



# The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



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## Part 1

### Mark 1:1-13

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# Mark 1:1 (NIV)

The beginning of the  
gospel about Jesus  
Christ, the Son of God.

“The beginning ...”

The text that immediately follows is not about Jesus, though! It is about John the Baptist. Clearly, then, the story of John the Baptist is, somehow, part of the gospel about Jesus.

“the gospel”

What is this word? What IS the “gospel”

In Greek, the word meant ANY “good announcement” – a birth, a wedding, etc.

It usually meant a VERBAL announcement – but here, the word is used in reference to the WRITTEN account that follows. It is possible that this is the very first such usage attested in literature.

Later, the word came to be applied to all FOUR “Gospels of Jesus Christ”.

“about Jesus Christ”

Here, the gospel is, specifically, a good announcement ABOUT Jesus Christ.

“the Son of God”

We will see that IDENTITY is a key theme of this Gospel. Mark identifies Jesus from the start as the Son of God.

## Mark 1:2-3 (NIV)

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” –

“a voice of one calling in the desert,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.’”

“It is written”

This is a common literary formula of first century Palestine, used to introduce a quotation.

“in Isaiah the prophet”

It is not clear if this phrase is really qualifying verse 1:1 or verses 1:2-3. It may be translated as in the NIV, qualifying verses 2 and 3, or it may be a continuation of verse 1, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet”.

The “quotation” itself contains material from more than just Isaiah:

Exodus 23:20 (NIV) – “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.”

Malachi 3:1 (NIV) – “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”

Isaiah 40:3 (NIV) – “A voice of one calling ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.’”

## Mark 1:2-3 (NIV)

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” –

“a voice of one calling in the desert,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

“my messenger”

In Exodus 23:20, this is an angel who is Israel’s guardian and guide into the Promised Land

In Malachi 3:1, this is someone who is a precursor to the “day of the LORD”, who will turn hearts back to God

This messenger is now equated to the voice crying in the wilderness from Isaiah 40:3

This implies that, prior to the day of the LORD, someone will arrive whose job it is to prepare the people for it, and to guide them into it. This person will do this task in the wilderness.

“ahead of you, who will prepare your way”

the “you” and “your” in this verse are references back to 1:1, referring to Jesus

“Prepare the way for the Lord”

This is an analogy to the task of preparing a route for a king to enter into a city

This is part of the role of “the messenger”

The next verse identifies this messenger as John the Baptist

Thus, both John’s and Jesus’ appearances fulfill the promise of the coming of the Lord

## Mark 1:4 (NIV)

And so John came,  
baptizing in the desert  
region and preaching a  
baptism of repentance  
for the forgiveness of  
sins.

“and so John came”

John the Baptist IS the messenger, meaning that the story to come (that this is the beginning of) is the fulfillment of Israel’s trajectory as God’s people

Unique among the Gospels, Mark actually refers to him as “John the Baptizer”, not “John the Baptist”!

“baptizing”

Baptism in Judaism was a ritual cleansing, but we also know from Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, that it was an initiation for new converts to Judaism (proselytes)

But both of these were self-administered rites, and John is **PERFORMING** baptisms

The purpose of John’s baptism is to signify readiness to repent (re-align one’s self) in preparation for God’s kingdom – and it was John’s invention!

It was a voluntary renunciation of old ways in order to join the community. This was similar to the initiation rite of Qumran, but here, it is to join **JOHN’S** community of followers through a readiness to repent

## Mark 1:4 (NIV)

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baptizing in the desert  
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“in the desert”

This points back to 1:3, the fulfillment of one “in the desert”, but also is a reminder of the Exodus wilderness wanderings and God’s subsequent deliverance

“preaching”

Again, a reference back to 1:3, and the “voice calling”

“for the forgiveness of sins”

John is preaching about the certainty of God’s acceptance of repentance, and the forgiveness that will come through the One to come ... see 1:8 just ahead!

## Mark 1:5 (NIV)

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

“whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem”  
This is certainly hyperbole (exaggeration for effect)  
But ALL Israel WAS called to repent!

“Confessing their sins”  
This is implicit in repentance – you can’t turn away from what you have not acknowledged!

“the Jordan River”  
The Jordan River runs north-south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.  
The lower Jordan (the southern end) really WAS “the wilderness”



## Mark 1:6 (NIV)

John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

“John wore clothing ...”

John's dress and food DO correspond to wilderness life  
2 Kings 1:8 gives insight into the dress of a prophet in describing Elijah – “They replied, ‘he was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.’”

“and he ate ...”

Some people have surmised that these “locusts” were actually bean pods of the locust tree. The Greek words for the two are very similar - but the same Greek word is used in Revelation 9:3 to refer to a plague of locusts, so unless “bean pods” plague the earth in Revelation, John ate insects, not bean pods!

Luke 7:33 corroborates John's diet to some extent – “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine”

## Mark 1:7-8 (NIV)

And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

“this was his message”

The coming of a far Greater One – seemingly the Messiah, but this is actually unusual language to have applied to the anticipated human Messiah. The “powerful” language was often reserved for God.

This could be pointing to the fact that this “more powerful” one will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

“the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down to untie”

This was considered a VERY low duty.

Untying the master’s sandals was beneath a Hebrew servant’s dignity.

In that culture, this phrase strongly emphasized just how much “more powerful”, or “greater”, the one to come would be.

## Mark 1:7-8 (NIV)

And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

“baptize you with the Holy Spirit”

This is part of the prophetic promise of salvation

Isaiah 32:15 – “till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high”

Isaiah 44:3 – “I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring”

Ezekiel 11:19 – “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them”

Ezekiel 36:26-27 – “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Ezekiel 37:14 – “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live”

Joel 2:28-29 – “And afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

We are looking at a new day of salvation, not just a new kind of baptism!

Being baptized with the Holy Spirit implies being fully immersed in the Spirit.

The Spirit's baptism will cleanse fully, providing ultimate forgiveness of sins

## Mark 1:9 (NIV)

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

“baptized by John”

Just WHY Jesus went to John for baptism is not addressed by Mark’s Gospel

Matthew 3:14 shows John hesitating to baptize Jesus: “But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”

Luke 3:21-22 doesn’t actually SAY who baptized Jesus, and the just-prior verses already put John in prison! “When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.”

John 1:32-34 only alludes to John the Baptist seeing the descent of the Holy Spirit, with no baptism per se. “Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.’”

Clearly, even the later Gospel writers struggled with John’s baptism of Jesus just as many people today do! But Mark, the earliest Gospel writer, simply tells the story as factual information – it did, in fact, happen.

“Jesus”

Note that other than 1:1, this is Jesus’ introduction into the narrative. 1:1 has provided all the introduction Mark needs! Clearly, Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah – the LORD that John has prepared the way for.

“from Nazareth”

In Galilee, in contrast to those who came to John from Judea and Jerusalem. Galilee had a very mixed population of Jews and Gentiles. This geographical difference would have been much more evident to early readers than to us.

## Mark 1:10 (NIV)

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

“As Jesus was coming up ... the Spirit descending on him”

Note the simultaneous actions here.

AS Jesus came up, the Holy Spirit came down.

“heaven being torn open”

This is divine revelation, providing access to the Holy Spirit

“he saw”

Jesus sees BOTH heaven being torn open, AND the Spirit descending

“like a dove”

Was this an ACTUAL dove?

Jesus SAW something descend!

But the syntax of the Greek here COULD imply something more along the lines of “he saw the Spirit descending on him in the same way a dove would descend”.

## Mark 1:11 (NIV)

And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

“a voice came from heaven”

This voice speaks directly TO Jesus – “YOU are my Son”  
Again, we have a combined Scriptural motif here:

2 Samuel 7:11b-14a”, God to King David – “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you. When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.”

Psalms 2:7 – “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’”

Isaiah 42:1 – “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.”

God affirms Jesus’ IDENTITY

Jesus is God’s Son.

Jesus is God’s Son, descended from David

Jesus is God’s servant, who has received the Spirit

The entire Trinity is present at this inaugural event – the Father (voice from heaven), Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit (dove)

The tension between Jesus as “king” and “servant” continues throughout the Gospel of Mark.

## Mark 1:12 (NIV)

At once the Spirit sent  
him out into the desert,

“the Spirit sent him”

Even though Jesus is the divine Son of God, as proclaimed by God Himself, Jesus does not depend on his own divine power, but on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit, immersion in the Holy Spirit, puts the Holy Spirit in control.

Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who is “in charge” immediately after the Holy Spirit’s descent upon Jesus.

“into the desert”

Recalls 1:3, and the one who would prepare a way in the desert.

The desert again recalls Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt.

## Mark 1:13 (NIV)

and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

“forty days”

There is a rich Old Testament background to the number forty.

Genesis 7:4 and 12 – Noah’s flood – 40 days

Exodus 34:28 – Israel’s wilderness wandering – 40 years

1 Kings 19:4-8 – Elijah’s flight without food – 40 days

These passages all contain themes of fasting and/or dependence on God’s sustenance.

Mark does not mention fasting, but Matthew 4:2 and Luke 4:2 both do in their parallel accounts.

Mark DOES refer to sustenance provided by angels, as does Matthew 4:11. Luke does not have this detail.

## Mark 1:13 (NIV)

and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

“tempted by Satan”

Mark does not have any specifics on this as Matthew and Luke do

Mark uses the proper name “Satan”, whereas Matthew and Luke say “the devil” – this points to a Jewish audience.

Hosea 11:1-2 – “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.”

Israel, God’s son, failed in their wilderness test

But Jesus, God’s Son, succeeds in the wilderness in the face of God’s supreme enemy, Satan.

How? Assisted by the Holy Spirit and angels!

## Mark 1:13 (NIV)

and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

“with the wild animals”

This could be viewed positively or negatively!

Negatively, wild animals symbolize danger and threat, things to be protected from.

But alternatively, this could be a picture of a restored Eden, where wild animals were NOT a threat! Jesus seems to be present with them peaceably.

Hosea 2:18 – “In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.”

Isaiah 11:6 – “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”

Isaiah 65:25 – “The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox”

With Jesus as the one bringing about the new age, these prophetic texts support the idea of this as an image of the new age

Before the fall, in Eden, Adam lives with wild animals peaceably, but fails when tested by Satan. Jesus lives with wild animals peaceably, and succeeds when tested by Satan.

Thus, Jesus is represented in this scene as both a new Adam AND a new Israel!

This is the start of a new creation, initiated by its promised deliverer!



## Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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