

INTRODUCTION

We will begin this survey/study of THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK. Just some quick bullet points to acquaint us with some of the basic features of this book:

- This Gospel was the first Gospel account to be written, and maybe even the first New Testament book to be written, with the possible exception of James.
- Although Mark does not ascribe authorship to himself, it was immediately recognized by the earliest ‘church fathers’ who were contemporaries with the apostles that he is the author.
- Mark was written around the early-mid 60s AD [see comments below in the next section]. This would place it only around 30 years after our Lord’s ascension back to Heaven.
- Although Mark was not an apostle, he was a close companion of both Paul and Peter [see especially **Colossians 4.10; 1 Peter 5.13**]. Those same early testimonies to Mark’s authorship refer to this Gospel as *‘the memoirs of Peter.’*
- Mark was written, we believe, from Rome while he was a ministry partner with Peter there. Mark had heard Peter give his own personal accounts of Jesus’ life during their times together; and perhaps also from the urging of other leaders among the churches, put Peter’s accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry into writing for the instruction and edification of the larger communities of churches. *Mark’s Gospel was...and is...an evangelistic tract to be used as a witness to Jesus Christ and the Gospel.*

I / WHO IS ‘MARK’?

1/ *This is why I call Mark a ‘common evangelist.’* He was a preacher of the Gospel, but he was not one of the apostles, nor was he one of the ‘eyewitness’ followers of Jesus. He did know about Jesus, and we have to wonder whether he is making a veiled reference to himself in **ch 14.51-52**. But, he is a ‘common’ evangelist in the same way you and I should be.

/2 Mark is commonly identified as **‘John whose other name was Mark’** [Acts 12.12]. There are ten references to **Mark** [or **‘John’**] by name in the New Testament. Let’s survey them:

- **Acts 12.12**. We first meet Mark here. He lived in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary. Mary opened her home for meetings of the church in Jerusalem. He also knew the apostle Peter from these associations. In fact, Peter was so well-known to Mark’s family and household, that when Peter was miraculously released from prison in this Acts 12 account and made his way to where the church was gathered and praying for him, and when he announced his presence to the servant girl at the door of the gateway to the house, the servant girl recognized him by his voice. [BTW, we know that by the time Luke wrote his Gospel and The Acts, he and Mark had spent quite a bit of time together in ministry partnership, especially with Paul / see **Philemon 23-24; 1 Timothy 4.11.**]
- **Acts 12.25** [circa AD 45]. Mark accompanied Barnabas and Saul [Paul] back to Antioch after Barnabas and Saul had come to Jerusalem to bring some relief funds for the saints there [Acts 11.25-29; 12.25].
- **Acts 13.1-5** [circa AD 46]. Mark accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey from the church at Antioch.
- **Acts 13.13**. Mark prematurely left Barnabas and Saul to return to Jerusalem.
- **Acts 15.36-40** [circa AD 49]. Mark accompanied Barnabas on a subsequent missionary journey after Barnabas and Paul had a sharp disagreement over whether Mark should accompany them on the journey they were planning to conduct together. [This is where Paul and Barnabas parted to go their separate missionary ways.]

- **Colossians 4.10; Philemon 23-24** [circa AD 61-62]. Paul was reconciled to Mark later in his life and ministry, and the two of them traveled and ministered together. Mark also was a personal companion to Paul during his **Acts 28** imprisonment in Rome [where these two letters were written]. BTW, we also learn here that Mark was a ‘cousin’ or ‘nephew’ to Barnabas: ‘sister’s son to Barnabas’ [KJV].
- **2 Timothy 4.11** [circa AD 64]. In fact, during Paul’s last and final imprisonment, he specifically and personally asked that Mark might be sent to help him.
- **1 Peter 5.13: She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son** [circa AD 63]. This is one of the key references that leads us to believe that Mark wrote his Gospel account under the tutelage and influence of Peter; perhaps while in Rome and first to the Christians in the church in Rome to give them a deeper and more personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ and His earthly ministry; and then to be circulated from there to the other churches and communities throughout the Roman empire.

II / ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’

What is ‘a gospel’ [with a little ‘g’]? Let’s play the word association game. If we say or hear the word ‘gospel,’ we immediately associate it with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the word ‘gospel’ was already in common usage when Mark wrote his Gospel. The word itself [*euangelion*] means ‘good news.’ The ‘eu’ is ‘good,’ and ‘angelion’ is the Greek word for ‘message/news.’ That’s what an ‘angel’ is: a messenger, [see v 2].

1/ And so, in the Graeco-Roman world, they had for centuries used this word to refer to ‘good news’ announcements or proclamations – either written or spoken.

- In fact, their fastest means of local communication was by runners. See, for example, how Paul quotes **Isaiah 52.7** in **Romans 10.15: As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.’** These ‘beautiful feet’ are those of the runners who were dispatched to announce the ‘good news/gospel’ of the moment. Many times, it was the announcement of a major military victory – like the ‘Marathon’ runner who ran the approximately 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to announce to the Senate that the Persian invasion of Greece had been turned back. Legend has it that he burst into the Senate who were in session to negotiate their terms of surrender to the Persians ... to announce “You are free! We have won!” and then dropped dead.
- Even that ‘good news’ had the distinguishing characteristics of The Gospel: [1] Public announcement or proclamation; [2] of a momentous event that was history-making and life-transforming; [3] that someone else had done for them ... that they could not do for themselves; [4] and it was ‘good news.’
- More specifically to Mark’s immediate historical and cultural context, there was an archaeological discovery made in Priene [ancient Greece, now turkey] – stone tablets dating back to c. 9 BC with the inscription “...*the beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus...*” in which it was announced “...*and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of good tidings [euangelion] for the world that came by reason of him...*” **Can you imagine the courage and holy audacity of Mark to begin his Gospel of Jesus Christ with this ascription to Caesar Augustus already in use and circulation?**

2/ But Mark is here to announce the True Gospel – the only Gospel: **The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!** *This is why I have called it ‘the Uncommon Gospel.’ It is the only True Gospel, and it demands that everyone in the world repent of their sins and believe Christ and His Gospel.* The Gospel of Jesus Christ is one thing – and one thing only: The Gospel is Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has come into our world to save us from our sins by His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection which Mark will chronicle [see **1 Corinthians 15.1-8**].

3/ Maybe we should say just a word about what Mark means by ‘**the beginning of the Gospel...**’ He may mean:

- [1] the Gospel of Jesus Christ ‘began’ with the announcement of John the Baptist;
- [2] or the Gospel ‘began’ with the appearance of Jesus Himself who IS the Gospel of God [v 14] and who proclaims the Gospel concerning Himself [see **Romans 1.1-6**];
- [3] or Mark may be intentionally referencing **Genesis 1.1** to say that Jesus Christ has come to BE and to BRING IN a new creation and ‘beginning’ of the reconciliation and restoration of the fallen world and people of God which was ruined by the entrance of sin into the first ‘beginning’ see **Colossians 1.20**.

III / What is this ‘Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ that Mark is announcing to the world? What are its distinctive characteristics and tenets? [... and the prominent themes of Mark?]

1/ v 1 / **The Gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** Jesus Christ is God the Son, sent to us from God the Father, to announce to us the salvation God is giving us through His Son. In contrast to the other so-called and self-proclaimed ‘gods’ [like Caesar Augustus] or all their pagan patron ‘gods’ whom they worshiped, there is only one God who is Supreme and saving – and He has appeared from Heaven in the Person of Jesus Christ!

2/ vv 2-3 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ was prophesied and promised in the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ is the Personal fulfillment of them all.**

- Mark specifically quotes from **Malachi 3.1** to show that Jesus is the Personal fulfillment of the ‘messenger of the covenant’ whom Yahweh would send to them in time to come. We’ll address this here in a moment, but in this **Malachi 3.1** Scripture, there are two ‘messengers’ who will come. The first ‘messenger’ will announce the impending appearance of the primary ‘messenger’ ... whom Yahweh says will be Himself: ‘**he will prepare the way before Me.**’ But the principal ‘messenger’ is ‘**the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.**’ That is Yahweh coming in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!
- Then the second OT prophecy is from **Isaiah 40.3**. This is such a powerful witness to Christ’s fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. This whole passage, **Isaiah 40.1-10**, was the promise the people of God had clung to for the past 700 years. Yahweh promised that He Himself would come **with might [v 10]** to save them from all their enemies, and that His coming would be announced by the forerunner who would precede Him, ‘**go before Your face,**’ and ‘**prepare Your way ... Prepare the way of the Lord**’ [Mark].
- Both of these specific OT prophecies were dramatically fulfilled in their sight and experience by the appearances of both John the Baptist and then Jesus Himself.

3/ vv 4-8 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ was announced by the appearance of John the Baptist.**

- John the Baptist appeared ‘in the wilderness [of Judea] in striking similarity to Elijah. Again, in **Malachi 4.5-6**, Yahweh promised: **Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.** [You can also compare even John the Baptist’s physical appearance and lifestyle with that of Elijah’s in **2 Kings 1.7-8.**]
- When the angel announced to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, that these promised prophecies were coming to pass, he told Zechariah: **...and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah... [Luke 1.17].** Zechariah then acknowledged this fulfilled promise in **Luke 1.76—77: And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins...**
- Jesus Himself declared that John the Baptist was that promised Elijah [**Mark 9.11-13**].
- But John’s announcement and preaching was not about himself, but rather to the Supremacy and priority of Jesus Christ [**compare ‘mightier than I’ with Isaiah 40.10**].

4/ vv 4-5 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for ‘the forgiveness of sins.’** This forgiveness of sins will reconcile and restore the fallen world marred and ruined in the first ‘beginning.’ Our sins have separated

and estranged us from the grace of God. Jesus has come to forgive us of our sins by the substitutionary death He will die on the Cross. John was preaching that we sinners must repent of our sins and turn from them to enter into the Kingdom of grace and life that Jesus has come to bring us.

5/ vv 4-5 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ is publicly confessed by water baptism.** That is what ‘**proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**’ means. NOT that our sins are forgiven through baptism [see **1 Peter 3.21-22**], OR that baptism itself is the act of repentance through which we receive the forgiveness of sins, BUT that baptism is our public confession and declaration that we have believed on Jesus Christ, that we have repented of our sins, and that we are now making an open admission that we have done so. NOTE: **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** means ‘*our confession in relation to our repentance from our sins and the forgiveness of them.*’ ...and [they] were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

6/ vv 9-11 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ was portrayed and manifested by Jesus’ own baptism.** Jesus’ baptism was a multi-faceted act of obedience to His Father:

- [1] It demonstrated His obedience to the Father to come as the Savior of His people [**Matthew 3.13-15**];
- [2] It demonstrated His commitment to the mission His Father had sent Him to fulfill;
- [3] It demonstrated His identification with the sins of His people whom He had come to save and whose sins He had come to forgive;
- [4] It demonstrated in this picture-act how He would be ‘baptized’ into His death on the Cross, and then be ‘raised again’ in resurrection to give His eternal life to those who would believe in Him [**Romans 6.1-11**].
- [5] It publicly demonstrated His Father’s pleasure in Him and His ‘seal of approval’ from God in Heaven & Christ’s unity with the Holy Spirit – the Trinity.
- [6] This was also the sign by which John the Baptist would know the Messiah [**John 1.29-34**].

7/ vv 12-13 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God’s declaration of war and promise of victory over Satan and the kingdom of darkness.** As Satan has been at war against God, His creation, all people – and especially against the Christ – even from the beginning of the creation, he is at war with Christ in His earthly life and ministry. If Satan can tempt the Christ to sin and thus fail, as he did with Adam in the Garden of Eden, then he can continue his campaign to overthrow and usurp the Kingdom and rule of God in His creation – take ownership, lordship, and control of the world for himself. BUT, even though Christ was solitary in the wilderness of temptation, He was not alone. Christ was accompanied by the Presence of the Holy Spirit and also by the angels who ministered to Him. **For fuller descriptions of the wilderness temptations by Satan, see Matthew 4.1-11; Luke 4.1-13.** Through Jesus’ victory over Satan in the wilderness of temptation, He demonstrated His Holiness, sinlessness, and sovereignty and declared Himself to be the Redeemer and Savior of all those who are tempted and under Satan’s dominion. He will conquer Satan, the Serpent, and fulfill all the promises of the *protoevangelion* in **Genesis 3.15** [which is the first ‘**beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**’

8/ vv 14-15 / **The Gospel of Jesus Christ is also ‘the Gospel of God’ to us in His Son.** We return now to the opening line: **The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** Does this mean: ‘the Gospel which is about Jesus Christ?’ or ‘the Gospel which Jesus Christ Himself preached?’ The answer is both! AND it also means that **Jesus Christ Himself IS the Gospel, Good News!** “**The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.**” *The Gospel of Jesus Christ is also ‘The Gospel of the Kingdom’ [one of Matthew’s favorite expressions].* The Kingdom of God is God’s sovereign, Supreme rule over all things. God’s rule is over all His creation, all the events that go on in His creation, and especially over His eternal covenant to save His people from their sins [**Matthew 1.20-23**]. *And so, with this introduction, Mark has written his headline and summary statement which he will expand on in the rest of his Gospel!*

REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL!