

Sermon Title: From Malachi to Mark  
Scripture Text: Mark

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 11-26-17

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I did some polling, deciding about what book that we would study next. I talked to the board about it, and there's kind of a dominant opinion there, but I also talked to the women's Bible study, and down to my last three, it was dead-even split, so I talked to the Wednesday night group—it was a dead-even split. And then I realized, boy, did you step in it! Because now you're guaranteed to offend at least two-thirds of the people that you asked about this, not to mention all the ones who didn't even agree with my three on my short list. So, we're about to dive into the gospel of Mark. If that wasn't what you voted for, get over it. We will get to the other books, Lord willing, in His time.

Today I want to give you a running start on Mark. I did this about 25 years ago in its first version before I began the study of Matthew. I was thinking, you know, there's a lot that happened leading up to Matthew that isn't in your Bible, so I did this and it went over so well, it actually took on a life of its own and recordings of that sermon were being used by seminary students to get them ready for New Testament Introduction, and that was kind of cool. I appreciated it being used that way, so I did it again when I preached through the Gospel of John, then I did it again at the start of a class for "The Life of Christ" for teaching in Russia, and I can't resist doing it again today, because as you turn the page in your Bible from Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, to the Gospels, more than four centuries pass. What happened in that time? How is the world different at the beginning of the New Testament from the end of the Old? How did Israel change in those 400 years? And what are the threads that connect the days of Jesus to what we read about in Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, and Nehemiah, the last history book of the Old Testament?

So, today I would invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Mark, just to practice for coming weeks, because eventually we'll read a few verses from Mark, but this is introductory, and to understand the Gospels, I want to suggest that you do well to understand world news between the testaments, and secondly, Jewish life between the testaments, and finally, Who's Who among the Jews, meaning, when we open up the pages of the New Testament.

Now first, let's talk about what happened in the world between the testaments, because that was very significant. And I'm going to back up and take a little running start even to that. We recently studied the book of Jonah, which is the words of Jonah's ministry in Nineveh, and then we studied Nahum, the prophecy against Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and it was the Assyrians whom God used to take the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity. Then the Babylonians usurped the place of the Assyrians, and the Babylonians took the southern kingdom captive in 586 B.C. Then, after the time in captivity, as they were there, the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, so it was actually a Persian king who was the one who God used to give permission for Israel to return to Jerusalem, where they rebuilt the temple and rebuilt the city—those are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that tell you the history of those things.

The spiritual factors that undergirded those events are in the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, so there's five—we call them "Post-Exilic" books in the Old Testament, because they're after the Exile, two of history and three of prophecy.

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Now the truth is that only a minority of the Jews took advantage of the opportunity to return around 445 B.C., and they came in a couple of different waves. Most of them stayed behind in the Medo-Persian Empire. Now that's not completely surprising from a human standpoint. Many who were alive at that time—most who were alive at that time—had never lived in the land of Israel, had never seen a temple, had never been in Jerusalem, and so you can understand that. It was a four- to five-month journey just to get there, and so it was a big deal, and by the time we come to the New Testament, more Jews live outside of Israel than live in the land.

So the last history of the Old Testament is the closing chapter of Nehemiah. The last prophecy of the Old Testament is the end of the book of Malachi. The Old Testament, therefore, closes at about 430 B.C. Jesus was born in 4 B.C. Yeah, they messed up a little bit and didn't get Him born in Zero B.C. or A.D. or 1 B.C. or 1 A.D., so that's just a mathematical issue. So over four centuries have elapsed now, and out of the view of Old Testament history, beyond what we are able to read in the Bible, in the fifth century B.C.—that's the time when the Old Testament is closing—Greece has been developing. Greece begins to expand and eventually, Greece becomes the dominant power in the world surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The most significant exploits of the Greek Empire came under Alexander the Great. In the 330's B.C., Alexander fought battles in many places against the forces of Darius the Mede—remember the Medo-Persian Empire that took over from the Babylonians that took over from the Assyrians—and Alexander prevailed. The height of the Greek Empire ensued, and that included everything around the Mediterranean Sea and for thousands of miles to the east.

So the spread of the Greek Empire was a very significant thing. The phenomenon of the spread of the influence of Greek culture and Greek language is called *Hellenization*. That's a word you're going to hear a lot today—not Helena Rubinstein, Hellenization. Hellenizing the Mediterranean world and the area around Israel was very significant for setting the stage for the events of the New Testament, setting the stage for the spread of the gospel, and for the spread of the New Testament itself. Why? Because *Koine* Greek, or, common Greek—the language of the people—became the international trade language of the world, or that part of the world, in that day. This is the language which, up to that time, had the widest acceptance in the world of any language since the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11. God used *Koine* Greek as the language of the New Testament, making the New Testament more readily spreadable than any writings ever before that.

Alexander the Great accomplished all of his exploits as a very young man. He died in 323 B.C., and I will not be giving you a quiz on all the dates here, but, Alexander died in 323 B.C. at the age of just 33 years old. I mean, the guy conquered the world, essentially, before he had time for a midlife crisis. That's pretty astounding. The influence of Greek culture lasted for centuries even after the empire built by Alexander the Great had crumbled.

I want to apologize, because there just might be, somewhere in the room, a teacher of world history, and I'm—needless to say—compressing a little bit, or a whole lot. But let's just say after Greece, along comes Rome. Okay? Is that a good enough summary of things? Al

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Mohler talks about a church history professor that he had who introduces the course this way. He says, "After the apostles and before your grandmother, stuff happened and it was important." There was important stuff from Greece to Rome, but by the time you open the New Testament, Rome is in charge, and without boring you with the dates, that's what we need to know for this morning.

Before we move on, though, I want you to draw some lessons, some applications, from the realm of just this simple contemplation of world news between the testaments. Now first of all, this is a majestic testimony to the sovereignty of God. The fingerprints of God are all over that portion of history, as they are over everything else. God is the one who determines the breadth and the time of the influence of every single country that has ever existed (Acts 17:26). Now that 400 years may not be recorded in the Bible in the form of history, but it is recorded in the form of prophecy, and as with all prophecy recorded in the Bible, these prophecies are fulfilled with great precision. This all came to pass—this sequence of empires came to pass—exactly as God predicted it.

A second thing to learn from that is a direct corollary of it: Because God is sovereign, He is trustworthy. If He is sovereign, that means He is in control, and if He's in control, you never need to fret. You don't need to worry about the affairs of nations. Conquerors come and go throughout the pages of history. Tyrants come and go; they rise and fall. Wicked men gain control of nations from time to time. Their folly runs its course. And none of that changes God's trustworthiness or His plan, even a tiny bit. We live in a nation that is something over 200 years old. It has been a very fruitful nation, a very prosperous nation, a tremendously blessed and influential nation, and, like most empires or nations throughout human history that have lasted a couple of hundred years, I think it's safe to say ours is in decline. And if our nation continues to decline, if it continues to take away freedoms that I consider precious, I'm going to go right on worshipping God and preaching His word, no matter who's elected, no matter who attacks whom, no matter what they say, because that is God's plan. Now, I would miss many aspects of this very comfortable, pleasant life that I have, but I won't be shaken from my faith in God if something happens to it. He is, He always has been, He always will be sovereign, good, and trustworthy.

Something else to draw from the world news between the testaments is this spread of the Greek language. That's a marvelous example of God's providence. Never before—from the Tower of Babel until the spread of the Greek Empire, there had never a vehicle such as *Koine* Greek to carry the Word of God to the people of many nations so smoothly. You know, men rarely have the idea that they are serving the purpose of Almighty God, and yet their actions are always under His control (Prov. 16:9; 20:24; Dan. 4:35; Rev. 17:17). Alexander the Great did not set out his things-to-do list when he was in his teens, and say, "I'm going to conquer the world and set up a system of language that will spread the New Testament." He had no intention of that. There was a Roman emperor named Caesar Augustus who decided that he would order a census in order to solidify and bolster his tax base. He had no idea that he was a pawn in the hands of God and his demand for a census is what took Mary and Joseph to precisely the place that God predicted would be the birthplace of Messiah at exactly the time that God designed for the Messiah to be born (Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:1-7). The point is: don't let

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political ups and downs—even political eruptions—don't let them shake your faith. Don't let them frighten you. They can be terribly inconvenient and they can be bad for your health, but God is in control.

Alright, that's world news between the testaments. Have you ever, in a history class, in your life, covered 430 years in that short of a time? Neither have I, and I'm sorry for whatever I may have done, but that's what we need to know. Those were the key factors for us.

The second thing I want you to consider is how Jewish life changed between the testaments. If you were a Jew living in Israel at the close of the Old Testament, your life was quite a bit different from a Jew living in Israel at the beginning of the New Testament, and there were at least four very significant factors within the life of the Jews between the testaments. I'm just going to give you four very quick developments of Jewish life between the testaments.

Number one is the *Diaspora*. You can pronounce that with emphasis on almost any syllable you want and somebody will think you know more than they do. Back when Israel was given permission to return and rebuild Jerusalem, only about 50,000 Jews made that long trip back to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem after the captivity. The vast majority stayed back in Persia. They came in a couple of waves under Ezra and under Nehemiah, but many of them eventually migrated even farther away than Persia to places around Mediterranean Sea and up into Europe. This scattering of the Jews is known as the "dispersion." *Diaspora* is just a foreign language way to say "the dispersion." For those who returned, life was once again centered around the temple, but for most Jews in the world, ever since 586 B.C., when the last ones were taken into captivity, for most Jews, the temple has never been part of their lives. That's a profound change in the nature of Judaism, and it leads to the next development.

Development number two in the life of the Jews between the testaments is the rise of the synagogue. You can search in vain through the Old Testament to find reference to a synagogue. It isn't there. And then the word synagogue in the New Testament with no explanation of where it came from. Here's what happened. The captivity brought about the complete absence of a temple, so they couldn't bring the sacrifices, they couldn't do those things, so Jews began meeting together in places called "synagogues." That word comes from a Greek word—remember the word *Hellenization*?—it's the Greek word that means "to gather together." A synagogue is a gathering-together place. Jews would gather together—they couldn't bring the sacrifices, they couldn't do all of that, but they could read the Scriptures. They could pray together. They could fellowship together. Most of what happens in a church today is essentially patterned after what happened in synagogues in the New Testament times. From the end of the captivity, wherever Jews went, synagogues arose. I think there's even a rabbinic rule that it takes ten Jews to form a synagogue...I think that's the magic number. And even in the land of Israel, even after the temple was rebuilt, there were still synagogues—even though they could reasonably travel to the temple—they were the gathering places for the Jews in any local area. That's a very significant development.

Development number three is the *Septuagint*, another fancy word you could use on your friends. As Jews scattered further and further, as more and more time went by, as they were

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more and more removed from their native Hebrew language, it was harder and harder for them to understand the Scriptures. Give it a few generations and you're going to be speaking the language that the people around you are speaking, and that was mainly Greek. So Jews of the Diaspora necessarily became Greek-speaking in order to just carry on life in the Hellenized world. For that reason, there came to be a translation of the Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew with a little bit in the dialect called Aramaic, and it was translated into Greek. That translation is called the Septuagint. The name comes from the Latin word for "seventy," so you often see the Septuagint abbreviated by the Roman numeral LXX for seventy. There's a Jewish legend that says that around 250 B.C., a man named Ptolemy Philadelphus brought together 72 scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek in 72 days. That legend is probably...a legend—it's highly suspect. But the Septuagint is very real, and it's very significant. It was probably translated over the period from about 250 B.C. to about 125 B.C. It may have been refined during that time, done in Alexandria, Egypt. The Septuagint was the first of many extremely important translations of the Bible. You're probably holding one in your hand right now—not a Septuagint, but an extremely important translation of the Bible, because a translation *you* can read is a very important translation.

Development number four is Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean Revolt. Now, that one you may or may not know about. Several prophecies from the later chapters of Daniel were fulfilled with great precision. Here's what happened—and again, I may cause you historical whiplash, but we'll put it together. After Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided into several components. Israel fell under the control of the Ptolemies—with a silent "P" on the front of it—the Ptolemies of Egypt, until 198 B.C. That's when the Seleucid rulers of Syria took over the area of Israel and controlled it until 143 B.C. And by the way, that's exactly as predicted in Daniel chapter 11. I wish we could take time to go there, but, go on your own and check it out. Now, the Seleucid rulers didn't cause trouble for Jewish worship, they just kind of let them alone, until the reign of a man named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In 170 B.C., Antiochus plundered the temple, offered a pig on the altar, and made all Jewish religious laws and practices illegal. By the way, his desecrations and blasphemies are predicted in Daniel 8 and in Daniel 11. He was sort of a forerunner of the things that the Antichrist is going to do during the Tribulation time.

So now we have Israel with the temple messed up. An old priest named Mattathias and his five sons led a rebellion against Antiochus and his successors. That is the genesis of a word I know you know. We're about to hear about it a lot more in the coming weeks—the word *Hanukkah*, a Jewish holiday not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament because it wasn't established by God in the Old Testament. Hanukkah commemorates the cleansing of the temple after that rebellion against Antiochus IV that was accomplished in 164 B.C. under the leadership of a guy named Judas Maccabaeus. He was the first leader among the five sons of Mattathias. That revolt came to be known as the "Maccabean Revolt." That sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? "Maccabean"—where have I heard that word before? Is that where Mac and Cheese came from? No, that's not exactly the one, but you might have heard of books of Maccabees. They're part of the "apocrypha"—non-inspired Jewish books of history that are included between the Old and New Testaments by the Catholic church, because they find some of their aberrant doctrines there.

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After a 24-year war, the Jews gained independence from Syria in 142 B.C., and the descendants of Mattathias founded the *Hasmonean* dynasty, named after Hashmon, who was an ancestor of the Maccabees. The Hasmoneans ruled until 63 B.C. Remember awhile back I said there was Greece and then I summarized it, "And then there was Rome"? Alright, here's the key turning point. In 63 B.C., a Roman general named Pompey intervened when there was a dispute between two men who claimed that they were the heirs to the high priesthood. After Pompey intervened, Rome never left the scene, and the land of Israel came to be under Roman control—by the way, *exactly* as predicted in Daniel. God is in charge of all of this!

As the unrest continued, the Romans made Herod the Great the king of Judea. Finally, he said *something* that relates to the New Testament! Okay, you've heard of Herod the Great. Herod was a brilliant builder; a military tactician; a horribly immoral, murderous, tyrannical genius. He's the one who humbly gave himself the title "the King of the Jews." Now do you know why he was just a tad bit upset when these guys from Persia—who had probably heard the stuff from Daniel—showed up in town and said, "Where is He who is born 'King of the Jews'?" We'll talk about Herod—Christmas is coming, so you'll hear about him. He was the Roman ruler in that region when Jesus was born.

There are the changes in Jewish life between testaments. The scattering, the rise of the synagogue, the Septuagint, and the Maccabean Revolt. Now, what are some lessons you might draw from that?

First of all: ditto to everything I said about the sovereignty of God, the trustworthiness of God, the goodness of God, the faithfulness of God, and the accuracy of His word. He was, He is, and He always will be in complete control. Despite the machinations of wicked men, God guides history *exactly* as He intends and exactly as He predicted (Ps. 33:10-11; Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:1, 31). The setting was perfect for the arrival of Jesus Christ at precisely the time appointed by God (Gal. 4:4). If all these events had not happened the way they did in the life of Israel—including acts of spectacular disobedience and wickedness—prophecy would not have been fulfilled.

A second thing that's very significant is that the Septuagint was the beginning of a long and fruitful history of translating the Bible into other languages. Unless you are reading your Bible this morning in Hebrew and Greek, you are a beneficiary of that long storied history. You are blessed by the translation of the Bible into your language. The Septuagint ministered to Jews throughout the Hellenized world. A very interesting thing is that many of the quotes of the Old Testament that are contained in the New Testament come from the Septuagint. We can tell by the wording and comparing, and you can ascertain the difference between a translation done spontaneously to one that is quoted from the Septuagint. And the Septuagint even sometimes helps us understand the Hebrew, a language that has been pretty much not in use for a couple thousand years until it was revived just over fifty, sixty years ago. Sometimes there are obscure words there, but because we have this translation from just before the days of Jesus, if there's a Hebrew word we don't know, we can see how the Greek culture understood that word, and that sometimes gives us insight.

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Now remember, no translation of the Bible is inspired, as were the original manuscripts of the original languages, but translations are extremely valuable, and you are super-blessed to live in an English-speaking country at this time in history. You have more resources and more translations than anybody else has ever had.

Anybody watch a football game yesterday? You might have done so, or you've seen a football game or a baseball game or a basketball game or a soccer game. You notice that the teams wear different colors, right? That's pretty helpful. And you notice they have numbers on their back—you've got to know who's on the field to know what's going on. Well, as we enter the New Testament, you need to know who's who among the Jews. You are now an absolute expert in world news between the Old Testament and New Testament, you're an absolute expert in understanding what developed in Jewish life between the testaments, but now—Who's around? What's going on?

Well, as you open the pages of your New Testament, Israel is under Roman control. Now you know that that's significant. The Romans followed the Seleucids who followed the Ptolemies who followed the Greeks who followed the...knee bone connected to the thigh bone and whatever else it is, okay? There's a majestic temple now in Jerusalem, way better than even the one Nehemiah and Ezra had something to do with. It was built by that wicked, strange character Herod the Great. There has not been a prophet in Israel now for over 400 years. Now Jews are scattered around for thousands of miles. Now the local synagogue has become the focal point for the religious life of most Jews in the world. And by the time you come to the New Testament, there is more diversity among Jews than ever before. So I want to give you a rundown of the key players when the New Testament kicks off, and among the Jews there are four groups with very divergent views of theology, politics, and everyday life. Two of these four play significant roles in the life of Jesus.

Let's start with the most obscure one. Group number one is the "Essenes." These were the Jewish version of monks. They were very spiritually oriented, but they made the absolutely flat-out dead wrong decision that the best way to be spiritual is, remove yourself from society. You don't have very much influence on people that you don't talk to, live with, work with, or have anything to do with. Well, they did that and they did it quite well. You don't read about them in the New Testament because, guess what? They hid. They would have nothing to do with everyday society, but you and I owe a great debt to one of the groups of Essenes who made that unwise choice to retreat from society to live in a community of their own, isolated from everyone.

Specifically, there was this group that lived in a place down near the Dead Sea. If you don't want to have a lot to do with people, move by the Dead Sea—nobody's there, in general. They lived in a community called *Qumran*. They clung together; they kept away from society; they copied manuscripts of the Bible and other religious writings. They did find out, however, that the Romans were coming through and dispatching Jews. Remember, Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. In A.D. 68, they swept along up the coast of the Sea of Galilee, and this group of Essenes at Qumran knew that they were about to die, so they took their most

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precious scrolls, they hid them in clay pots, and tucked them away in caves in the mountains above the Dead Sea. They weren't found until 1948 or '49, and they are the "Dead Sea Scrolls," which play a *huge* role in our understanding of the history of a lot of things, and a lot of validating of what we know as the accuracy of our translations. The Essenes didn't have anything to do with Jesus because they didn't have anything to do with anybody, but they were very real.

Group number two—the Zealots. These would get a little bit of mention in the New Testament. One of Jesus' disciples named Simon—not Simon Peter—was a member of this group before he became a follower of Christ. The Zealots were primarily a politically-motivated group of activists who were bent on seizing any opportunity they could to do anything they could that would lead toward throwing off the yoke of Roman oppression. Religion was *part* of their life, but the driving force for the Zealots was, "Get rid of the Romans!" Zealots became interested in Jesus once He became popular and there was talk of making Him a king. So they jumped on that bandwagon. The possibility of a Jewish king in place of a puppet of Rome—that made them salivate. Now, in the events of the life of Jesus, the Zealots as a group didn't come into play very much, though their influence was felt in the culture of Jerusalem and Galilee in the days of Jesus. The other two groups show up prominently in the Gospels.

Group number three is the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the products of—and you know this next word because you've learned it this morning—Hellenization. They were of the priestly line that descended from a high priest named Zadok, and hence "Sadducees" comes from "Zadok." They were Greek-speaking, primarily; they were aristocrats, they tended to be wealthy; and they controlled the temple policies and practices. It's generally believed that the Sadducees dominated the Jewish governing body known as the Sanhedrin—they're the council that had to deliberate on Jesus and a bunch of other things. When it comes to doctrine, the Sadducees were what we would call liberals. They rejected as Scripture everything except the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis through Deuteronomy—and they didn't believe a lot of what's there; they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor did they believe in angels or demons (Acts 23:8). So, if you want to keep track between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, remember the Sadducees don't believe in life after death...that's why they're "sad, you see," okay? You'll never forget it again. That's group number three.

Group number four is the Pharisees. The Pharisees traced their roots to the Maccabees, who opposed the forces of Hellenization, who opposed the guys that were messing with the temple. Their name probably means "separated ones" based upon the fact that they separated themselves from the official religious establishment. They didn't really want to be the political ones, but they had to work with the Sadducees. They wanted to be more spiritually separate, if you will. Now, even though there were only about 6,000 card-carrying members of the Pharisee party at the time of Christ, their influence was very powerful. The Pharisees were the ones who shaped the thinking and the practices of most Jews in Israel at that time. Their compatriots were the Scribes—the experts in the Old Testament and all of the writings and oral traditions and opinions of the rabbis.



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The Pharisees had a rule for every situation in your life. As a matter of fact, they had rules about why you shouldn't do things that you would have never thought of doing if you didn't hear about the rules. We have modern versions of Pharisees today. Theologically, the Pharisees were the absolute opposites of the Sadducees. Not only did they accept every word of the Old Testament Scriptures—while the Sadducees rejected all but the writings of Moses—they also added to it a massive collection of oral traditions and opinions of rabbis. Their reasoning was, they wanted to make sure that they didn't break any laws of God, so they made up rules that would keep people away from getting near any situation which might cause them to get close to someone or somebody that could possibly lead to them being tempted to break a rule. The essence of legalism is adding to Scripture, and the Pharisees were really good at it—they were masters of legalism. In their misplaced, overdone zeal to be obedient, they amassed such a hodgepodge of do's and don'ts that they completely missed the point of the Word of God. They perverted the beauty of Judaism into a system of works-righteousness, and they put this spiritual load of bondage on the average Jews of Jesus' day (Matt. 23:4). The Pharisees controlled most of what was taught in the synagogues because the Sadducees wanted to sit around and enjoy all their pomp around the temple. The Pharisees influenced the people.

The Pharisees opposed Jesus more often and more openly than anyone else. Matthew, the gospel that was targeting Jews, mentions them by name more than any other gospel. When you see John refer to them, he usually just calls them "the Jews" because John's audience didn't know all the distinctions of all the different parties within Judaism. There was only one thing that the Pharisees and the Sadducees ever agreed upon during the time of the New Testament. They agreed that they had to murder Jesus.

Those were the four main groups in Israel: the Essenes, the Zealots, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. That's the Who's Who among the Jews.

It's near Christmas, and you'll soon get a refresher course in that major player, Herod the Great, and the others that are involved in the birth of Jesus, but when we get to the gospel of Mark, you're not going to have Christmas. He doesn't even mention the details of the birth of Jesus. Matthew and Luke give it in detail; John gives it in a theological version; Mark just kind of jumps in to the **[indiscernible] [00:40:10]**. Mark is the shortest gospel, the fast-paced one, and we're going to see that when we get there. But I want you to understand, as we go from Malachi to Mark. The last book of the Old Testament, which is Malachi, predicts the man who was chosen by God to break that 400-year drought of prophets in Israel—he was the prophet John the Baptist. Malachi chapter three and verse one is where we read about the prediction: "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me." And then, how does the Old Testament actually close? Malachi 4:5-6: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet"—doesn't say John the Baptist. Maybe working through Mark, we're going to figure out the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist, but there was the promise that Elijah would come. "I am going to send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

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And how does Mark begin? I threatened to read a couple of verses to you. Mark chapter one verses one through four: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet"—and then he's going to quote a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3—"Behold, I will send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.' John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

That's from Malachi to Mark. So we covered 430 years just this morning. Now we're going to spend, Lord knows how long, on the next 3 ½ years in the life of Christ. What should you take away from these things? My goal here is that you would have the right perspectives as you begin to look at the gospel of Mark, as you begin to look at the New Testament in general.

First—I'll say it again—above all, know: God is sovereign. He is in control, despite anything that man does. He's always trustworthy, He is always good, no matter what happens in the world.

Secondly, understand: Everything happens on schedule in world events, just as God decrees it to happen. Acts 17:26 says He decrees all of the "boundaries and habitations," in other words, how long and how far will be the influence of every single country. When things are going well, when things are going badly, when you see a society like ours becoming more and more polarized, understand: God is in control.

Understand, thirdly, that liberals and ultra-conservatives are equally likely to be offended by Jesus Christ. My friends, do not hitch your wagon to *anybody's* political agenda (Ps. 118:9; 146:3)! The Kingdom of God will not arrive on Air Force One. I mean, we've gotten farther and farther that, no matter who we elect now, it seems that it's more and more extreme than the one before him. We have a president now that governs by Tweet. We're not getting better! Don't hitch your wagon to that. Don't put your faith in that. Don't make that your number one earthly priority. You are here as an ambassador of a foreign government: the Kingdom of Heaven, and it's coming, and it's going to be great. And meantime, nearly everyone across the political spectrum is going to be equally offended by Christ. Only those who are willing to face their own sinfulness and pride can ever embrace the wonderful gift of eternal life that Jesus brings, and you're going to see what John the Baptist was preaching when He showed up—Lord willing, next Lord's day, when we actually crack open the Gospel According to Mark. That's Mark chapter one, verse zero, that we have completed today.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your majestic sovereignty. Thank You for Your grace in which we stand. Thank You for sending Your Son to die that we might live. Thank You for the riches of Your grace, showering upon us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. O Lord, through Your word and by Your Spirit and with our mutual encouragement, teach us to live as You would have us to, for Your glory, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

END OF AUDIO