

**Mark 1:1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in the Prophets: *'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'* **3** *'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'* **4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. **5** Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. **8** I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." **9** It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. **11** Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (NKJV)

We begin the book of Mark with action. Mark doesn't go into genealogies. He doesn't begin with the birth of Christ. He skips a lot of things that the other gospels give detailed accounts on. Why? Well if this book was written by Mark who was trained by Peter, it is very likely this book is a reflection of how Peter would have viewed things. Can you imagine, with what we know of Peter, that he would give detailed genealogies? Would he give detailed historical facts? No. Leave that to Dr. Luke. Peter would be wanting to get the show on the road. And that is what Mark does here. He skips ahead immediately to John the Baptist. Which means he jumps ahead to where Christ is 30 years old.

Now it is interesting to note what Mark does in the first 11 verses. Did you notice when you read this that Mark validates who Christ is from 5 sources?

We see **first** that Mark is writing this book and that he knows that what he is writing are the **facts about Christ**. The facts have come from eyewitnesses. Most probably came from the mouth of Peter. Maybe Mark saw some of these events first hand. We don't know. But in any case, the events were validated by first hand witnesses. So **Christ is validated by first hand witnesses**.

**Secondly** we see that the identity of Christ was validated by the **prophets**. The prophets told of a forerunner to the Messiah, which implies that the person that the forerunner is proclaiming is the Messiah. So the prophets proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, even before he arrived. So **Christ is validated by the prophets**.

Then we see in the story that **John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah**. In other passages we see this unfold even more clearly. So **John the Baptist validated Jesus**.

Then the **Holy Spirit** validated that Christ was the Messiah. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove.

Then **God the Father** validated the identity of Christ. A voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

You see, that is the kind of book we are starting. It is fast paced and it gets right to the point.

Mark understood that the first thing we need to know is who Jesus Christ is.

Who is Jesus to you? That is the most important fact about your life. Who is Jesus to you?

Mark was making it very clear, very quickly that this Jesus is not one to trifle with. Think about this. Christ was so important that he could not show up without being announced. And the person who was sent to announce Christ was only living for that one purpose. He was dedicated from birth for that one purpose. Christ's ministry and person were so important that **a full human's life** was given to the purpose of saying- He is coming. Christ is coming. Get ready for Christ. Prepare your hearts for His appearance. Confess your sins. Repent of your sins. It is that big of a deal. Get ready for the Messiah. He is coming soon.

Mark does not want us to miss this. He validates who Christ is in a rock solid fashion in just a few verses. He keeps it simple. And he keeps it moving.

Jesus is the Christ that was **promised by the prophets**, was **preached about by John**, and **who the Father and the Holy Spirit both announced**.

We should be entering this study with a great expectation. Mark is telling us who this Jesus is, what He did, what He said, and what He expects. He is telling us about Jesus who was **God in flesh, God incarnate**. This truly is the greatest story ever told. And that is what we are endeavoring to study. In Romans we learned about the details of the Gospel. In Mark we will meet **its central character**.

Prepare yourself to be changed.

Now let's start with verse 1.

**Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

Mark is making the beginning of the gospel at John the Baptists ministry. That is not the only place that the story can be started. But that is the place that Mark decided to start at. It is interesting that in Acts, Peter, in a sermon proclaiming the Gospel, he started at the same place. Let's take a look.

**Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all-- 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God**

**anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (NKJV)**

So John the Baptist is a good place to start.

Now notice how Mark describes what he is writing. He says it is a gospel. He does not call it a biography. A biography would simply tell us about the person. It would tell us his story. **But a biography does not rescue us from our problems.** It does not compel us to act. It does not have any **command** over our lives. The gospel, however, affects everything about us. We saw that in great detail in the book of Romans.

The word for gospel, the good news, was originally used to describe an announcement of good tidings about the emperor. But to us it is a message of **God's saving grace** as delivered to this planet through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mark is not trying to explain a misunderstood person. He is preaching to us about the only way that we can have our sin forgiven and live forever in an eternal bliss. This is way more important than a biography.

As we go through this book you will hear that Mark's language was rough and ungrammatical. Greek was probably a second language with Aramaic being first. That is very clear already. From what I read, even the first couple of verses are a bit rough.

Now Mark uses a few terms referring to Jesus.

**Jesus** is the Greek form of Joshua which means Yahweh is salvation. Jesus was his name like mine is Jon.

**Christ**, on the other hand, is not something you would find on Jesus's birth certificate. Christ is a Greek word that means anointed –It comes from the Hebrew word is masiah from which our word Messiah comes. It is more of a title than a name. And it is understood as a position that was prophesied to be filled one day. Then Mark says **Son of God**- this clarifies Jesus' relationship with God with an emphasis on the deity of Jesus. Mark gives us a whole lot in the first verse. We have a person named Jesus that is the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for, but he is more than just a person, He is God incarnate...the son of God.

**2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."**

To understand Christ you must understand what comes before. Mark begins his story with John the Baptist.

Where this verse says **it is written**, this phrase is written in the **perfect** tense. It means it was completed in the past but has continuing results. That is how God's word is. It has authority. It was written in the past but you can't keep it in the past. It continues to accomplish what it was **set out** to accomplish.

The passage that John uses is a combination of two verses.

**Exodus 23:20 "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. (NKJV)**

This verse is combined with the following.

**Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. (NKJV)**

From what I read it seems like the Rabbi's of Mark's day understood these texts this way. They saw that they fit together.

So what Mark says is that **prophecy predicted a messenger** who would prepare the way for another. It is important to understand in all of this that Mark is going back into the Israelites history and appealing to a promise of a Messiah. This is basically showing the reader that this Messiah is not someone who just showed up. In fact, the beginning of the gospel, that verse 1 refers to, is much earlier than the first line of Mark. It goes back to the time of the Israelites. And it points to Malachi where it was promised that Elijah would visit the people again.

**3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'**

This passage comes directly from **Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. (NKJV)**

This messenger would be a person whose ministry would be done in the wilderness.

The word for Wilderness means uninhabited territory—open, wild territory. It doesn't have to be desert or jungle. It is just not inhabited. The location where John the Baptist was ministering definitely fit that bill.

And as for "making His paths straight"- back then when a dignitary was going to visit a remote place, a work crew would be sent out to clear a road for the dignitary to travel on.

So the crux of the message is get ready. Get the road ready for the King to walk on it. Prepare for this dignitary. Prepare to greet someone this special.

**Vs 4" 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.**

Now Mark lets us know who these prophecies were written about. John the Baptist was the guy. He was the announcer. He was the messenger. He was the forerunner to Christ.

And how did he prepare the people for Christ?

John was preaching a repentance-baptism. Now this baptism didn't accomplish repentance. No. In fact the baptism indicated that repentance had already occurred or was being **accompanied** by it. It did not indicate that the baptism accomplished anything.

So John preached, he proclaimed a message preparing people for Christ's arrival. He clearly understood the pre-eminence of Christ. He understood Christ's importance. So he preached that people should repent. And when they repented John would baptize them. As a result of their repentance God would forgive them. I can't tell exactly when this forgiveness would happen. I suspect that the remission of sins would follow as these people, prepared by John's preaching and the Holy Spirit's conviction, prepared by God granting them repentance, would receive Christ when He arrived and would, through the gospel, receive the forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Christ.

**5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.**

The verb tense for went out means they went out and kept going out. This was a continuing revival. John was creating quite a stir.

It is important that we understand that for the people in Jerusalem to go see John they had to go down 4000 feet in elevation and travel 20 miles from Jerusalem. A 20 mile hike on flat ground would take at the very least 5 hours. It is more like an all day hike. And these people were doing this. They were walking one day to get there and another day to get back. People would not do this unless they were convinced that something important was going on. And what was going on is that John was preparing the way for the Messiah. It is clear that he was creating Messianic expectations.

Notice too who John would baptize. He would only baptize those who were confessing their sins. John would have been intensely unpopular with the proud. We learn in another gospel

**Matthew 3:5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**

Think about that statement. Who warned you? John is basically saying that you are so clueless about spiritual things that you could not possibly know about coming judgment yourself. The only way you would know is if someone else told you. That was a real stab at their supposed spiritual authority. John is basically calling them all spiritual novices, spiritual know nothings.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were not about to confess their sins. They were not about to humble themselves. And they were not about to be forgiven either.

John goes on....

**8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.**

John is pointing out what Jesus will make even clearer. You cannot trust your bloodline for salvation. You cannot trust anything of your flesh to make you right with God. The only way good can come out of you is if the tree is good. All of life is bearing fruit. If you have a tree that God has granted repentance to, since that is the only way we ever repent is **if God has granted us** repentance, if God has changed our hearts, if you are bearing the good fruit of that good tree, that is wonderful. That is what we all must do. And it will only happen if God does a miracle in us.

But we had better not think that miracle comes from our bloodline, or our flesh, or our efforts, or our religious efforts. Because it won't. We cannot trust anything but the work of God for our salvation.

Then John points out to the religious leader what God is up to. He says:

**10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

The leaders would have expected that when the Messiah comes He is going to just step into leadership and the good guys are the Jews and the bad guys are everyone else. But what they don't understand is the bad guys are those who are in their sin and the good guys are those who fully realize their lostness and cling to Christ with everything they have for salvation. The ax is going to cut down all those who think they are good. The ax will cut down all those who think they can get to God just as they are. The ax will cut down those who are good in their own eyes. But the people that God has changed, the people that God has humbled and redeemed, the saved sinners will be producing a fruit based on that spiritual change. They alone will be saved.

John goes on in verse **12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** (NKJV)

John's was not a message that the leadership would want to hear or endorse. They would not be likely to humbly confess their sin in the hearing of all those who they thought themselves better than. So in the end, they would not be receiving a baptism or forgiveness.

Let's go on.

**Vs 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey**

We see a picture in the bible of someone similar in **2 Kings 1:7 Then he said to them, "What kind of man *was it* who came up to meet you and told you these words?" 8 So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite." (NKJV)**

John was the prophesied Elijah according to Jesus, but he also wasn't the prophesied Elijah. We will look at that more later. But what we see is that he was very similar in lifestyle to Elijah.

John lived off the land. Camels hair clothing is very durable and very uncomfortable. Locusts and wild honey were available in this part of the country. We can see right away that John was not living for himself. He had pretty much given up on the cares and anxieties of this life. He was not doing anything by way of storing up for retirement. He was devoted to his life of preaching and he had very little to distract him. John was impressive. He chose this way of life. And he did it for one purpose. To prepare people for Christ.

**Vs 7,8 . 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

Mark skips over John's dealings with the Pharisees and Sadducees, his speeches to the crowds, or the tax collectors and soldiers. Instead he focusses on the supremacy of Christ. We get here the focus of John's preaching. One is coming. He is greater than me. In fact, I am not worthy to be this man's slave. He is that much greater than me. I am not worthy of doing the most lowly task in His service. And this is the difference in our ministry. I will take you physically and put you underneath water. But He will do something unknown. He will cover you with the Holy Spirit of God.

A Mr Moule's said it this way "The Baptist evidently meant that the great coming One would not merely cleanse with water but would bring to bear, like a deluge, the purging, purifying, judging presence of God himself" (*Gospel of Mark*, p. 10). This is what happened in a dramatic way at Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)) in fulfillment of Christ's promise ([Acts 1:5](#)).

Then Mark goes on....

**It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.**

We find more about this encounter in Matthew

**Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be**

**baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. (NKJV)**

This is very fitting given what John just said about the supremacy of Christ. John did not see himself as fit to do this to Christ. Christ was greater than John. Therefore in John's mind Christ should baptize John. But getting baptized is something that Christ wanted to do. He didn't do it because He needed forgiveness of sin. But he did it to fulfill those things that He needed to do while He was on the earth. Probably he was identifying with those he came to seek and save. And maybe by doing this thing Jesus knew what would follow. And what would follow would be important for His followers to know about.

**10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (NKJV)**

Mark is very dramatic in the words he chooses. He says the heavens were ripped open. The other gospel writers just say the heavens were opened. His language reflects a verse in Isaiah.

**Isaiah 64:1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence-- (NKJV)**

We don't know what everyone else saw, but Christ saw some kind of cosmic event. And the Holy Spirit came down on Him that in some way resembled a dove in flight. We don't know how. It certainly does not say the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. But it came in some way like a dove. A dove flies in bursts of speed after it flaps its wings. It is fast and erratic. Maybe it was like that. We really don't know. But it was real enough that Christ could describe it accurately and maybe those around him saw it too.

And then a voice came. And it told everyone **that John was preaching to** exactly what they needed to know. You are my Son and I am pleased with you.

Think about the implications of this event.

Here is John the Baptist. This man is a devoted prophet foretelling the coming of the Messiah. His ministry is clearly empowered by the Holy Spirit. People are coming miles to their own misfortune to be convicted of sin to the point that they are willing to confess it. When they confess and repent they are baptized, which is a humbling process. Their sins bother them enough now that they want rid of them. They want forgiven. And they are being told that the one who has the Holy Spirit power in this ministry is coming. His ministry will be with more than water. It will be with the Holy Spirit. And that seems to be the thrust of his message. So day after day he is saying this. Day after day people are flocking out to hear him. Day after day people are repenting.



Then on this amazing day something completely different happens. John sees someone and he treats him completely different than everyone he has baptized previously. Instead of being willing to do the necessary service of baptizing someone who needs their sins forgiven, John refuses to baptize this man. And it is not because the person is **not willing** to repent. It is because **he does not need to** repent. He is greater than John who, himself, had to repent.

But John relents and gives in to Christ's reasoning. And he baptized Christ. But when Christ comes out of the water cosmic events happen. Maybe the audience could see them. Maybe they couldn't. But what came next they heard. A voice came from heaven. And it essentially said- **THIS IS HIM!** I sent John to do one job- to prepare for Christ. And now his job is fulfilled. He did it well. But now Jesus is here. He is my son that I love. And I am pleased with Him, **just as He is.** He is in fellowship with me. He is exactly what He should be. There is no sin barrier between the two of us. He is what everyone needs to be, in perfect fellowship with the Father.

Wow, what a sermon. What a powerful event. What an amazing day. And what a perfect start for a fast moving Gospel story. Mark has laid out the first event. Jesus Christ has come to the planet and He is approved by God to fulfill His mission. God confirmed it on 5 levels.