

MARK

A Commentary for Bible Students



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PROLOGUE

Mark 1:1-13

Scholars agree that 1:1-13 forms an introduction to the book of Mark. If this is true, then the themes the reader is prepared to find in the rest of the narrative should be initially presented. The opening lines of the Gospel (1:1-8) introduce the reader to the idea that God's plan, which had been asserted in the Old Testament writings, was on the verge of breaking forth into human history. The baptismal scene (1:9-11), though short, reveals the author's intention for the remainder of the book. This condensed baptismal scene can be viewed as a calling or commissioning of Jesus, as the heavenly voice speaks directly to Jesus (and the readers) and declared what His role would be: "My beloved Son." We find Jesus as God's ambassador on earth to announce God's rule. This theme of being God's authority figure is quickly picked up in the opening healing stories (1:21-28; 2:1-12). First the people recognized Jesus as having authority that was different from the scribes'; Jesus had a self-authenticating authority, which was unheard of in the first century. The theme is reinforced in 2:1-12 as Jesus proclaimed to possess the very authority of God by forgiving sins. The implication of the opening passage is that human authorities "have been ruling themselves rather than God" and that Satan has been the strong man in charge of the house (3:27).

In the temptation narrative (1:12-13), rather than "lording over" the world and its inhabitants through this authoritative position, Jesus was thrust by the Spirit into the midst of wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark 1:24 tells the reader that Jesus' mission is further qualified as destroying the demons, and 9:22 informs the readers that the demons are intent on destroying their victims.

Prologue

The insertion of 1:14–15 as a new beginning² to the narrative allows the reader to sense that the baptism-temptation episode is not simply the first in a series of cosmic confrontations, but it is the foundation of the series. The struggle introduced in the temptation would continue until it comes to a climactic solution.

The next issue is to address the overall purpose of the opening line: **The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God** (1:1). Is this a title for the entire Gospel, or does it merely serve as an introduction to the first thirteen verses? What did Mark mean by using the term “beginning”? Was he referring to the prophetic announcement by Isaiah (1:2–3), to John the Baptist (1:4–8), and the baptism and temptation of Jesus (1:9–13) as the beginning of the gospel? Or should Mark’s readers prepare themselves for a beginning that will not even be fully completed by chapter 16? This truncated beginning that contains no annunciation to Mary and has no nativity scene is a perfect match for Mark’s abrupt ending in 16:8, where the witnesses ran from the tomb in fright and remained silent. But that cannot be the “end,” for what about the resurrection? Thus, in the gospel of Mark, the end is not really the end; it is only the end of the beginning. The story of the resurrection will be told and retold by countless disciples, in all nations, in every generation. Thus, the first line, **the beginning of the gospel**, prepares the reader for an amazing ride as God invades the world in the form of His Son, Jesus. Furthermore, the story ends with a call to all readers from all times, regardless of their fears, to rally around the truth that has been revealed in the intervening chapters and to go and tell the message that the women seemed momentarily to keep to themselves. Thus, Mark begins and ends with ambiguity, which would be fleshed out as one walked and listened to the Master teach.

Mark introduced three precise terms that will shape the rest of the story: gospel, Christ, and Son of God. Modern readers should be cautious not to read into the term “gospel” any bookish conations, for in Mark’s time, the genre of gospel was only beginning. Nevertheless the word “gospel” was rich in ancient tradition. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the verb form of the word (*euangelizo*) was utilized in a sacred manner, declaring the establishment of the reign of God and the good news of salvation (Isa. 40:9; 52:7; Ps. 40:9; 96:2).

Yet there was a second use of *euangelizo* linked directly to the emperor worship of the first century. The emperor’s birthday or accession to power was labeled as a *euangelizo*. Mark’s use of the word seems to link up both of these uses, declaring the arrival of Jesus on earth as a “royal visit” of the King’s Son. But Mark’s readers cannot understand the term *gospel* in a safe and sterile kind of way. Salvation entered the world at a bloody cost, not only for Jesus, but for all. The call of all future disciples is to abandon everything of value that they have (10:17–31) and to follow Him, carrying their own cross (8:34–38).

The second term Mark employed in his gospel’s title line is “Christ.” The term “Christ” most literally means “the anointed one.” It was a common term in the Old Testament, but it did not hold the divine imagery that most modern Christians might expect. For the most part, it was ascribed to a man who would carry out specific tasks to free the nation of Israel from her oppressors. Even one as pagan as King Cyrus of Persia was called an “anointed” one (Isa. 45:1), for he allowed the return of the Jews from exile. The apocryphal book, the Psalms of Solomon, may best sum up the first-century expectation of the Messiah of God:

 BACKGROUND

SEPTUAGINT

The Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) was translated about 250 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt. This Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was produced because many Jews had ceased being fluent in Hebrew and needed a Greek translation. According to tradition, approximately seventy Jewish scholars were commissioned to translate the Hebrew Scriptures. Septuagint (“seventy” in Latin) is named to honor the seventy scholars.

A majority of Old Testament quotes cited in the New Testament are quoted directly from the Septuagint.

 MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

EMPEROR WORSHIP

The Greeks, Romans, and other peoples in the Roman Empire worshipped multiple deities (polytheism). Beginning in 29 B.C., the “Imperial cult” was the worship of the Roman emperor as a god. Cities built temples to the emperors in order to show their loyalty. In return for their loyalty, these cities received help and prestige from the Roman authorities. Christians agreed to pray for the well-being of the emperor, but refused to worship the emperor as a god. Their refusal sometimes led to persecution.

Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David,

At the time in which Thou sees, O God, that he may reign over Israel Thy servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers,

And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample (her) down to destruction. Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance;

He shall destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter's vessel.

With a rod of iron he shall break in pieces all their substance,

He shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth;

At his rebuke nations shall flee before him,

And he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart. (Psalm of Solomon 17:21–25)

The predominant first-century Jewish messianic expectation was that he would be a warrior-king-like figure, wielding a sword in one hand and a royal scepter in the other. Thus, a gospel whose core truth proclaims a dying Messiah was an enigma to some, to others an utter absurdity (1 Cor. 1:23). The most pressing task for the early church was to reconcile the prophetic words of the Old Testament with the life and teachings of Jesus, which may be the reason why Mark began with Isaiah's prophecy in 1:2–3.

Many commentators wrestle with how to understand the grammatical construction, "gospel of Jesus Christ." It hinges upon how one is to understand the modifying phrase "of Jesus Christ." Is it the gospel concerning Jesus or the gospel proclaimed by Jesus? The only other place in the gospel where a similar construction occurs is in 1:14, "gospel of God," which has a similar elusiveness to its meaning. The remaining uses of the noun *gospel* refer to a concrete message to be proclaimed or believed (1:15; 13:10; 14:9). This is also the more natural way to understand the

use of the noun throughout the rest of the New Testament (though exceptions arise in Rom. 2:16 and 16:25). On the other side of the grammatical argument, early on in the second Gospel, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God" (1:14). Thus, within the introduction itself, Jesus is depicted as the object of the gospel as well as the proclaimer. Knowing the intrigue and mystery of Mark, it should not surprise any reader that Mark was playing for both meanings, for throughout the Gospel, Jesus is both the subject matter under discussion and the teacher in every scene.

The final phrase in Mark's opening line attributes to Jesus the title **Son of God**. Though some of the early manuscripts omit this last phrase, it certainly plays a key role in the remainder of the gospel story. Initially, at Jesus' baptism, the Father from heaven declared Jesus' Sonship: **And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"** (1:11). This divine designation was reiterated in the Father's words to the disciples as they witnessed the Transfiguration: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (9:7).

Throughout several of the opening miracle scenes, as Jesus confronted the evil spirits, they clearly recognized His role on earth: "Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God'" (Mark 3:11; see also 1:24; 5:7). With Jesus on trial, the question posed to Him by the chief priest again centered on this title: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

(14:61). To this question Jesus abruptly answered, "I am" and was condemned to death. Finally, the first time a human proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God was at the cross, when the centurion said, "Surely this



MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

SON OF GOD

The "son of god" in the ancient world had three presumptions: (1) it spoke of a devoted servant of the gods, (2) it referred to someone with gifts that surpassed normal expectations, and (3) it referenced political rulers. According to Mark, Jesus was the Son of God because He (1) accepted the ministry that God prepared for Him, (2) possesses supernatural abilities (expelled demons, healed the sick, and forgave sins), and (3) will rule at the right hand of God. However, Mark's specific understanding of Jesus as Son of God cannot be divorced from the Jewish "son of man" concept. (See "Manners and Customs" on p. 48.)

man was the Son of God!" (15:39). This most certainly is the climactic confession by anyone in the gospel. Humankind had finally comprehended what the Heavenly Father had twice declared and the truth that caused the demons to shake in terror: Jesus is the Son of God. Ironically, no one on earth seemed to comprehend this until after His death.³ The first person who made the confession, the centurion, was both a Roman and the man most directly responsible for killing Jesus, the leader of the execution squad. Thus, the goal of the gospel of Mark is clearly illuminated for the readers. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And the next sixteen chapters will attempt to see how these two titles, which essentially have warrior and royal connotations, climax on a cross. Until humankind confesses Jesus as a dying Messiah, all is lost.



MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

SON OF MAN

The "son of man" concept is rooted in the Old Testament as an emphasis on one's humanity (Num. 23:19; Job 25:6; Ps. 8:4; 80:17; 144:3; and multiple references in Ezekiel). In Daniel (7:13), the prophet saw a person that resembled a "son of man" arriving to institute His divinely ordained authority; Jesus seemed to base His understanding of the term here. In the wisdom literature, this concept was linked to persecution and righteousness. As a result, the "son of man" concept developed from emphasizing humanity to emphasizing a messianic figure ordained by God to carry out divine intentions.

this case Isaiah. Scripture and its fulfillment in Jesus plays an enormous role in the gospel of Mark (see 9:12; 11:17; 14:21, 27, 49), but at no other juncture in the remainder of the book did Mark name the source of his quotations. Second, the words of Isaiah are in actuality a composition of Isaiah, Exodus, and Malachi. **It is written in Isaiah the prophet:**

The first verse of Mark opens with the reader being informed of Jesus' identity: **Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** This is closely linked with the prediction of the Isaianic witness (1:2–3) and its fulfillment in the person of John the Baptist (1:4–8). Thus, the true beginning of the good news of Mark began in Isaiah. Consider these three preliminary comments regarding this Old Testament quotation. First, this is the only quotation in the second Gospel directly ascribed to an Old Testament author, in

- "I will send my messenger ahead of you (Exod. 23:20)
- who will prepare your way"— (Mal. 3:1)
- "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Isa. 40:3)

The theological importance of these scriptural choices should not be overlooked. Exodus marks Israel's first exodus as a key for understanding God's unique relationship with His people. Malachi warns that God will send "my messenger" to prepare for the coming judgment day. The third reference comes for the last half of the book of Isaiah, which speaks of a second exodus through the desert for a final deliverance. Interestingly, Mark attributed all the material to Isaiah. This is not a historical inaccuracy, but Mark's way of saying the themes that will unfold in the ensuing chapters will remind one of Isaiah's promises of a new exodus.

Finally, this prophecy is not directly about Jesus, but His forerunner, John, who played an instrumental role in this story. John prepared the world for the coming of the Lord through his preaching and baptism. Additionally, he prepared Jesus for His ministry to the world in His baptism and Spirit filling. But finally, John is reintroduced in chapter 6 as one who prepared Mark's readers for the perception that prophets who stand for God will suffer the ultimate sacrifice. John was Jesus' forerunner in faithful ministry even unto death.

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). The announcement of the ministry of John appears in the form of the simple words **John came**. Easily lost in the English text is the succession of the next two key players in the story introduced in exactly the same fashion: (1) **Jesus came (1:9)**; (2) **a voice came (1:11)**. All three converged at the baptismal site of Jesus. Furthermore, Mark informed his readers little about John other than his role.⁴ His clothing (**John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist**) and his diet (**he ate locusts and wild honey, 1:6**) preempt other human interest details. The gospel of Luke reports his priestly lineage and his miraculous birth. But for Mark, John was exclusively a forerunner, and an odd one at that.

**BACKGROUND****QUMRAN AND DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

The Qumran community was located on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Some scholars have associated Qumran with the Essenes. The inhabitants of Qumran adhered to a strict, almost ascetic, lifestyle. From 1947–56, numerous valued manuscripts that dated to the mid third century B.C. were found in eleven caves. Copies of every Old Testament book except Esther were discovered. Findings from the Qumran community have provided a much-needed window into the textual history of what became canonical Scripture.

The real focal point for Mark is John's place of ministry and his preaching. The location seems surprising as he was **baptizing in the desert region** (1:4). The note about the desert connects John with the prophetic words of Isaiah in 1:3, but also with a long-standing prophetic tradition that describes the desert as the beginning of a new exodus and a place looked upon with fond memories (Jer. 2:2; 31:2; Hos. 2:14; Amos 5:25). The Qumran community, whom many scholars attribute as part of John's upbringing, supported just such a reading of Isaiah 40:3 when they instructed that those who join them "will separate from the habitation of ungodly men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him [Messiah]" (1QS 8:12–16). But it is the content of the preaching that set the stage for the coming of Jesus: **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** (1:4). The grammar of the passage is not helpful in determining the direct relationship of baptism, repentance, and forgiveness. Some have read baptismal regeneration into this passage while others believe that Mark is referring to the forgiveness that will become manifest to humanity through the ultimate sacrifice in Jesus' death. As Wesleyan-Arminians, we would hold to this latter interpretation; John the Baptist called people to repentance, and baptism was offered with or following their repentance. It seems from all the accounts we have of John's ministry (four Gospels and the ancient Jewish historian Josephus) that practicing the rite of baptism was not his dominant emphasis. Rather, his preaching was centered upon a declaration of repentance in the face of an impending divine judgment. Moreover, his goal was not merely to initiate individuals into new life through baptism, but it was to call the people of Israel to repentance and restore them to

their covenant faithfulness before God. Thus, it might be more accurate to understand John the Baptist's ministry as calling people to repentance, with baptism offered following or in conjunction with their repentance.

Mark seemed less concerned with John the Baptist's theology and more focused on his practice. Baptism (*baptisma*) is a uniquely Christian word. It may have first come into existence in Paul's writing (Rom. 6:4) and from a historical perspective, this rite was new. The Jews of the first century had ceremonial washings (7:3–4), and the Qumran community themselves practiced ritual immersion baths. But these are both with reference to being ceremonially impure, and modern research into John's culture says, "There is nothing morally sinful about being impure. One cannot avoid it. Becoming impure happens quite naturally all the time."⁵ The model for Christian baptism most likely was the immersion of Gentile converts upon becoming proselytes.

If that is true, John seemed to be calling his people *out* to a completely new place in preparation for a completely new order, of which his baptism is only preliminary. For **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"** (1:7–8). It seems that the combination of the place, the proclamation, and the people is the key. For a first-century Jew, forgiveness was found exclusively in the Temple practices through the Levitical sacrifices. Yet Mark reported that **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** (1:5). This may be an expression of hyperbole, for it seems unlikely that Jerusalem turned into a ghost town for the people to be repatriated in the desert. But it does express the people's hopes and expectations for more than the current condition of the Jewish cult can offer them. Mark was certainly depicting its impotence at dealing with personal sin and sin's inherent manifestations (illness, disease, evil spirits). Everyone Jewish was streaming out of Jerusalem. For them, this city, and specifically, the Temple, was the very location where, in the end, all nations would ultimately stream to find God. Yet, all were journeying to the desert to find a wild man in strange garb who was calling them to begin their new journey like a common Gentile.

These opening verses depict a land with long-term, great spiritual hunger, going back to the days of Isaiah. Mark succinctly identified it to the audience as sin: **Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River** (1:5). It was a pervasive problem, as all Judea and Jerusalem sought out John to receive what he had to offer. John's own words then indicated his work was merely preparatory for the more efficacious baptism of Jesus. Thus, even with water baptism and sincere repentance, there was something more that needed to be done for *all* the people. John's time was transitioning with the coming of Jesus and the hope of the one who **will baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit** (1:8).

Jesus arrived on the stage set by John. **At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee** (1:9). The readers know nothing about Him as He descends from the north without pomp and circumstance, coming from one rural district (Galilee) to a deserted region along the Jordan; hardly the expectation of one coming who has just been described as being "more powerful" than John. In an understated manner, he **was baptized by John in the Jordan** (1:9). But this unassuming demeanor would become Jesus' watchword. In Mark, it is less what He says and more who He is. No trumpets will blare at Jesus' first arrival. Jesus seems more to blend in with the crowd than to stand out. Then, **as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove** (1:10). Mark provided an interesting perspective to this passage. It is told exclusively in the third person, with Mark as the omniscient narrator. The others being baptized by John at the Jordan seemed oblivious to this heaven-splitting event. Mark's telling of this event is exclusively for his readers, giving them insider information seemingly unknown by the participants in the remainder of the story. One only needs to compare Mark with the other Gospels to sense the subtle nuance. Matthew reported not that Jesus saw the heavens opened but that "heaven was opened." Moreover, the divine voice that follows is recorded in third person, not the second person of Mark. Luke concurred with Matthew, but added the unique phrase "in bodily form" (Luke 3:22), implying that the Spirit was perceived by others witnessing the event. In the fourth Gospel, John explicitly stated that he indeed "saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him" (John 1:32). Mark

told his readers that humanity was oblivious to the implications of this event. Only Jesus **saw heaven being torn open** (1:10). This term, "torn open," appears at only one other time in the Gospel, at Jesus' death when the same word is employed to describe the tearing of the curtain in the Temple (15:38). Thus, Mark was conveying to his readers that heaven was torn open at the onset of Jesus' ministry, and the world will never be the same. The readers have a glimpse into the heart of heaven as Jesus walked, talked, and lived before them. Moreover, God, through His Son, has access to the world in a new, tangible way. This dovetails into Mark's overall theme of fear; God is loose on the world.

The insider information was not only limited to the tearing of heaven, but also to the overhearing of the voice. **And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"** (1:11). The readers of Mark are given the opportunity to overhear the most personal conversation between Jesus and His Heavenly Father. Throughout the rest of the Gospel narrative, people wrestle with the various pieces of information about Jesus as they seek an answer to the question, "Who is this man?" The disciples struggled with this identity issue on the Sea of Galilee (4:41); Jesus' family friends from Nazareth pondered the origin of His wisdom (6:2-3); Herod in similar fashion wondered if He is John the Baptist back from the dead (6:16); the people believed He must be a prophet like Elijah. But from the very outset of the story, Mark's readers know Jesus is the divinely appointed Son. This calls to mind Old Testament passages such as the royal enthronement language (1 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1). Yet how and when will people recognize Jesus as the king that He is? The next time the divine voice is heard is on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:7). This is on the heels of the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ (8:29). Yet as the disciples were descending the mountain, Jesus commanded them "not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (9:9). Jesus is indeed the royal Son of God, but His throne would be seen first as the cross, His crown as one of thorns, and His royal robe placed upon Him surrounded by mockers. The obedient Son, who has the favor and pleasure of God, was linked intimately with humanity in baptism, suffering, and death.

There are simply not enough textual details to interpret fully Jesus' personal preconceptions regarding this baptismal rite, yet the text implicitly gives the readers a few insights. At the very least, He was linking himself intimately with all humans though He did not need cleansing from sin. Moreover, as He was baptized, He was filled with the very Spirit John had just finished talking about. Thus, He was being depicted as the ideal man, the perfect Son whom Israel has failed to produce. It would be easy to overplay one's hand with what this scene of Jesus' entrance into the Gospel depicts. However, with the exception of the Transfiguration scene in chapter 9, the arrival of Jesus for the human rite of baptism is unsurpassed in its exalted view of Jesus.

The final scene of the book's introduction is Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (1:12–13). The passage begins with a seemingly innocent word for Mark, "immediately" (*euthus*), translated as "at once" in the NIV. The word occurs forty-two times in Mark's gospel, usually during a transitional point in the story. When one scene ended, and metaphorically Jesus might have caught His breath, another event was engaged *immediately*. More than just a throwaway term, this word drives the story forward from one scene to the next at an exhausting pace. And if alert readers read the story (book) as it would have been encountered in the first century—in its entirety—at the same frantic tempo, they will get to the end and be equally fatigued. Thus, Mark would be encountered not simply intellectually but also physically. **At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert** (1:12). The NIV's translation of the word "sent" is just a bit tame. It's a forceful word used eighteen times, almost exclusively associated by Mark with Jesus casting out demons (1:34, 39) and most certainly sets the tone for future cosmic resistance. Possibly the better translation of the word might be the Spirit "drove"⁶ Jesus into the desert. This is alarming since Jesus so willingly submitted to the baptism of John, and the readers just heard the words of the Father's divine commendation. Now a word denoting violence and force leaps from the page.

A true difficulty at this point is to read Matthew and Luke's more extensive temptation narrative into this scene to address Mark's more sketchy account. Its brevity cries out for more details. There are no details of the temptations themselves, no reference to the "Son of God"

title (which is central to Mark's gospel), no reported conversation between Jesus and Satan, and finally no quotation of Scripture. But just as Mark's baptism sets a theological trajectory of identification with human ills, so does the temptation (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 2:17–18). Moreover, adding non-Markan words to the event will certainly deafen his account. For example, the main verb in these two verses is the Spirit "driving" Jesus, not the temptation itself. And the only other active verb is associated with the **angels** who **attended him** (1:13). The one common ingredient with the other accounts is not the presence of Satan, but the place where the event transpires: **in the desert**. Mark described Jesus in passive terms: **he was in the desert . . . He was with the wild animals** (1:13). The juxtaposition of this scene with the previous one demonstrates to Mark's readers that Jesus' role as the "beloved Son" anticipated the ensuing cosmic struggle. One might understand Mark to be arguing that Jesus the ideal Son of God would be doing forty days of battle in the very place where Israel the son wandered faithlessly for forty years. Additionally, Mark established a suspenseful story line for the remainder of the book as he did not elaborate upon the outcome of the wilderness temptations. Though the other synoptic traditions portray at least a temporary victory in the wilderness, in Mark, we are informed only of the existence of the conflict, not the victor. This leaves the reader with the understanding that this occurrence is not a one-time good-evil encounter but will be ongoing until one is destroyed by the other.

ENDNOTES

1. D. Rhodes and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.74.
2. The announcement of the new rule of God is officially proclaimed to the story's participants as Jesus says, "The time has come, . . . The kingdom of God is near." The first opening (1:1–13) is for the reader, the second (1:14–15) in summary fashion reveals the new rule of God to the participants inside the story of Mark.
3. To be precise, Mark reports that the confession arose directly from the centurion's viewing *how* Jesus died. "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died . . ." (15:39).

4. Readers do not hear this role officially ascribed until 6:14, 24–25. One may wonder if the title was given to him after death, as his name or role was shaped by the tradition that preserved this story. His name is not John the Baptist but John, the one who baptizes.

5. See J. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist Within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 58–64 for detailed discussion of impurity.

6. This is the first of more than 150 historic presents in the gospel of Mark. By definition, a historic present occurs when an author uses a present-tense verb referring to a past event. This adds to the vividness of the scene, for it sounds as if it is actually happening right before the reader's eyes. Literally the verse should be translated "Immediately the Spirit is driving Him into the wilderness."

JESUS' WORDS AND WORKS

Mark 1:14–45

1. JESUS' FIRST WORDS 1:14–15

There is major shift in the story as Jesus began His speaking ministry. Furthermore, 1:14–15 may serve as a heading or new beginning to the narrative as the announcement of the new rule of God is officially proclaimed as Jesus said, "**The time has come, . . . The kingdom of God is near.**" The first opening (1:1–13) provides insider information to the reader. None of the participants seemed to be aware of these facts. If they were, it would be hard to understand how they missed the Christological point of Jesus' words throughout the Gospel. However, this second introduction (1:14–15) summarizes Jesus' ministry in Galilee: declaring the new rule of God.

For the first time in the Gospel, Jesus spoke, and He proclaimed an almost identical message (repent and believe the good news) as that of John the Baptist. Moreover, there is a parallel drawn between the ministry of John and that of Jesus: They both preached (1:7, 14), and they both baptized (1:5, 8). So, it might be fair to assume that if all Judea and Jerusalem responded obediently to John's message, how much more should people respond to this one who is stronger? In these opening words, Mark set the stage for God to reclaim His dominion through His agent, the Son of God. Yet, sadly, Jesus' call to repentance and belief in the gospel only seemed to be superficially fulfilled. There was only minimal response to Jesus' words. Certainly people responded,

but nothing comparable to the "all of Judea" response received by the weaker John. Why?

These two verses serve to introduce the Galilean ministry of Jesus, speaking in general terms as if this proclamation may summarize the essential nature of His message. Immediately, there was a location change from the wilderness of Jordan to Galilee. There, Jesus was at the seashore calling disciples (1:16–20) and teaching in the synagogue (1:21–27) so powerfully that His fame spread to all the region of Galilee (1:28). Jesus' renown heightened as He healed (1:29–31), cast out demons (1:32–34), and preached (1:35–39) with such force that He could not enter a town publicly (1:45). Ironically, His only option was to return to the wilderness (1:45), where people from all directions came to Him (1:45). The place where John lived (in the wilderness, 1:4) and preached, the place where the people came out see and hear him (1:5), the place where they repented and were baptized was the place where Jesus' ministry returned because of His outward success. Sadly, the further Mark takes his readers on the journey with Jesus, the more His call fell upon deaf ears (4:10–12; 8:17–21) and hard hearts (6:51; 7:6–7). The more Jesus taught about the gospel and the Kingdom, the more people resisted.

Thus, the repentance described by the opening words of Jesus is not to be understood as an act of the will, as if a character in the story merely needed to correct a false notion of religion (like understanding of Sabbath in chapters 2–3 and purity laws in chapter 7) or revise a cultural norm (family or wealth). Rather, repentance is linked to the battle waged in the wilderness on a cosmic scale.

2. JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES 1:16–20

Jesus' first foray into the world to bring His kingdom message was the gathering of His first disciples. These men would play a vital role in the ensuing chapters and would be with Him day and night for the next three years, until the arrest in Gethsemane. These men would fail, misunderstand, and desert Jesus. Yet for Mark, they were front and center with the entrance of the kingdom of God. Mark's readers will follow their development and ask all future disciples, if even by contrast, to likewise abandon all and follow Jesus.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen (1:16). The first four disciples were two sets of brothers: Peter and Andrew plus James and John. They would become the inner circle of the Twelve (see 1:29; 13:3; minus Andrew 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). Jesus appeared by the lake with no announcement, and He surprisingly chose fishermen from a rural fishing village to lead this new movement. Peter and Andrew might have been poorer than the rest, for they did not even have a fishing boat like the one the next two disciples possessed. But initially Jesus did not call out leaders but followers: **"Come, follow me"** (1:17). A literal translation of the phrase is "Here, behind Me." Thus, the person of Jesus must have been the deciding factor, not just His persuasive words. He called them to locate themselves directly in line with Jesus, the teacher. It is best not to hear this in the framework of a rabbi in relation to his students, for rabbis did not call their students; students chose their teachers. The relationship Mark was depicting is similar to a charismatic leader in the line of Elijah-Elisha (1 Kings 19:19–21) and may explain why most people misunderstood Jesus to be only an Elijah-like prophet (6:15; 8:28).

Their role was not to be merely passive followers, but Jesus said, **"I will make you fishers of men"** (1:17). This can be heard one of two ways. First, possibly Jesus asked His followers to offer to Him all they had personally and financially, and Jesus would multiply it. Second, this call to be "fishers of men" echoes profoundly the words of Old Testament prophets who used fishing metaphors with reference to drawing people back to God (Jer. 16:14–16; Ezek. 29:4; 47:10; Amos 4:2). Jesus may have been aligning His own followers with the covenant promises of God. He was not moving them in a radically new direction, but rather making a mid-course correction, bringing them back to a scriptural position. There is a striking dissimilarity between this call of Jesus and an Old Testament prophetic call. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him. Prophets, such as Elijah, called people to follow God (1 Kings 19). Rabbis called people to learn and follow the Torah. Jesus was calling them to himself. He expected them to hold nothing back as they followed Him.

The brothers immediately broke their family ties and means of livelihood: **At once they left their nets and followed him** (1:18). Mark gave no clear

explanation for the disciples' response. One implication is the authority of Jesus, which will become a major theme in the rest of the book. However, the gospel of John provides other background information; these men had previously been associated with the followers of John the Baptist (John 1:35–42). Additionally, though their decision to follow was abrupt, they remained near Galilee from their call until the end of chapter 8, when they began the final journey to Jerusalem for Jesus' crucifixion. Mark may have been emphasizing the reestablishment of authority; a disciple answered to his teacher, not to the patriarchal authority, in first-century society. Disciples had to reorient their priorities. Jesus was fashioning a new community, even a new family. He said, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (see 3:31–35).

The second set of brothers whom Jesus called was James and John. They were **in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him** (1:19–20). Once again we see the reorientation of Jesus' disciples around a new head of household, a new authority. Moreover, the second brothers had a boat and hired men, indicating some sort of business offerings beyond a subsistence family network. This point enhances the level of their sacrifice and undergirds Peter's later claim: "We have left everything to follow you!" (10:28).

3. A DAY IN JESUS' LIFE 1:21–39

Mark 1:21–39 is a series of exorcisms (1:23–26, 32, 34), healings (30–31, 32–34), and teachings (21–22, 27) that are temporally set in the same twenty-four-hour period (see 1:29, 32, 35). This unit seems to climax with Jesus at prayer early the next morning when the disciples declared, "**Everyone is looking for you!**" (1:37). Jesus responded with an early glimpse at His overall mission: "**Let us go . . . to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come**" (1:38). Thus, this first day in Capernaum is a concise summary of Jesus' work during His Galilean ministry (1:14–8:21).

TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach (1:21). This is an ideal place for a short aside on Jesus as a teacher. There is a close connection between the Markan concept of preaching and teaching. Whatever differentiates them, it is not their content.¹ Though Mark contains more references to Jesus as teacher than any other Gospel, it contains far fewer of Jesus' actual words, with only a few extended examples of His teaching (1:21–27; 2:13; 4:1–9; 6:2, 6, 30, 34; 7:7; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:14, 35; 14:49). The title "teacher," or "rabbi," is the most common one used for Jesus in Mark. Moreover, the major blocks of teaching found in Mark do not contain straightforward instruction, but rather consist of the parabolic material of chapters 4 and 12 and the enigmatic discourse of chapter 13.

This first synagogue scene in 1:22–28 is one of the prime examples. Here the passage opens with Jesus teaching and the people's astonishment at His teaching, yet there is no direct account of the actual content of His teaching. It might well be argued that Mark's Jesus teaches not primarily by word but by action. Specifically in this passage, Mark linked teaching with the divine power of exorcism.

Finally, as will be demonstrated through this commentary, each of Jesus' most revealing teaching moments, such as the parabolic instruction, the feeding narratives, and especially His passion predictions, escaped the grasp of the disciples. He was the teacher sent by God and anointed by His Spirit, yet humanity refused or resisted His instruction at every juncture.

The people were amazed at his teaching . . . he taught them as one who had authority (1:22). There is something undeveloped in this



BACKGROUND

SCRIBES

Scribes in antiquity can be likened to the modern secretary as they offered their record-keeping abilities for hire. However, scribes were often associated with political officials or other members of high society. The New Testament links the scribes with the chief priests and the Jewish religious establishment, and it even seems to suggest some authority in their teaching. The New Testament also portrays scribes as a unified group, but this apparent unity was due to their common opposition regarding Jesus.

observation made by Mark that he slowly and subtly unveiled throughout the remainder of the book: an explicit contrast between Jesus and the teachers of the law (traditionally translated as scribes).

Synagogue worship in Jesus' day most likely included prayers, blessings, readings from the Law and the Prophets, translations of the material into Aramaic, and finally an interpretation of the readings. This last element was not based on a scribe's personal exposition of the text, but consisted of a series of interpretations of the passage known as the Oral Tradition (or Tradition of the Elders; see Mark 7:5, 13). Thus, what the scribes taught was essentially a series of legal precedents surrounding the text from previous rabbis, securing their authority from tradition while holding back any personal renderings.² Jesus, on the other hand, consistently taught with what Mark called "authority." His source of authority originated from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus, while the scribes quoted other rabbis, Jesus' authority was self-authenticating. **The people were amazed.** A careful exegete of the texts where this word "amazed" (1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18) and its synonym (1:27; 10:24, 32) occurs should be cautious not to over-read its meaning. This specific occurrence of the word "amaze" does not denote a faith-creating event, nor for that matter do any others in Mark. Rather, the words "amazed" or "astonished" indicate that the crowds or onlookers had been impacted by Jesus' teaching or by their witness of His miracles. But it does not explicitly mean that they came to faith nor that they adopted Jesus' worldview as their own.

A man . . . who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out (1:23). Literally, the Greek term is "unclean spirit." This is a common way for Mark to refer to a demonic possession.³ It may be that this was to be contrasted with the designation given to Jesus by the unclean spirit: **"I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"** (1:24). Moreover, for Jesus, this man was not a distraction from His teaching, but Jesus' teaching included bringing mercy and deliverance to the suffering. The words of the man sound more like a confession than a cry, for they contain both Jesus' earthly designation—Jesus of Nazareth—and His divine origin—Holy One of God. In Mark, the residents of the heavenly realm knew and trembled at the name of Jesus; it was humanity who was oblivious to His majesty. Additionally, the unclean spirit sought information relating to

Jesus' mission. **"Have you come to destroy us?"** (1:24). Jesus' response was not to be heard as conversation with the demons, but to silence them. It was to announce once again His mission to the listening crowds as He cast out the demons⁴ with a firm rebuke. This act rhetorically answered the unclean spirit's question. Indeed the Holy One of God had come to destroy the works of the evil one.

One should not overlook this first command to silence in the Gospel of Mark (1:25, the same word as to the wind and waves in 4:39). The unclean spirits in this and other passages knew Jesus to be the all-powerful Son of God. However, from Mark's perspective, that message is only partially right. Jesus was not to be proclaimed until He was understood to be the one who had come to suffer and die. Thus, the words of the demons are only partially right, and half a gospel message can be just as dangerous as none. Thus, this is the beginning of what scholars have called the Messianic Secret that runs throughout the first half of the Gospel. It refers to those places where Jesus commands the demons to silence (1:24, 34; 3:11), preventing people from receiving a distorted view of Christ. Surprisingly, Jesus also ordered His disciples to remain silent (8:30; 9:9) until after His death and resurrection.

The closing words of this passage again make note of the people's amazement on the Sabbath day teaching: **The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this?"** (1:27). This passage is difficult since it is hard to determine with which clause to equate the phrase "and with authority." Should it read as the RSV renders it: "What is this? A new teaching! With authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"? Or is the NIV closer to Mark's intent when it associates the authority more directly to the teaching? The best answer is the ambiguous *both*. Earlier in the passage, the authority of Jesus was shown to exceed that of the scribes' (1:22). Moreover, the amazement of the synagogue listeners was squarely based on Jesus' teaching, which could be understood as purely based on Jesus' physical presence and verbal presentation. But here, the crowd's astonishment arose not only from His authoritative teaching, but also His ability to command of the unclean spirits.⁵

News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (1:28). Ironically, Jesus' command to secrecy did not stop the spread of

His popularity throughout Galilee. Thus, the first miracle in the Gospel, this synagogue power-encounter, was the basis of Jesus' fame. He has authority, much more than the scribes, and He commands demons. The real question that is just beneath the surface will become the driving force in the rest of Mark: "Who is Jesus?" The rest of Mark enumerates the answer, and every word should be heard as a Jesus "teaching moment" for the sole purpose of discovering the nature and purpose of Jesus.

Finally, this initial synagogue event should be seen as a synopsis of Jesus' plan in dealing with both the human and cosmic realms. Humans are whole persons, in need of a holistic salvation. The answer is never to be trivialized into a "going to heaven" answer. Yet people will flock to the spectacular and fixate upon the instant spiritual gratification. Jesus will never cease to offer miracles of mercy, but He will not allow himself to be defined solely by those events. It is full freedom and release from what holds men and women captive that Jesus will proclaim with His teaching and with His suffering and death. In the end, Jesus will not allow a partial gospel to be proclaimed. He will silence any and all people who speak only of the miracles without the cross.

A FEVER HEALED

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew (1:29). The men took Jesus to their home for what most certainly would be the Sabbath meal. Upon arrival, they discovered Simon's mother-in-law had a fever. For most contemporary readers, this may be the least impressive of Jesus' miracles. But for Torah-centered Jews, a fever was not simply a symptom of an illness. The Law (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:22) often gave the impression that fever was a penalty sent by God.⁶ **So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up** (1:31). The translation is quite understated with the choice of the word "helped." The original literally says "raised up," which is cloaked in radical healing (2:9, 11–12; 3:3; 5:41; 9:27) and resurrection language (6:14, 16; 14:28; 16:6). This was no less a miracle than the synagogue exorcism; it is simply narrated differently. The first miracle was public; this one is private. The first had Jesus speaking; this time He

remained silent. The first He commanded from a distance; He performed this one with a touch. One focused on demon possession, the other with physical illness. The first was dramatic and created amazement; this one is told in tranquil tones.

The scenario closes with words of full healing: **The fever left her and she began to wait on them** (1:31). The domestic qualities of Simon's mother-in-law go beyond first-century hospitality, for the word "wait" is the same word used to describe the angels' ministry to Jesus after His wilderness experience in 1:13. It is the same word Jesus used to describe His overall life-call in 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (italics added). It also reflects the discipleship language of the faithful women who followed Jesus to the crucifixion after the disciples themselves deserted Him (15:41). Thus, Jesus' healing readied this woman to follow Him.

A HEALING SUMMARIZED

In the two previous episodes, there was a single exorcism and an individual healed by Jesus. Still, **that evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed** (1:32). This intimately linked this event to the other two. In typical summary fashion (see also 1:39; 3:10–12; 6:53–56), Mark reminded his readers that the events reported in this gospel were only a sampling of Jesus' work. Moreover, it was evening, and the Sabbath that began in 1:21 was officially over. The people were carefully adhering to Sabbath practices, while this record may hint that Jesus was demonstrating more mercy to the afflicted than observance to the Jewish Law. This turned to conflict with the Pharisees over Sabbath regulations in 2:23–3:6. One wonders if Mark meant that the whole town was physically gathered at His door, or was this an idiomatic way of saying Jesus was the talk of the town? Either way, once Jesus came to town, it was never the same.

Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons (1:34). It is quite interesting to note that in this summary statement Jesus distinguishes illness from demonic possession. The second Gospel will always maintain this distinction between healing and

exorcism.⁷ Jesus almost always touched the sick to cure them, but He vocally commanded the demons to come out.⁸ Thus, it would be unfair to say that ancients could not comprehend or communicate the difference between demon-possession and illness. Though they were not inhabitants of a modern scientific age, they were far from naive.⁹ An observant reader will notice that **all** the town was at Jesus' doorstep, yet He only healed **many** of the sick and cast out **many** demons. Mark may have been hinting that healing is not some sort of magical or automatic process. Faith will be brought front and center in the Gospel, and this may be preparing for it. By the time Jesus returned home to Nazareth, miracles were restricted by the people's lack of faith. Additionally, in the following episode, the people were still searching for Jesus, meaning all of the needs were yet to be met.

A SOLITARY PRAYER

This next passage begins with Mark's typical dual-faceted introduction—**very early in the morning, while it was still dark** (1:35)—in which he used two expressions where one would seem adequate. Yet the phrase “while it was still dark” temporally links this event to the same Sabbath day as 1:21–34. Thus, in a typical Galilean day, Jesus confronted demons, illness, and exhausting demands on His private time. How do solitude and prayer fit in? **Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed** (1:35). Possibly for the first time in the Gospel, Mark illuminated that there was an overt difference between Jesus' agenda and the pressing needs of humans. If the primary issue was making Jesus known to the masses, then healing services and public exorcism would accomplish that better than anything. Yet in the Gospel, Jesus never initiated a healing or pursued a demon-possessed person; He responded to human initiative. Thus, it may be fair to say that Jesus' ministry was not a healing ministry as such, but it seemed to arise from the enormity of human suffering combined with Jesus' unique power to meet the need.

Jesus left the house and sought out a solitary place for prayer. The word “solitary” is the same word used in 1:1–13 for “desert.” One should not over play the meaning of desert since Jesus was just outside of

Capernaum and since the disciples easily found Him. This must have been a place that Jesus frequented; it is worth noting that Jesus often withdrew from the public forum (1:45; 3:13; 6:31–32, 46; 7:24; 8:27; 9:2, 30–31). **Simon and his companions went to look for him** (1:36). The construction of the phrase “Simon and his companions” may seem strange, since presumably at this point there were only four disciples, but it may indicate that at this early point Simon Peter had assumed the role of leader. Their exclamation that everyone was looking for Jesus gives the readers a feel for the human expectation for Jesus' ministry: “More healings like yesterday, please.”

More healings and more exorcisms in the same place was not Jesus' agenda for the new day. **Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also”** (1:38). Jesus called for a move of ministry that had centered itself in Capernaum to smaller, out-of-the-way villages. The core of ministry would not be healing as such but preaching.¹⁰ And it is further described with a clause to substantiate this specific mission: “**That** [for this reason] **is why I have come**” (1:38). This phrase is pregnant with meaning. It could simply mean that Jesus had come out from Capernaum to the villages. Yet Mark may have had in mind much more. The word “come” is a compound word more literally read “come out.” Thus, it may rightly be read “why I have come (out)” at this time to this place (that is, from the thirty-year preparation in Nazareth for this moment). Luke's gospel may take it just a bit further since he worded it, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why *I was sent*” (Luke 4:43, italics added). It is easy to make the next step to link this concept with the gospel of John's “coming into the world” feature. Is this Mark's way of cloaking the incarnational language of Matthew, Luke, and John?

4. MAKING THE UNCLEAN CLEAN 1:40–45

This final scene in chapter 1 may best be described as transitional. First, it closes Mark's discussions about the healings and exorcisms by directly interjecting Jesus' personal reaction to the despair of others: He was **filled with compassion** (1:41). Thus, His healings in the previous

passages are not to be seen as raw power, but divine authority over demons and illness clothed in empathy. Second, it connects Jesus' healing ministry directly to what has been traditionally discussed as the controversy narratives of 2:1–3:6 as Jesus and His disciples engaged the Jewish leaders on a number of religious issues. Thus far, Jesus' actions were universally welcomed, albeit the demons were somewhat distraught. But soon Jesus' perspective will confront the worldview of the Pharisees and the scribes. In this passage, Jesus commanded the now-healed leper, **“go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them”** (1:44). It is the closing phrase that attracts attention and serves to prepare Mark's readers for the impending confrontation. This was not just Jesus confronting the illness of leprosy, but He was contrasting His compassion with what might be labeled as the normal, callous application of the Levitical laws, seen in His willingness to touch the unclean. This will not go unnoticed by the scribes and Pharisees in Mark 2.

The setting of 1:40–45 appears to be essentially the same as the previous section. Jesus and His disciples were in and around Capernaum, though their sphere of influence had expanded to include more of Galilee (1:39). During their preaching and healing ministry, **a man with leprosy . . . begged . . . , “If you are willing, you can make me clean”** (1:40).

BACKGROUND

LEPROSY

The concept of leprosy is incredibly difficult to understand completely. The problem stems from the symptoms described in Leviticus, from which no specific medical condition can be derived. Through the text of Leviticus, several types of skin lesions that exfoliate the skin are suggested, in which the medical condition leprosy finds its place. The New Testament seems to carry forth these ideas established in the Old Testament.

conversation. The unclean man takes the initiative and comes within close proximity of Jesus. Breaking the taboo was only one issue for Mark; the real question was not one of Jesus' power but of His nature and character. The leper inquired, “I know you have the power, but do you care?”

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man (1:41). There is an interesting debate among scholars as to exactly what word expresses the emotion of Jesus in this encounter. The majority of the ancient manuscripts have the word “compassion,” but some of the most ancient documents have instead the word “angry.” Both words fit well with Mark's description of Jesus. Throughout the gospel, when Jesus encountered human need, the word “compassion” is often used (see 6:34; 8:2; 9:22). But at the same time, it would be unfair to exclude “anger” from depicting Jesus' response to situations (3:5; 10:14). Either word would be accurate as long as we carefully consider the object of Jesus' compassion or anger. The compassion of Jesus was directed to the leper, while the anger would be intended toward the disease or even toward the social customs that forced the leper to live as an outcast.

Then Jesus broke the legal customs of the day and touched the man (Lev. 11:24–40; 14:46–47). With Jesus, the need of the man superseded the Law. **Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured** (1:42). The result was instant and apparent to onlookers. But the word “cured” does not have a medical connotation as much as a legal or ceremonial one, since it literally reads “clean.” He had not just been restored to health, but with a priest's approval, he could reenter the community and return to the Temple to worship and offer sacrifices. Jesus sent him away with a firm warning to silence, with a single exception: **“But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them”** (1:44). One could argue that Jesus had discarded the Law for a need, but that is far too simplistic a reading of Jesus. He demanded that the “clean” man adhere to what was a lengthy, eight-day cleansing process for the restoration of a healed leper to society (Lev. 14:1–32).

Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news (1:45). The term “spreading the news” is the formal term for preaching. This testimony of what Jesus did might have been seen by the Pharisees

and scribes as Jesus condoning lawbreaking. Thus, the man's disobedience of Jesus' command to silence and His call to follow the law in fact initiated Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders.

Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. . . . Yet the people still came to him from everywhere (1:45). This final verse points in two directions. Initially, Jesus' intense popularity demonstrated the caution He had to take in exercising His power and authority, for it begs the question, "Why are they coming?" Simply, they came for a touch from Jesus, the miracle worker. Little else was known by the general public about Jesus; there had been minimal teaching but countless miracles. It will take the remainder of the book of Mark to fill out a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Jesus—not just Messiah but suffering Messiah. The second issue this passage reveals is that when Jesus encounters the Pharisees in the next section, we know that the religious leaders possess the minority opinion. At this point, Jesus' popularity was unparalleled.

ENDNOTES

1. Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 38–39 goes on to argue that in 6:12, 30, both words are used to depict the same event, and the phrase "speaking the word" serves as an equivalent for both preaching (1:15, 45; 14:9) and teaching (4:33; 8:32; 9:31). Furthermore, faith is the desired response to both preaching (1:15) and teaching (2:2, 5; 6:2, 6).

2. This is the oral tradition, often from memory, that would be later codified in the Talmud.

3. Mark uses the term "unclean spirits" eleven times (1:23, 26; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25) and "demon" or "demon-possessed" fifteen times (1:32, 34, 39; 3:15, 22; 5:15, 18; 6:13; 7:26, 29; 9:38), an almost equal distribution.

4. The NIV reads, "'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly." The NASB follows the Greek more literally: "Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet and come out of him.'" This is typical exorcism language for the gospel of Mark. Jesus commands the demons, and they must comply.

5. The NIV correctly adds the seemingly insignificant word "even" that logically links the two clauses together and places an increasing emphasis upon the exorcism as the source of the amazement. Literally, "What is this? A new teaching . . . with authority . . . and *even* (or also) the unclean spirits he commands and they obey!"

6. David Garland, *Mark: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), p. 72, enumerates places in rabbinic tradition and in Philo where they regarded fever as demonic and as divine punishment.

7. This parallel concept is mentioned again in 3:10–11 and 6:13.

8. Thanks to R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: New International Commentary on the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 109, for this insightful observation.

9. Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 85–94.

10. This is the last time Jesus is said to preach in the gospel. He is only the subject of the verb in 1:14 and 1:38–39. From here on out, His disciples will do the preaching, as well as a few other followers. His ministry is defined by the term "teach."