Kingdom of Heaven is a concept that has both a present and a future meaning. One spiritually enters into it when he repents and believes and finally enters it in a future fulfillment:

Eph 2:6 NAS77 "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,"

Phil 3:20 NAS77 "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"

1Cor 15:24 NAS77 "then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."

Eph 5:27 NAS77 "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

The Greek word used by Mark for repent does not imply any sorrow although such will surely come as the Holy Spirit brings to mind sins of commission and omission. The word means to turn away from a live devoted to self and to commit to one centered on the will of God. Jesus

calls the people to believe **in** the gospel and not just believe it. The gospel must become a part of the life of the person if he is truly redeemed. It is important to remember an event only recorded by Luke when Jesus was on the way to Capernaum. He came to Nazareth, entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from Isaiah (Luke 4:14-22) stating that the words of Isaiah had been fulfilled before their eyes. Rather than accepting Jesus as He revealed, the people were filled with rage and tried to kill Him by throwing Him over a cliff. But Jesus mysteriously passed through them and went on His way.

Jesus traveled to the Sea of Galilee that was well known for great fishing and He called four men to follow Him: Simon, Andrew, James, and John. They had previously known Him for at least a year and had traveled with Him for several weeks or months. At Samaria He had dismissed them at Samaria and gone back alone to Jerusalem. But now He called them into fulltime service with Him and so He came into Capernaum with His new disciples.

Mark 1:18- 22NASB

*Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. (19) Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. (20) Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him. (21) They *went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. (22) They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

This call to ministry was immediately accepted by the men as they left their nets and followed Him. The next call was to James and John, the sons of Zebedee who were also engaged in their family fishing industry. They immediately left their father in the boat along with their hired servants to begin a ministry with the Lord. On the Sabbath He then went to the synagogue and began to teach. It was the custom for traveling Rabbis to be asked to teach when they came into the synagogue. The amazing thing is that His teaching was seen as being offered by someone with authority and not as the scribes taught. The synagogues were initiated during the travel of the Jews during the Exile as they needed a place to gather and be taught. The scribes were experts on the law and thus very respected but Jesus taught differently as the people recognized that He had some type of authority over the words spoken.

Mark 1:23-28 NASB

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, (24) saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" (25) And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" (26) Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. (27) They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." (28) Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

Suddenly the service was interrupted by a man who was demon possessed. Certainly Satan tries to disrupt any gathering where people are studying about God but he was very much concerned to try to stop this teaching by the Son of God. The demon recognized Jesus as the person He really was: the Holy One of God. Demons know and believe in the truth of God but they cannot be saved: *“You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”* (James 2:19) Jesus immediately restored order to the meeting by simply telling the demon to be quiet and come out of the man. The demon made the man go into convulsions as he left him after crying out with a loud voice. There was no need for any special incantation or spell for Jesus to rid the man of the demon. The people were again amazed at this power and teaching of Jesus and the news began to spread all over Galilee and the surrounding districts.

Mark 1:29- 34 NASB

*And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. (30) Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they *spoke to Jesus about her (31) And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. (32) When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. (33) And the whole city had gathered at the door. (34) And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.*

Capernaum was the home town of Peter and it became somewhat of a center of the activity of Jesus in this area. Only Mark mentions Andrew at this point when Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. We are not told the origin or symptoms of the illness of Peter's mother but the sons immediately told Jesus about her illness. Jesus then did not do anything special but raised her up and took her hand. Just this touch of Jesus was sufficient to cause the symptoms of the illness to leave her so that she was immediately able to wait on them. The Sabbath ends at sundown so the evening after sunset would be the following day according to the manner in which the Jews designated daily time. Since the Sabbath had ended the people could bring the sick and demon possessed to Him for cures. Jesus then healed many people and cast out many demons. He did not allow the demons to speak because they knew who He was and He was not ready to make that announcement. Matthew further describes some of the conditions of the people brought to Him: *“And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.”* (Matt 4:24)

Mark 1:35-39 NASB

*In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. (36) Simon and his companions searched for Him; (37) they found Him, and *said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." (38) He *said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." (39) And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.*

After a remarkable day filled with pouring out His healing power onto many people, Jesus left the house early in the morning to go to a secluded place to pray with the Father. Mark records

two other occasions of Jesus praying and in each case there was a crisis to be addressed (6:46; 14:32-41). The crisis here is the weak response of the people as they are only interested in the healing power rather than the spiritual power of Jesus available to truly transform their lives. His disciples found Him and told Him that everyone was looking for Him. It seems that they are mainly focused on the perceived needs of the people and did not understand that He needed time in communion with the Father to properly address the needs. The reply of Jesus was that He needed to go to other towns nearby so that He could preach in those places also. He tells them that such is why He came, meaning the reason why He came from heaven to go on the Father's mission. He then went into synagogues of the small towns and continued to preach, heal, and cast out demons. Such actions are involved in the fighting of Jesus over the rule of Satan but His main mission was to proclaim the Good News of salvation rather than being a healer and an exorcist.

Mark 1:40-45 NASB

*And a leper *came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." (41) Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and *said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." (42) Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. (43) And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, (44) and He *said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (45) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.*

Mark does not record what has been called the Manifesto or the Sermon on the Mount. The healing of the leper occurred at the foot of the mountain after He gave His Manifesto but Mark was not detailing the actions of the King and Lawgiver but the Servant of God as Priest and Savior. By referring to the writings of Matthew we see that the people came from many different places as they were flocking to Him everywhere. All of this action was tiring on Jesus and He went to the mountain to teach the disciples the Manifesto. After this Jesus had the interaction with the leper. The precise condition of the illness is not stated but anyone with an infectious skin condition was required to make it known to anyone by his torn clothes and unkempt appearance (Lev 13:45-46). This was a social disease as well as a physical one and so would have caused the person considerable pain in many ways. A person with such a condition was forbidden to interact with other people but he came to Jesus knowing that, if Jesus so willed, He could heal Him. Jesus was moved with compassion for the man and told him that He was willing to heal him and then just told him to be cleansed. It is important to note that Jesus did touch the man for the Mosaic law forbid such an action. It is probably related to the fact that Jesus took on the physical nature of man in His ministry as He came to cleanse people of all sin and its results although the total healing will not be complete until people are glorified.

Jesus sternly warned the man to not spread the word about the healing for He did not want to be known primarily as some "holy man" capable of such healing. He did tell the man to follow the

Mosaic law as he confessed the healing to the priest (Lev 14:2-31). However the man did not obey Jesus but spread the word about the healing. Such proclamations are usually more about advertising the importance of the person healed rather than offering praise to the Healer. Being told not to do something is almost certain to appeal to the human nature to make the announcement. The action of this leper made it impossible for Jesus to enter a town because of the clamor of people to be healed. Jesus then remained out of towns for a while but where people still flocked to be healed by Him.