

**Introduction to the Gospel According to Mark**  
**November 23, 1995**  
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**A. General Introduction**

1. The Author: Ancient tradition (first decade of the second century) that it is John Mark, known to us from Acts and the epistles, who is recording Peter's reminiscences.
2. Strong evidence that this is the first of the gospels to reach its present form. Both Matt and Luke appear to draw from it. Would have been written before AD 60; perhaps as early as 50.
3. Each tub on its own bottom. Originally a stand-alone document; we should study it as an independent work of literature, not "the life of Christ" (which the HS has not prepared for us).

**B. 1-3, The OT Promise**

Paraphrase 1-2, "The good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began to be proclaimed in the way that the prophets said it would."

1. Our Lord's titles:

- a) Jesus: the human name "Joshua." Means "Jehovah is savior."
- b) Christ = Messiah, the anointed one, prophet, priest, and king.

- 1) First occurrence is Peter's confession in 8:29. Comparatively rare throughout the gospel; the only other references to Jesus are 9:41 (by our Lord) and 13:21; 14:61; 15:32 (on the lips of unbelievers!).
- 2) There is another title that is used more extensively throughout the gospel, and that refers to the same promised deliverer: "son of man," used by the Lord 15x of himself between 2:10 and 14:62. This last reference gives the clue to the meaning of this title, by drawing it from Dan. 7:13, where it describes the one to whom an everlasting kingdom is given.
- c) "Son of God." Indicates his deity. Like "Christ," a rare title in the book.
  - 1) 1:11; 9:7; used by God himself at the baptism and transfiguration.
  - 2) Used twice by demons in referring to him (3:11; 5:7; cf. 1:24). They recognize his divine authority.
  - 3) The only human in Mark to recognize Jesus as the son of God is the centurion at the cross in 15:39. NB: shows orientation of the gospel toward the gentiles, and in particular to the Romans; this Roman soldier grasps what the Jewish leadership cannot accept.

2. What is the "good news" concerning this person?

- a) Cf. Mark's summary in 1:14,15, "the time is fulfilled, and the

kingdom of God is at hand." The king has come, and the world is no longer without responsible leadership. Now justice will be administered, the wicked punished and the righteous protected.

b) Relation to Paul's summary in 1 Cor. 15: the Messiah is not only the king who protects the righteous, but also the priest who makes us righteous so that we can be his citizens.

3. Not only was the *substance* of this good news the subject of OT prophecy, but the very *manner* in which it began to be proclaimed followed the prophetic promise. Mark's point: the Lord's coming should not be unexpected. Every detail was in fulfillment of divine promise, right down to the role of the herald.

a) The texts quoted:

1) 1:2a quotes Exod. 23:20, God's promise to send an angel before the nation Israel when they leave captivity in Egypt.

2) Mal 3:1 picks up this phrase from Exod and extends it, so all of 1:2 may also be considered a quote from Mal.

3) 1:3, from Isa. 40:3, which in its original context describes the preparation of a road for the Jews to return to Judaea from the Babylonian captivity.

b) Two main points being made:

1) In their original contexts, both Exod 23 and Isa 40 are political in nature. God's people are returning from captivity to be established in their own land. Compare the political sense of "gospel" with its emphasis on the establishment of the kingdom of God.

2) Mark identifies Jesus with the Lord by subtle adjustments in both Mal and Isa.

a> 1:2 shifts Mal's "before me" (YHWH) to "before thee" (Christ). Christ is God; his arrival is God's arrival; the forerunner of God is his forerunner.

b> In 1:3, the Lord whose path is being prepared is YHWH in Isaiah.

#### C. 4-8, Fulfillment of the Promise in JB

1. 4-5, The Message, Part A: "Prepare ye the way ...": John's Baptism

The "way" to be prepared was not a physical road, but a spiritual one in the hearts of the people. They had to turn from their sin before they would be ready for the rule of Messiah.

a) The meaning of baptism: "repentance for the remission of sins." Repentance is a change of mind about ourselves. We

cannot be God's people if we are sinful; we cannot expect our sins to be forgiven until we acknowledge that we have them. We must declare moral bankruptcy before we can enjoy the riches of heaven. Throughout the NT, repentance is the first step to salvation: Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 6:1.2 2 Pet 3:9. The NT gospel does not begin with "God loves you." It begins with "You are a sinner, under the judgment of God, and you must repent."

b) The recipients of baptism: "all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem. Jews! The people of God! Their ancestry and religious heritage does not exempt them from God's sentence, "All have sinned." So today, neither do church membership or Christian parents. Each of us must personally, individually repent and receive the Lord Jesus.

2. 6, The Messenger.

The allusions identify JB with Elijah, a point that the Lord Jesus will reinforce later (9:11-13).

a) Clothing of camel's hair: 2 Kings 1:8, where "a hairy man" is literally "a man, owner of hair," and may well refer to Elijah's clothing.

b) Girdle of a skin: ditto.

c) Locusts and honey: no direct linkage with Elijah, but such fare as one could easily procure in the wilderness.

3. 7-8, The Message, Part B: "Prepare ye ... the Lord": Announcement of the Lord

a) His timing: "after me." JB was conceived six months before the Lord Jesus (Luke 1-2), and established his activity before the Lord made himself known.

b) His strength: "mightier than I." Singles out the Lord not for superior holiness, or piety, or honor, but for his power, his strength. Cf. Luke 11:21-22, the Lord in combat with Satan. Continues the political sense of the good news. The mighty king who can destroy our enemies has finally arrived.

c) His worthiness: loosing the shoe was the very lowest task, one that was below a Hebrew slave (see Gundry). Yet the Strong one was so far above John that John was not even worthy to do him this service.

d) His baptism: not just forgiveness of sin, but also conveys the HS. Compare Acts 19, where Paul distinguishes John's baptism from full Christian baptism, which pictures our ID with Christ in DBR.