

Gospel of Mark

Chapter 1

Prologue: 1:1–13

Mark's prologue is a prelude of the major themes that he will later develop in his gospel. In the first 13 verses, the reader receives information about the identity of Jesus that the characters in the narrative do not know. We must peel these verses back.

Mark 1:1-3	Beginning of the gospel of Jesus
Mark 1:4-8	John the Baptist
Mark 1:9-11	Jesus' baptism
Mark 1:12-13	Jesus in the wilderness

Verse 1: Opening Verse

- **Beginning:** Gk: *archē* recalls Genesis 1:1, suggesting a new creation.
- **Gospel:** Gk: *euangeliou* – (*eu* – good) + (*angelon* – angel, messenger);
 - **Isaiah:** God is coming to save His people (Is. 52:7, 61:1)
 - **Roman:** Proclamation of military victory or coronation of emperor
 - **Key:** God is coming to visit His people in Jesus.
- **Jesus:** “YHWH saves,” Greek form of Joshua (leader into Promised Land)
- **Christ:** *Messiah* or “the Anointed,” (1 Sam. 16:13 - David's anointing)
- **[Son of God]:** Multiple Meanings
 - **Ps. 2:7:** King on coronation day called “my son.”
 - **Hos. 11:1:** Israel called “my son”
 - **Wis. 2:16, 5:5:** Just person called son of God
 - **Roman:** Caesar Augustus given the title “son of God.”
 - **Key:** We must keep reading to understand this title

Verses 2-3: Mark says he quotes from Isaiah, but in reality he has strung three Old Testament texts together:

- **Exodus 23:20:** See, I am sending my angel before you, to guard you on **the way** and bring you to the place I have prepared.
- **Malachi 3:1:** Now I am sending my messenger – he will prepare **the way** before me (Mal. 3:23 - Elijah)
- **Isaiah 40:3:** In the wilderness prepare **the way** of the Lord
- **Key:** Notice all three quotes speak of “the way” (Gk: *hodos*) – *ex* (out) + *hodos* (way) or “going out.”

God worked through Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Isaiah prophesied that God would lead the Israelites out of Babylonian exile (new exodus). Malachi prophesied that a new Elijah would prepare God's people for the Lord's coming.

Mark, assuming his readers know this history. He is saying that John the Baptist (new Elijah) will prepare the way for Jesus, who will lead God's scattered people in a new and definitive exodus from all the nations back to the Lord.

- Early Christians were nicknamed "the way" in Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14

Verses 4-8: *The Preaching of John the Baptist*

- **Desert:** Place of deprivation, loneliness, and stripping away comforts
 - **Old Testament:** Israelites spent 40 years in the desert; the Israelites crossed the Jordan River (new exodus – from sin)
- **Repentance:** Gk *metanoia* – "change of mind" or interior conversation
- **Camel's Hair:** Reminiscent of Elijah's clothing (2 Kgs 1:8)
- **Locusts/Wild Honey:** Evokes the exodus (Ex. 10:13-15), Promised Land (Ex 3:8)
- **Sandals:** Task for a slave – expression of John's humility
- **Baptize with Holy Spirit:** I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh (Joel 3:1)
- **Key:** Mark presents John the Baptist as the new Elijah, calling people to repentance in the desert (think exodus) to encounter Christ, who will baptize (i.e., dip or drench) God's chosen people with the Holy Spirit.

Verses 9-11: *The Baptism of Jesus*

- **Torn Open:** Gk *schizomenous* (English word: schism); Unique to Mark
 - **Isaiah 64:1:** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down
 - **Mark 15:38:** The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom
- **Spirit:** Recalls creation in Genesis 1:2 – Jesus is bringing about a new creation
- **Voice:** Revelation of the Trinity (Father: Voice; Son: Jesus; Spirit: Holy Spirit)
- **Beloved Son:** Old Testament allusions: Gn. 22:12, Ps. 2:7, Is. 42:1

Verses 12-13: *The Temptation of Jesus*

- **Desert:** The Spirit drives Jesus into the desert to battle Satan
- **Forty Days:** Recalls Israel's (God's firstborn son) testing in the desert (40 years)
- **Satan:** The Adversary, or literally "one who throws across;" He opposes God's plan
- **Wild Beasts:** Recalls Genesis 1:24, "beasts of the earth" and Is. 11:1-9 (harmony)
 - **Rome:** Evokes suffering of early Christians thrown to the beasts in games
- **Ministered:** Gk *diēkonoun*; The angels "deaconed" or served Jesus
 - **Angels** served Israel in the desert (Ex. 14:19) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:5-7)

Summary: The Prologue teaches us that God is beginning a new creation in Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah. He is mightier than John the Baptist. He baptizes with fire. He is anointed and God's beloved Son. He overcame Satan in the desert. Indeed, this is Good News! Keep in mind that while we know this information, the characters in Mark's Gospel do not!