

**A. Introduction to Mark – A Review**

1. Mark is most likely the first gospel to be written.
2. The traditional author is John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, travelling companion of Paul, and friend of Peter. The gospel benefits from many witnesses but Peter may have been Mark's main source.
3. The traditional place of Mark's writing was Rome. This gospel is written to a Roman audience and focuses on the good news concerning the actions of ". . . Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1).
4. The structure of Mark:
  - I. The Beginning Prologue (Mk 1:1-13)
    - A. **1:1-8 – Preparing the Way**
    - B. 1:9-11 – Baptism of Jesus
    - C. 1:12-13 – Testing of Jesus
  - II. Initial Ministry in Galilee (Mk 1:14-3:6)
  - III. Later Ministry in Galilee (Mk 3:7-6:13)
  - IV. Ministry in Other Gentile Regions (Mk 6:14-8:30)
  - V. Journey to Jerusalem (Mk 8:31-10:52)
  - VI. Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)
  - VII. Passion Narrative (Mk 14:1-15:47)
  - VIII. The Resurrection (Mk 16:1-8)

**B. Witnesses of Jesus' Identity- Read Mk 1:1-8.**

1. "Beginning . . ." (Gk. *arche*) (1:1)
  - a. The first word in Mark's gospel recalls the initiative of God "in the beginning" of creation in Ge 1:1.
  - b. God, through the words of this gospel, reveals the critical action in his unfolding plan of salvation—the revelation of centerpiece of that plan: "Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1).
2. The Prophets (1:2-3) – This point will be expanded below.
3. John the Baptist (1:4-8) – This point will also be expanded below.
4. God the Father and Holy Spirit (1:9-13) – We will explore the witness of the Godhead next week.

**C. The Witness of the Prophets (2-3)**

1. Mark cited the prophet Isaiah since he was considered to be the greatest among those from whom he quoted. Mark utilized three Old Testament prophetic scriptures within Mk. 1:2-3.
2. "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. . ." (Mk 1:2b). This part of the quotation is based on two scripture sources.
  - a. First, Mark echoes the prophetic word given by God to Moses near the beginning of the narrative of God taking Israel as his people at Sinai after he called them out of bondage in Egypt.
    - 1) ""See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared." (cf, Ex 23:20).
    - 2) In context, Israel had encountered God in the Wilderness at Sinai. They had received the Law and would soon affirm it in a solemn covenant ceremony. God called on Moses and his people to follow "an angel" (Hb., *malach*) whom he would send to "guard" and "bring" them to "the place I have prepared," that is the Promised Land.
  - b. Second, Mark echoed the prophetic word recorded in Malachi (Hb., *malachi* – "my angel" or "my messenger").
    - 1) "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty" (Mal 3:1).
    - 2) In context, this message came from God to his people near the end of the Old Testament period as God called on his people to continue to look forward with hope to the deliverer whom God would send to them in the future.
    - 3) Again, God's people were entering the wilderness at the beginning of a 400 year period of prophetic silence.
    - 4) God sent this message of hope to his people to let them know that he has not forgotten nor will he yet forget them. He will send the promised deliverer in his time.

3. “. . . a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (Mk 1:2c).
  - a. This is part of the famous passage from Isaiah at the beginning of the part of Isaiah known as The Book of Comfort (i.e., Isaiah 40-55).
  - b. Here is the whole passage in fuller context: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isa 40:1-5).
  - c. Judah had been in captivity in Babylon (the Wilderness) for 70 years due to her recalcitrant sin.
  - d. Now God declared that the time of punishment was over and that he was again opening a way out of the Wilderness and back to the Land of Promise.
4. Notice the connecting theme or motif of the Wilderness. God calls his people out of Wilderness and desolation into a future of faithfulness with him in the Land of Promise.
  - a. The three prior scriptures all came to God’s people who were in the wilderness.
    - 1) The first Exodus (Ex 23:20) – God guided his people out of Egypt through the Wilderness of Sinai to the Promised Land.
    - 2) The second Exodus (Isa 40:3) – God guided his people back from Babylon to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity.
    - 3) The Old Testament concludes with God’s promise for another Exodus yet to come (Mal 3:1). This would be the most important exodus for God’s people—the one from sin, death, and hell.
  - b. It is appropriate that John the Baptist came to the people in the Wilderness of Judea near the Jordan River Valley. This was historically a place of wilderness and isolation.
    - 1) “The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him . . .” (Mk 1:5).
    - 2) The people had to go into the wilderness in order to hear and respond to the voice of John the Baptist as called them through him from the wilderness of their present lives into the salvation that he was about to send to them in Jesus the Messiah.

#### D. The Witness of John the Baptist (4-8)

1. John the Baptist was a cousin and forerunner of Jesus. He is the key transitional figure as we move from Old Testament prophets to New Testament messengers/preachers.
  - a. His birth, like that of Jesus, was miraculous. His mother, Elizabeth, and father, Zechariah, were old and Elizabeth had been barren.
    - 1) **Read Luke 1:5-25.**
    - 2) Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth were close relatives, most likely cousins.
    - 3) From the womb, John gave testimony about the one to come after him. **Read Luke 1:39-45.**
  - b. John’s manner of dress and lifestyle supported Gabriel’s announcement that “. . . he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:17).
    - 1) Mark recounted that John “wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey” (Mk 1:6).
    - 2) Here is a description of Elijah in 2 Ki 1:8 – “He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist.”
      - a) When Elijah was caught up to heaven in a fiery chariot sent by God, his hairy cloak was left behind to his protegee, Elisha (2 Ki 2:1-18 (v. 13)).
      - b) The mantle or cloak of the prophet became a sign of God’s presence and powerful word.
      - c) Elijah, Elisha and his band of prophets with them, like John, lived mostly in the wilderness and shared the word of God with those to whom God sent them.
    - 3) So, John is revealed as the Elijah prophesied to come by Malachi. “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parent; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction” (Mal 4:5-6).

- 4) This prophetic word in Mal 4:5-6 marks the end of the Christian Old Testament canon. It was a word of hope spanning 400 years of prophetic silence until the coming of John the Baptist.
2. John came “. . . preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4).
  - a. “baptism of repentance (Gk., *baptisma metanoias*)”
    - 1) Baptism here is the root of our name Baptist.
      - a) The word in Greek refers to plunging an object completely under the surface of a liquid.
      - b) In secular Greek it was used to describe the process of dipping a sheep to remove pests or of a ship that had completely sunk to the bottom of the sea and was completely underwater.
      - c) Baptism is a physical action symbolizing a wholehearted devotion to change from the person we were into the person God would have us to be.
      - d) The commitment is instantaneous, but the transformation through the process of sanctification takes some time.
    - 2) Repentance is the object or point of being baptized. The focus is not on baptism but repentance.
      - a) Repentance is a change (Gk., *meta*) of mind or heart (Gk., *noias*).
      - b) The evidence of true repentance comes through confession of sin (Mk 1:5) and a change in actions.
      - c) Repentance is about leaving an old way of living behind and moving out of the wilderness of sin and into the future of life with God now and into eternity of heaven’s promised land.
      - d) The result of repentance and confession is “forgiveness of sins (Gk., *eis aphesin harmation*)” (Mk 1:4). We confess that we have missed the mark of God’s calling. We repent by changing our future ways with baptism as a symbol of our commitment to do so. We trust God to forgive us through Christ Jesus, the Messiah, as only God can do this.
  - b. Baptism would have been a familiar ritual for Jews. They ritually baptized themselves during special purification rites, done according to Jewish law and tradition, known as *tvilah*. There are similarities to Christian baptism, but Christian baptism is not focused on cleansing but commitment.
  - c. John’s baptism was a preparatory act as those undergoing it looked forward to the coming of God’s ultimate Messiah, the one whom John proclaimed. They were preparing themselves for his appearance and for the inauguration of the kingdom of God.
  - d. John told them to look forward to an even more important baptism that would come with the appearing of Messiah: “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8).
  - e. This fiery baptism may best be seen in the events of Pentecost as God’s Spirit descended upon believers after Messiah Jesus’s resurrection (cf, Acts 2).
3. The end of John’s life and ministry.
  - a. John fearlessly and continuously confronted the sins of Jewish King Herod.
  - b. Herod had him imprisoned and was tricked by his lover Herodias into having him beheaded (cf., Mk 6:17-29, Mt 14:1-12).
  - c. Jesus testified that he completed his mission. “The disciples asked (Jesus), ‘Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist (Mt 17:10-13).
4. In our next study of Mark, we will examine John the Baptist’s important encounter with and baptism of Jesus.

#### E. What does this text say to me?

1. We can trust God’s promises. If God says it in his word, then he will fulfill it. It may not happen in our desired timeframe or manner, but we can count on God to always be faithful to fulfill his promises.
2. God wants to deliver us, his people. He continues to call us out of our wilderness of life in sin into the better future that he has for us as we follow Christ Jesus.
3. God will send us messengers. We have his written word which is primary. Believers have the inner witness of God’s Spirit. We must listen carefully to hear the voice of God’s messenger even when it comes in an unexpected person, place, time, or manner.
4. Like John the Baptist, we must be humble, faithful, and fearless in presenting the good news of Jesus to others and in fulfilling God’s kingdom purposes in our lives at any cost.

5. We must prepare our hearts to receive the good news and be ready to receive Christ as he comes to us in each day of life. We prepare with repentance and commitment each day to live faithfully for Jesus.
6. God will come and open the way before us by his Spirit. Will we, his modern disciples, be ready when he says, "Come, Follow me"?