

John the Baptist: The Forerunner of the Mightier One
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Text: Mark 1:1-8 (see also Matt. 3:1-11; Luke 3:3-16; John 1:19-34)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Preaching of John the Baptist

Central Idea of Message: Those who would receive the message of John and act on it would become ripe fruit ready to be harvested by the coming Messiah.

Introduction: Who is the author of The Gospel of Mark? Well, Mark is! But what more can we learn about him? His Latin name is Marcus. Jewish people called him by his Hebrew name, John, or, more precisely, John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). But Mark was not one of the twelve apostles.

Mark's mother had a very popular lady's name - Mary (Acts 12:12). She owned a house in Jerusalem which served as a meeting place for Christians, so, Mark quite possibly grew up in Jerusalem.

Simon Peter seems to have frequented Mary's house, so Mark would have become quite familiar with him (Acts 12:13-16), which is why many surmise that Mark based much of his gospel on his association with Peter, who was Mark's primary source of information, inspired, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

Also, Mark had a cousin whose name you might recognize - Barnabas (Col. 4:10). This Barnabas, along with his cousin Mark, accompanied the Apostle Paul on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). But Mark quit and returned to Jerusalem, to the chagrin of Paul (Acts 13:13). When Paul and Barnabas were about to embark on their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to bring his remorseful cousin, Mark, along again. Paul wasn't having it. He had seen enough "quit" from Mark. The disagreement over this between Paul and Barnabas was so contentious that they split from one another. Paul chose a man named Silas and they went on their way on the second missionary journey recorded in Acts (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas and his cousin, Mark, went elsewhere.

Perhaps in his younger years Mark wasn't willing to pay the price being in the ministry demanded. No home, no pay, no

pension, no insurance, hostilities, arrests, in jeopardy of being beaten or stoned, and constantly being on the road and away from family and friends. But by the end of Paul's life, Mark had matured and he and Paul had reconciled to the point that Paul wrote that Mark was useful to him for service (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark's ministerial history serves as a reminder that people who have failed don't have to stay failures; that people who have dropped out of ministry service can re-enlist, even after we have put ourselves on the shelf. **God is the God of second chances, in ministry and in life. But, it's wise not to push our good fortune and repeatedly test either his mercy or his grace.**

Good scholarship conjectures that The Gospel of Mark was the earliest [Priority of Mark Theory] of the four. It is the shortest of the four Gospels, and was probably written between A.D. 60-70 (cf. Lane 17). Most certainly it is narrative in form and gospel in genre as it chronicles much of the life, times, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth based on Mark's recollection of Peter's preaching and oral tradition which Mark himself selected, arranged, and structured by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to evangelize the lost and to encourage and strengthen Christians in their faith in the face of widespread persecution at the hands of Nero, the ruthlessly sadistic Roman Emperor, following the burning of Rome.

Mark, the man, should be greatly respected as an astute historian and theologian in his own right. Mark especially seems to want to emphasize the supernatural power of Jesus by recalling his miracles, which boldly and unquestionably demonstrate his deity.

I. **John the Baptist: The Messenger (vv. 1-4)**

- A. The testimony of Mark (v. 1)
 1. Beginning: outset, setting the stage
 2. Gospel
 - a) **Gospel means good news of God's provision through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus culminating in his offer of salvation to every person willing to repent of sin and believe that Jesus is the Son of God able to forgive sin (see 1 Cor. 15:1-4)**
 - b) Mark created an entirely new literary genre called "gospel" (cf. Wessel 618)
 3. Of Jesus Christ: about Jesus
 - a) Jesus
 - (1) "Jehovah saves"

- (2) "Jesus is the basis for Christian faith"
(Brown 7)
 - b) Christ: "anointed one"
 - c) The Son of God
 - (1) Divine, more than merely human
 - (2) Absolutely unique relationship
 - (3) God planned both the incarnation of his Son and the coming of his Son each at its time; neither was an accident
- B. The testimony of Isaiah and Malachi (vv. 2-3; cf. Exod 23:20; Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1)
- 1. God promised to send a messenger (v. 2)
 - a) Ahead of the coming Messiah
 - b) God's plan of redemption did not begin with the birth of Jesus
 - c) Any true understanding of the ministry of Jesus must be firmly grounded in the Old Testament (cf. Wessel 619)
 - d) Isaiah lived about 700 years before John the Baptist and Jesus
 - e) The task of this messenger was to prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah
 - (1) Through his preaching, he would prepare hearts and minds to recognize and accept God's coming Messiah
 - (2) There was significant groundwork to be done by the preaching of this messenger
 - (3) **In the day of John the Baptist, the hearts of people were dark and hard**
 - (4) Does this sound familiar?
 - 2. This messenger will be peculiar (v. 3)
 - a) He will cry out: raise his voice and be full of feeling and emotion
 - b) He will dwell in the wilderness
 - (1) He will be a loner devoted solely to God
 - (2) He will dwell apart from the corruption and culture of the cities
 - (3) Geography matters regarding moral progressivism (Albert Mohler, *The Briefing: Part 1*, April 11, 2023)
 - (a) Coast
 - (b) City
 - (c) Campus (college or university)
 - c) He will make ready the way of the Lord
 - (1) He has no need to be popular with people

- (2) He would point out the brush on the trail and verbally begin to chop it down
- d) He will make the path of the Messiah straight
 - (1) He will not alter truth due to peer pressure
 - (2) He will make God-given, necessary demands on people
 - (3) **Those who would receive the message of John and act on it would become ripe fruit ready to be harvested by the coming Messiah**
- e) First readers would have understood the word "Lord" to refer to God, so Mark here links Jesus with the God of Israel (cf. Decker 5)
- C. Meet the messenger (v. 4; Isa. 40:3)
 - 1. **John the Baptist was the first prophet in about 300 years (cf. Cooper 7)!**
 - 2. Considered the last of the Old Testament prophets
 - 3. Appeared in the wilderness: check!
 - 4. Crying out: check!
 - 5. Proclaiming a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
 - a) Baptism: immersion upon confession of sin and promise to turn from it
 - b) **Repent means turn from, do an about face, a 180, and indicates a radical change of one's mind and will and is a necessary prerequisite for being saved**
 - c) There is no forgiveness without repentance!
 - d) Repentance requires humility
 - (1) It acknowledges wrong-doing
 - (2) It admits transgressions
 - (3) It recognizes the need for grace
 - (4) It fears consequences
 - e) **Repentance paves the way for faith to be placed in Jesus**

II. **John the Baptist: The Message (vv. 5-8)**

- A. The people were coming to John the Baptist (v. 5)
 - 1. "All" [hyperbole] the country of Judea (cf. Burdick 990; Wessel 620)
 - a) Large region
 - b) Country folks?
 - c) Drawn by the belief that John was a prophet
 - 2. All the people of Jerusalem

- a) City folks too!
 - b) Twenty mile trip to the Jordan and a drop in elevation of 4,000 feet [tough walk back] (cf. Wessel 620)!
 - c) They were serious!
3. They were being baptized by him
- a) Immersed in the Jordan River
 - (1) Completely unique!
 - (2) What Old Testament prophet did this?
 - b) As they confessed their sins
 - (1) **"Admitting our sin to another person has the wondrous effect of loosening its grip on us. Secret sins lose their power when they are not secret" (Cooper 20)**
 - (2) **Confessing our sins to those harmed by our sin and to those concerned about our souls is both liberating and healthy (cf. James 5:16)!**
 - c) **Being Jewish prepared nobody for the coming Messiah, only confession of sin and repentance did!**
 - d) Estimate he baptized 300,000 (cf. Cooper 8)
 - e) Likely included all twelve of those who became Jesus' disciples (Acts 1:21-26; cf. Wiersbe, *Exposition*, 111)
- B. The person of John the Baptist (v. 6)
- 1. Clothed with camel's hair (wild man) and he wore a leather belt around his waist
 - a) Dressed like a prophet
 - b) Would have caused people to reflect on what they had read about Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8
 - 2. His diet was locusts and wild honey
 - a) Probably not overweight!
 - b) Lived off the land
 - c) Relied on God for food
 - d) **Mark intends to point out that John the Baptist was definitely not materialistic, unlike the Chief Priests, Sadducees, scribes, Pharisees, and most members of the Sanhedrin [the Jewish religious council of elders]**
- C. The message of John the Baptist (vv. 7-8)
- 1. "After me One is coming who is mightier than I [am], and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals" (v. 7)
 - a) Note the humility and the subordination

- b) **We are at our best when we are claiming no more about ourselves than what is true**
 - c) **Unlike Lucifer long before him, John the Baptist was more than satisfied with not being the top celebrity**
 - d) If people thought the preaching of John the Baptist was penetrating, powerful, and life-altering, wait until they heard Jesus!
 - e) John felt unfit even to stoop down and untie the sandals of this coming King!
 - (1) Please note, again, the humility
 - (2) **John the Baptist found maximum satisfaction in discovering and executing God's will for his life and the same can be true for us**
 - (3) Baptism has never saved anybody and neither did John
2. "I baptized you with water" (v. 8)
- a) John the Baptist immersed repentant sinners in water
 - b) Outward, external significance
 - c) **John's baptism was not Christian baptism but an immersion in water symbolizing both admission of being a sinner and repentance from sin**
3. "But He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (v. 8)
- a) Inward, internal significance
 - b) **The baptism performed by the One coming after John would symbolize (1) immersion by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, (2) death, burial, and resurrection to new life (Rom. 6:3-4), (3) washing, regeneration, and renewal (Titus 3:5), and (4) giving of the purifying power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)**
 - c) **Specific mentioning of the Holy Spirit somewhat unveils the mystery of the presence and power of the third person of the Godhead [Trinity] and adds a unique dimension to the gospel of Jesus Christ**

Conclusion: Have you believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and acted upon it? If not, then why not today? **Repentance**

is the starting point for a new history of grace found only in Jesus Christ.