

Mark 1:1-8 Jesus and John the Baptist

The beginning of the gospel

The term “gospel” or “evangel” meant “joyful tidings” and was associated with the emperor, whose birthday, and accession to power were celebrated in all the world--reports of such festivals were called “evangels” During these times of persecution by the Roman Emperor, Caeser, the “really Good News” that supersedes any other good news is that Jesus, God’s son had come into the world. This was the real Historical Event that should be on everyone’s calendars! The Hebrew aspect to the meaning of the “gospel” is “joyful tidings” of the coming salvation promised in the prophetic word. Especially in Isaiah the Hebrew terms signifying “good news” concern the announcement of the beginning of the time of salvation. Isa. 52:7. **7 How delightful on the mountains Are the feet of one who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”** It was left to the prophet Isaiah to reveal so much about Jesus, and especially his ministry, with it’s great joy. **of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,**

Mark presents us with a very succinct, orderly, and straightforward account of Jesus’ mission, emphasizing the crucifixion, and also the Resurrection. Mark is the Gospel account which most demonstrates Jesus as a man of action, describing what He did and the authority and power that He has from God, which would resonate with his Roman audience. Mark presents Jesus as the suffering servant of God, but carefully demonstrates that it was Jesus’ humility of character and fidelity to His mission that caused Him to serve; that He served because of strength, not weakness. Romans respected power, justice and honor, not weakness. Mark introduces Jesus as the subject of the good news, the Messiah of Israel, and the Son of God in one sentence. Jesus, or Yeshua as his mother called him, named after Joshua, meaning The Lord is Salvation. Then Mark includes his title Christ, Christos, the equivalent of the Hebrew Word Messiah, the Anointed One of God. And, lastly, His Source, the Son of God. No-one will have any doubts as to Mark’s opinion on these important matters, since he states them right up front.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist, the forerunner announces the coming of the Messiah who introduces the new age of redemption promised through the prophets.

2 Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way; 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight; The “even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,” indicates that the proper context for understanding the gospel is the promise of future salvation found in the latter half of Isaiah. The coming of John signaled both the beginning of the joyful tidings of salvation, providing a foundation for Jesus’ subsequent ministry.

4 John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. 5 And there went out unto him all the country of Judea, and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins

Those who heard John would understood that this was the familiar call to repentance, just like an OT prophet. But in response to his preaching John called for a new action—baptism in the Jordan River, individually. The river whereby their nation had come out of the wilderness, and entered the promised land. John’s baptism was likely derived from the Jewish practice of baptizing proselytes, but for John to suggest that those who were already Jews needed baptizing was radical. Baptism appears rather as a unique activity of this prophet, a prophetic sign so striking that John became

known simply as “the Baptizer.” This was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” indicating a new relationship between God and the individual believer. The biblical concept of repentance, is deeply rooted in the wilderness tradition. In OT prophecy, the summons to “turn” means a return to the original relationship with the Lord, in the Garden, but for Israel, symbolically, during the exodus. This means a return to the beginning of God’s history with his people, a return to the wilderness. Israel’s time in the wilderness was the period of true sonship to God. The correlation between the wilderness and repentance was not John’s innovation and must have been understood by his contemporaries. John’s call to repentance and his call to come out to him in the wilderness to be baptized are two aspects of the same reality—salvation.

Who was John the Baptist?

Although his name implies that he baptized people (which he did), John’s life on earth was more than just baptizing. John’s adult life was characterized by devotion and surrender to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. John’s voice was a “lone voice in the wilderness” (John 1:23) as he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior. His central message “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand”, was the exact same as the central message of Jesus’ ministry.

⁴John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. As an adult John lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea, between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. John the Baptist’s ministry grew in popularity, as recounted in Matthew 3:5–6: **“People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.”** To be baptized by John was to admit your sin and repent of it—which was, of course, the way to be prepared for the Savior’s coming. The repentance associated with John’s baptism also kept the self-righteous out of the water, as they did not see themselves as sinners. Most people knew that John the Baptist was a prophet of God (Matthew 14:5) **⁵Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet.** His baptism is a call to a return to the beginning of God’s history with his people, a return to God’s leading through wilderness. He does the same thing with us, continually calling us to return to the beginning of our relationship with Him, when our love for Him was the central thing in our lives, and He continually urges us to keep our love for Him the most important thing in our lives. He says to all of us, like He did to the church at Ephesus in Rev 2:4-5 **⁴But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the [d]eeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.** The same correlation should be seen between baptism and the wilderness. The summons to be baptized in the Jordan meant that Israel must come once more to the wilderness.

⁶John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and [d]his diet was locusts and wild honey.

The reference to John’s clothing and diet serves to emphasize that he is a man of the wilderness. Both his garb and his food are those familiar to the wilderness nomad, and characterize life in the desert, and are the traditional garb and diet of the prophets.

⁷And he was preaching, saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to bend down and untie the straps of His sandals.

“To come after someone” is technical terminology for discipleship among the scribes and rabbis of the first century, and this usage is reflected in Jesus’ summons to men to come, or follow after him (Mark 1:17).

⁸I baptized you ⁱⁿwith water; but He will baptize you ⁱⁿwith the Holy Spirit

The reference to the bestowal of the Spirit is appropriate to the wilderness context of John’s proclamation. Isaiah describes Israel’s trek in the wilderness as a march under the guidance of the Spirit of God (Isa. 63:11); it was the Spirit who gave the people rest in the wilderness (Ch. 63:14). As the first exodus had been a going forth into the wilderness under the leadership of God’s Spirit, the prophet announces the second exodus as a time when there will be a fresh outpouring of the Spirit (Chs. 32:15; 44:3). With this concept in mind John calls the people to the wilderness in anticipation of the fulfilment of the prophetic promise. By introducing his Gospel with an account of the ministry of John, he is calling on those who hear or read his Gospel to make a choice regarding Jesus—to return to dependance on God, letting Him lead the way, or to stay, thinking you’re doing fine, until destruction comes.