


TEACH THE TEXT
COMMENTARY SERIES

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Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; this commentary is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship

but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept

to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each six-page unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological

themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
 - a. *The Text in Context*. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.
 - b. *Outline/Structure*. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
 - c. *Historical and Cultural Background*. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
 - d. *Interpretive Insights*. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
 - e. *Theological Insights*. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.

4. *Teaching the Text*. Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text*. At this point in the commentary the writers partner with a team of pastor/teachers to pro-

vide suggestions for relevant and contemporary illustrations from current culture, entertainment, history, the Bible, news, literature, ethics, biography, daily life, medicine, and over forty other categories. They are designed to spark creative thinking for preachers and teachers and to help them design illustrations that bring alive the passage's key themes and message.

Abbreviations

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalms	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

General

//	parallel text(s)
bk.	book
cf.	compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
e.g.	for example
etc.	and the rest

Gk.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
ibid.	in the same source
i.e.	that is
no(s).	number(s)
p(p).	page(s)
par(s).	parallel(s)
v(v).	verse(s)

Ancient Versions

LXX Septuagint

Modern Versions

ESV English Standard Version
NET New English Translation
NIV New International Version
NLT New Living Translation
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
REB Revised English Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version
TNIV Today's New International
Version

Apocrypha and Septuagint

1 Macc. 1 Maccabees
Tob. Tobit
Wis. Wisdom of Solomon

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Apoc. Ab. *Apocalypse of Abraham*
2 Bar. *2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)*
1 En. *1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)*
4 Ezra *4 Ezra*
Jub. *Jubilees*
Pss. Sol. *Psalms of Solomon*
Sib. Or. *Sibylline Oracles*
T. Job *Testament of Job*

Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

CD-A *Damascus Document**
1QS *1QRule of the Community*
4Q174 (4QFlor) *4QFlorilegium*
4Q246 *4QAramaic Apocalypse*

Mishnah, Talmud, and Related Literature

b. Babylonian Talmud
m. Mishnah
t. Tosefta
y. Jerusalem Talmud

'Abot *'Abot*
Ber. *Berakot*
Git. *Gittin*
Pesab. *Pesahim*
Shabb. *Shabbat*
Sanh. *Sanhedrin*
Yoma *Yoma (= Kippurim)*

New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Ps.-Clem. *Pseudo-Clementines*

Greek and Latin Works

Eusebius

Hist. eccl. *Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)*

Josephus

Ag. Ap. *Against Apion*
Ant. *Jewish Antiquities*
J.W. *Jewish War*

Livy

Hist. *History of Rome (Ab urbe condita libri)*

Introduction to Mark

Mark first applied the term “gospel” (*euangelion*) to these dramatic biographies of Jesus (1:1, 15). Gospels provide the “good news” about “Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God” (1:1). They contain both history and theology. As history they tell of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and their narrative is absolutely trustworthy. But they are more than that: as “gospel” they are historical and theological drama, “history with a message.” In the verb form, *euangelizomai*, the term means “to preach good news,” so these are “sermons” about Jesus. When we study Mark, we look not just at “what it meant” historically but also at “what it means” theologically. The sacred writers chose those details (we call it their “redactional” or “editorial” choices) in their narratives that brought out the theological meaning of the events. Both trustworthy history and deeply relevant theology lie behind each pericope (i.e., episode).

We will study Mark at two levels. At the macrolevel we want to see how each episode is embedded in a larger story, the ongoing

Jesus narrative of Mark’s Gospel. There is a “preface” or introduction in 1:1–15 that tells us who this person is we are studying in the Gospel: Jesus the Messiah and Son of God. He is witnessed to by Isaiah 40:1–3 and by John the Baptist and then proven to be the Messiah by the Father’s testimony at his baptism and by the defeat of Satan at his temptation. This is followed by his opening ministry in Galilee, told in two opening cycles (1:16–3:6; 3:7–6:6) in which Jesus challenges three groups: the disciples, crowds, and leaders. These groups will be traced through Mark to show how this Gospel is organized. It is critical to realize that chronology is often not the organizing principle. Following ancient history-writing techniques, the Gospel writers were free to organize the stories differently and often to place them in different order. This was not error, for topical arrangements were acceptable, and the Spirit inspired both types of organization.

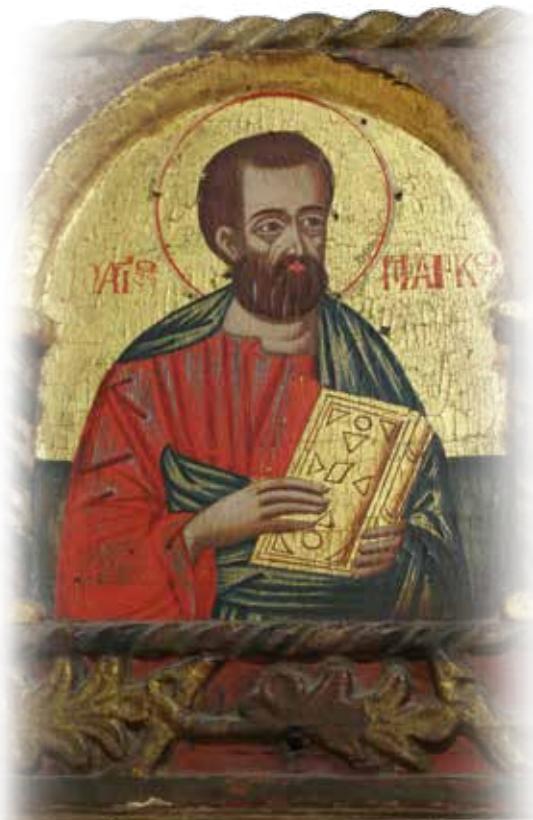
At the microlevel we also will be looking at how each individual story is organized to ascertain Mark’s unique message.

Each unit of the commentary will begin with a “big idea” that will function like the proposition of a sermon to tell the reader what the action is all about. This will be followed by the primary theological ideas of that section and the “structure” and “context,” sometimes separate and sometimes combined, to explain how Mark has put together the details of the story in this section. At the end of each unit we will consider major theological and life-oriented themes that flow out of the section.

Authorship and Date

Mark’s Gospel, like those of Matthew, Luke, and John, does not name its author. Most likely the authors felt that these were not their Gospels but the church’s Gospel, and the Holy Spirit was their true author. Mark as the author was universally recognized by the earliest church fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, Augustine). Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39) quotes Papias, the early-second-century father who claimed to have learned from John the Elder late in the first century that Mark was interpreting Peter, who had provided him with accurate information. Yet many critical scholars doubt the connection to Peter, and say that Mark contains several errors regarding geography (e.g., 7:31; 10:46–52) or Jewish customs (e.g., 7:3–4). However, all of these are easily explained and do not involve error. All in all, there is every likelihood that John Mark, the assistant of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11) and Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), was indeed the author of this Gospel.¹

When Mark’s Gospel was written is difficult to determine. Many date it in the 70s



John Mark, who worked with the apostles Peter and Paul, is the most likely author of the Gospel of Mark. This icon of Mark is part of a larger piece titled *Christ and Twelve Apostles* from a nineteenth-century Orthodox church in the Antalya region of Turkey.

on the supposition that the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13) was written on the basis of the events in AD 68–70. But there is too little material in the chapter that would reflect details of that event; rather, it is a general prophecy of judgment on the nation and the temple. Others believe that this Gospel was compiled after the Jewish Zealot uprisings of the 50s and 60s and after the death of Peter, so in the late 60s. Also, the strong theme of persecution would fit the late Neronian period. Yet this is inconclusive, for the persecution is general and the Zealot background suspect. Two factors favor a

date in the 50s: (1) there is no reason to doubt some association with Peter, so it is better to place it in the 50s or 60s; (2) Mark was used by Matthew and Luke, and so was the first Gospel written (we will look at this below). If Luke was written where Acts ends (AD 62, with Paul on trial in Rome), a tenable proposal (the one that I prefer) is that Mark was composed in the mid-to-late 50s, then recognized by the church and utilized by Luke.²

Audience and Purpose

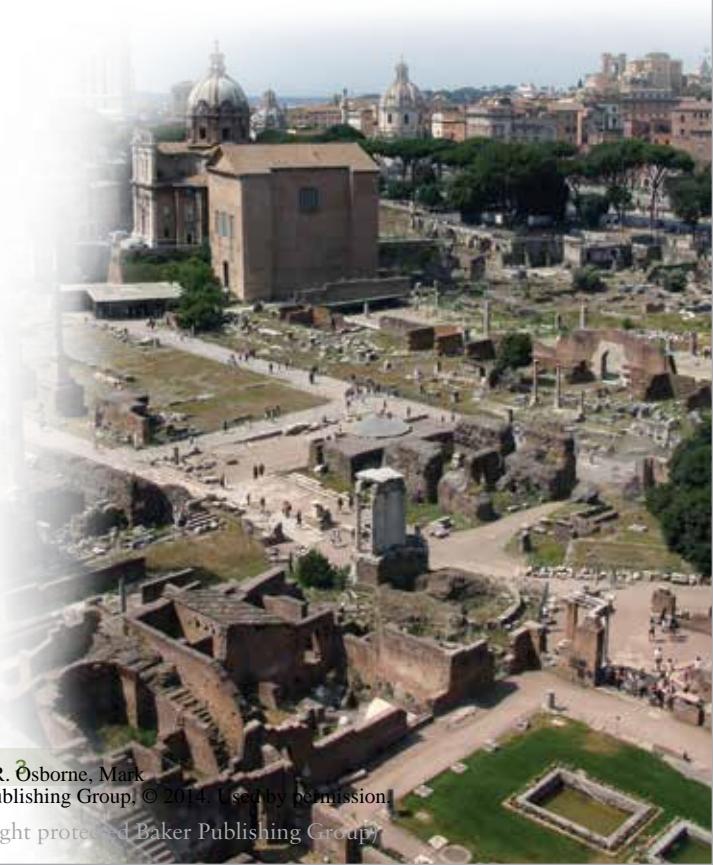
Most agree that Mark wrote for Gentile readers, probably in Rome. There are several Latinisms (e.g., terms for “basket” [4:21], “tax” [12:14], “scourge” [15:15]), as well as a tendency to translate Aramaic for Greek-speaking readers (5:41; 7:11, 34; 10:46; 15:22, 34). Moreover, the church fathers connected Mark with Rome (Clement of Alexandria, Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Eusebius). It has commonly been said that the emphasis on Jesus’s suffering means that Mark was addressing a church whose members were undergoing a great deal of persecution, exhorting them to remain faithful through difficult times. There is some truth in this, but it is not the primary purpose. The occasion of the book must be linked with the major theological themes (see below). Thus, first, it intends to tell the historical story of Jesus and prove him to be the Messiah (especially the *Suffering Servant of God*) and the Son of God in order to instruct believers and to evangelize

nonbelievers. Second, it stresses discipleship—what it means to follow Christ and embrace his path in this evil world.³

Relationship to Matthew and Luke

The Synoptic Problem arises from the recognition that the three “Synoptic” (= “same look”) Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are so similar to one another that there must be some literary relationship between them. The major debate over the last few centuries has centered on whether Matthew or Mark was written first. Often there is similar wording (e.g., Matt. 19:13–15 // Mark 10:13–16 // Luke 18:15–17) or order of events (Matt. 12:46–13:58 // Mark 3:31–6:6 // Luke 8:19–56). Until the nineteenth century Augustine’s view (Matthew, then Mark, then Luke) predominated. In 1783 this was revised by J. J. Griesbach

Many scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was written for Gentile readers in Rome. The center of Roman political and religious activity was the Roman Forum, shown here.



(Luke used Matthew, and Mark abbreviated both), but in the last hundred years the Four Source Theory has become the majority view: Mark was first; then Matthew and Luke used Mark as well as a collection of Jesus's sayings, labeled "Q" (from the German *Quelle*, meaning "source"), along with their special material, called "M" (Matthew's unique material) and "L" (Luke's unique material).

In other words, Mark is generally seen as the first Gospel. There are four basic reasons for this: (1) Mark uses more emotive and frank language, often toned down by Matthew (e.g., Mark 10:18 // Matt. 19:17); (2) Mark has many difficult, even negative expressions (e.g., "hardened heart" in 6:52; 8:17, omitted by Matthew); (3) redactional differences are best explained as Matthew editing Mark (e.g., Mark 6:5–6 // Matt. 13:58); (4) it makes more sense that Matthew and Luke added material to Mark than that Mark removed so many important stories and material from the other two (e.g., the stories of Jesus's birth and his Sermon on the Mount/Plain, both found in Matthew and Luke). Q may have been a tradition rather than an actual document, but it helps to explain the 235 verses in Matthew and Luke that contain sayings of Jesus not found in Mark. It is better to assume some type of common source than to have that much material appear in Matthew and Luke by chance. In

conclusion, Mark was written first and was used by the other two in constructing their Gospels.⁴

Theological Themes

Christology

This study needs to proceed on two planes: what Jesus did and who Jesus was. He performed miracles, taught wondrous truths, and prepared people for the kingdom of God. At the same time he was the Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Prophet, and Suffering Servant of God. We must briefly consider each aspect. In his miracles the emphasis is on his absolute authority over creation (e.g., 4:35–5:41); his opening miracle brought out his authority in word and deed (1:21–28). Jesus taught as the very voice of God, and he acted as the authorized Son of God. Although Matthew has more teaching content, Mark centers on Jesus as teacher/rabbi more than Matthew does.

Jesus's compassion is front and center, as he heals all who come to him (1:32–34; 3:7–12; though see 6:5–6), even when he affronts the law keepers as a result (2:5–6, 24; 3:4). The needs of people have priority over religious scruples.



One of the theological themes in the Gospel of Mark is discipleship. We see Jesus calling, training, and sending his disciples. This ivory plaque called *The Mission of the Apostles* is from the tenth century AD, Constantinople.

As the Messiah, Jesus is not only royal Messiah but also the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, fulfilling Isaiah 52–53. His death provides a ransom for sins (10:45) and a new covenant with God (14:24). As the Son of God, he is the beloved and intimate Son of the Father (1:11; 9:7), whose exalted state is especially linked to his resurrection (12:10–11) and second coming (8:38 [“the glory of his Father”]; 13:32). Also, as the Son of Man, Jesus is glorified through suffering (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) and will sit at the right hand of God (13:26–27; 14:62) as judge (8:38).

Yet the reality of Jesus is shrouded in secrecy, as Jesus commands silence from demons (1:25, 34; 3:12), the people he heals (1:44; 5:43; 7:36), and even from his disciples (8:30; 9:9). At the historical level this makes sense, for the Jewish people expected only a conquering king, whereas Jesus came to be the Suffering Servant. He did not want such misconceptions about the role of the Messiah to cloud his ministry. At the level of Markan purposes, Robert Stein notes two: (1) it proves that Jesus did not die as a political revolutionary who pushed his own agenda; (2) it highlights Jesus’s true glory, for it shows that his greatness could not remain hidden but had to break forth publicly.⁵ The more Jesus told people to be quiet, the more they had to proclaim to everyone what they had seen and experienced (1:44–45; 7:36).

Discipleship

Jesus is the “rabbi” (9:5; 10:51; 11:21) who trains his disciples with patience and love. He calls them and involves them immediately in his mission (1:16–20), commissions them as apostles and gives them

authority (3:14–19), and sends them out in mission to Galilee (6:7–13). They are called to deny themselves and follow Jesus totally (8:34–9:1). Yet throughout the story the disciples struggle with failure. They have hardened hearts (6:52; 8:17), and after each of the passion predictions they fail to understand (e.g., 8:31–33), instead seeking their own greatness (9:34) and future power (10:37). Those who had cast out demons (6:13) are suddenly unable to do so (9:18). They fail Jesus at Gethsemane (14:37, 40–41) and at his arrest (14:50–52). Peter denies Jesus three times (14:66–72). The key is faith, which in Mark means a total dependence on Jesus. As the disciples fail, the “little people” (those who appear only once) center entirely on Jesus and show that victory comes by complete faith in him (5:34, 36; 7:27–29; 9:23–24; 10:47–48; 14:3). At his death and resurrection the women are the faithful followers, yet even they fail (16:8). The answer is given in 16:7: meet the risen Lord in Galilee and find the faith to be victorious over failure.

Cosmic Conflict

The war against Satan and the “unclean spirits” (one of Mark’s terms for demons) is central to this Gospel. The very first miracle that Jesus performs involves a battle against demon possession (1:23–28), and it demonstrates the authority of Jesus over the evil powers (1:27). The thesis statement for cosmic conflict occurs in 3:27, Jesus’s terse parable about the “binding of Satan.” Every exorcism in Mark provides a glimpse into the extent to which Satan and his minions have been bound by Jesus. This power is demonstrated in the exorcisms in Galilee (3:11–12), the Gadarene demoniac

(5:1–20), the Syrophenician’s daughter (7:24–30), and the demon-possessed child (9:14–29). Jesus passes this authority on to the disciples (3:14–15; 6:7), and they successfully cast out demons (6:13). Yet when they depend on their own strength rather than on Jesus (9:18), they can no

longer do so. The message is clear: Satan has been defeated by Jesus and no longer has power over God’s people. However, he still tempts and deceives, and any disciple who loses focus on Jesus and becomes self-reliant may be defeated and become a tool of Satan (8:33).

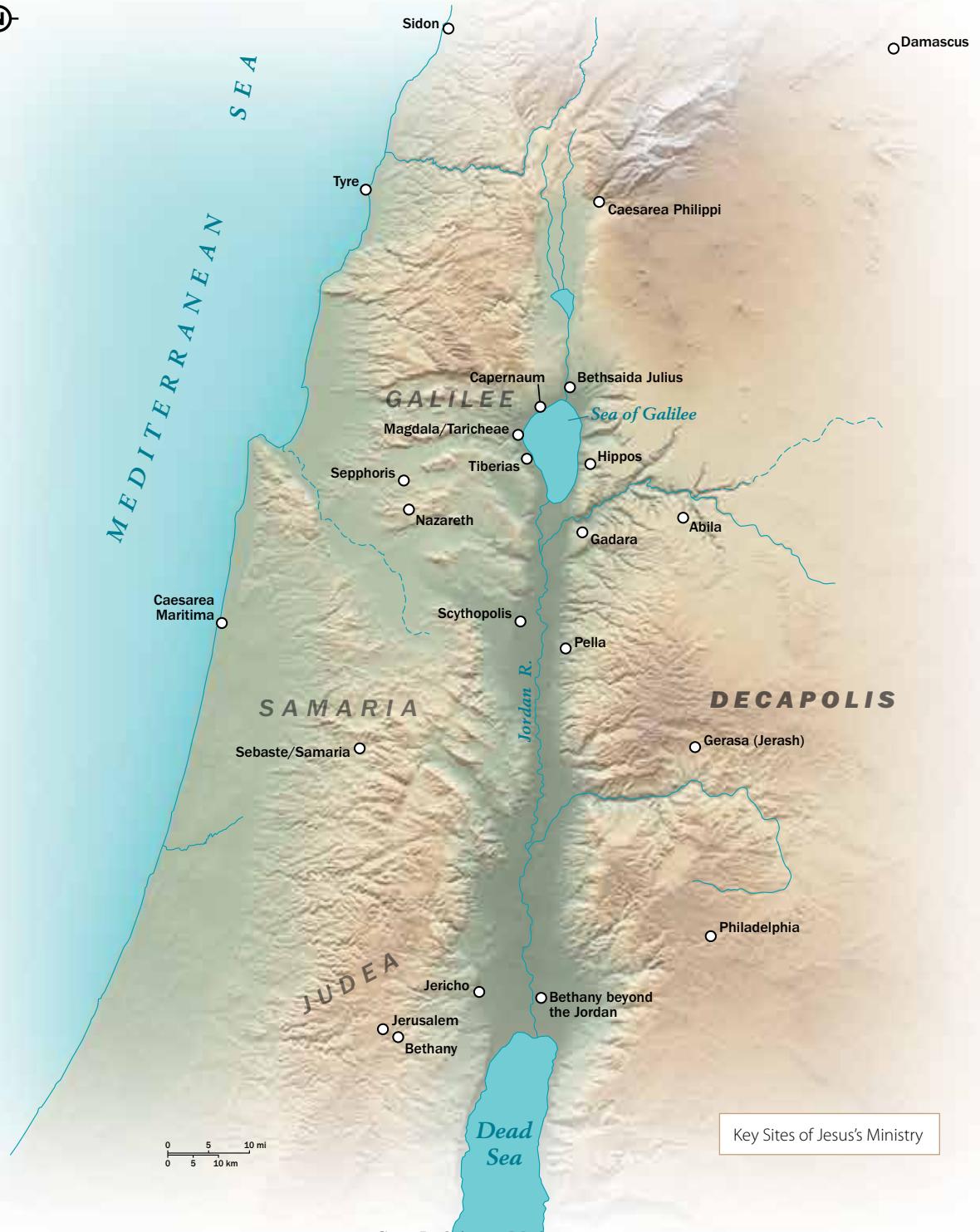
The Structure of Mark

1. Prologue (1:1–15)
 - a. Introduction: messianic herald introduced (1:1–3)
 - b. Ministry of John the Baptist (1:4–8)
 - c. Baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)
 - d. Temptation of Jesus (1:12–13)
 - e. Entrance into Galilee and message—summary of the gospel (1:14–15)
2. Jesus’s Galilean ministry (1:16–6:6)
 - a. First cycle: opening ministry (1:16–3:6)
 - i. Call of the disciples (1:16–20)
 - ii. Sabbath (a typical day) events—growing popularity (1:21–34)
 - (1) Authority in synagogue at Capernaum (1:21–28)
 - (2) Peter’s mother-in-law healed (1:29–31)
 - (3) Summary of ministry that evening (1:32–34)
 - iii. Jesus’s itinerant preaching ministry begins (1:35–39)
 - iv. Cleansing of the leper (1:40–45)
 - v. Conflict with religious leaders—growing opposition (2:1–3:6)
 - (1) Healing of the paralytic (2:1–12)
 - (2) The call of and fellowship with Levi the tax collector (2:13–17)
 - (3) The new versus the old—the theme of this section (2:18–22)
 - (4) Sabbath conflict over plucking grain (2:23–28)
 - (5) Healing and opposition intensified (3:1–6)
 - b. Second cycle: ministry by the Sea of Galilee (3:7–35)
 - i. Summary—withdrawal, large crowds, healing, and exorcism (3:7–12)
 - ii. The election of the Twelve (3:13–19)
 - iii. Rejection and discipleship—sandwiching episode (3:20–35)
 - c. Third cycle: ministry in word and deed (4:1–6:6)
 - i. Kingdom parables (4:1–34)
 - (1) Parable of the sower (4:1–20)
 - (a) The parable told (4:1–9)
 - (b) Excursus on the insider and the outsider (4:10–12)
 - (c) The parable explained—the leaders, the crowds, the disciples (4:13–20)

- (2) Parables on receptivity (4:21–25)
 - (a) The lamp on a stand (4:21–23)
 - (b) The measure (4:24–25)
- (3) Parable of seedtime and harvest (4:26–29)
- (4) Parable of the mustard seed (4:30–32)
- (5) Summary concerning parables (4:33–34)
- ii. Miracle stories (4:35–5:43)
 - (1) Stilling of the storm (4:35–41)
 - (2) The Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20)
 - (3) Two connected miracles: Jairus’s daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage (5:21–43)
- iii. Further rejection in Nazareth (6:1–6)
- d. Mission and withdrawal (6:7–8:30)
 - i. The mission of the twelve (6:7–13)
 - ii. Flashback: the death of John the Baptist (6:14–29)
 - iii. Miracles and misunderstanding (6:30–56)
 - (1) The feeding of the five thousand (6:30–44)
 - (2) Second storm: Jesus walks on the water (6:45–52)
 - (3) Summary: general healings (6:53–56)
 - iv. Dispute over clean and unclean (7:1–23)
 - v. Ministry to the Gentiles (7:24–37)
 - (1) The Syrophenician woman (7:24–30)
 - (2) The deaf mute (7:31–37)
 - vi. Feeding of the four thousand (8:1–10)
 - vii. The demand for a sign (8:11–13)
 - viii. The disciples’ misunderstanding (8:14–21)
 - ix. Healing of the blind man—two-stage miracle (8:22–26)
 - x. Peter’s confession of the Christ (8:27–30)
- 3. The journey to Jerusalem (8:31–10:52)
 - a. First passion prediction (8:31–33)
 - b. True discipleship and suffering (8:34–9:1)
 - c. Jesus’s transfiguration (9:2–13)
 - d. The healing of the demon-possessed child (9:14–29)
 - e. Second passion prediction (9:30–32)
 - f. Sayings on rewards and punishment (9:33–50)
 - i. Rivalry over greatness (9:33–37)
 - ii. Exorcism in Jesus’s name (9:38–40)
 - iii. Sayings on rewards or punishments (9:41–50)
 - (1) Reward or judgment (9:41–42)
 - (2) The offending member (9:43–48)
 - (3) The dynamics of discipleship—sayings on salt (9:49–50)

- g. Marriage and divorce (10:1–12)
- h. Jesus blesses the children (10:13–16)
- i. Riches and rewards with respect to the kingdom / cost of discipleship (10:17–31)
 - i. The rich young ruler (10:17–22)
 - ii. Lesson: the wealthy and the kingdom (10:23–27)
 - iii. Rewards for sacrifice (10:28–31)
- j. Third passion prediction (10:32–34)
- k. Rank and precedence (10:35–45)
 - l. Final event: the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10:46–52)
- 4. Prelude to the passion events (11:1–13:37)
 - a. Jesus’s triumphal entry (11:1–11)
 - b. The fig tree and the temple (11:12–26)
 - i. The cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14)
 - ii. The clearing of the temple (11:15–19)
 - iii. The withered fig tree and sayings on faith (11:20–26)
 - c. Controversies in the temple (11:27–12:37)
 - i. The issue of Jesus’s authority (11:27–33)
 - ii. Parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–12)
 - iii. Questions regarding the tribute money (12:13–17)
 - iv. Question about the resurrection (12:18–27)
 - v. Question concerning the first commandment (12:28–34)
 - vi. The Messiah and the Son of David (12:35–37)
 - d. Teaching in the temple grounds (12:38–44)
 - i. Diatribe against the scribes (12:38–40)
 - ii. The widow’s total sacrifice (12:41–44)
 - e. The Olivet Discourse (13:1–37)
 - i. Prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple (13:1–2)
 - ii. The destruction and the parousia (13:3–27)
 - (1) The disciples’ question (13:3–4)
 - (2) Warnings regarding signs (13:5–13)
 - (3) The great sacrilege and tribulation (13:14–23)
 - (4) The parousia (13:24–27)
 - iii. Parable of the fig tree (13:28–31)
 - iv. Call to vigilance (13:32–37)
- 5. Jesus’s passion and death (14:1–15:47)
 - a. Events preparing for the passion (14:1–11)
 - i. The plot unfolds: arrest and kill Jesus (14:1–2)
 - ii. The anointing at Bethany (14:3–9)
 - iii. Judas agrees to betray Jesus (14:10–11)

- b. The Last Supper (14:12–31)
 - i. Preparation for the Passover (14:12–16)
 - ii. Prophecy of betrayal (14:17–21)
 - iii. The words of institution (14:22–25)
 - iv. Conclusion and departure (14:26)
 - v. Prophecies of the failure of the disciples (14:27–31)
- c. Gethsemane (14:32–42)
- d. Jesus’s arrest and trial (14:43–15:15)
 - i. The arrest (14:43–52)
 - ii. Trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53–65)
 - iii. Peter’s threefold denial (14:66–72)
 - iv. Jesus before Pilate (15:1–15)
- e. Jesus’s crucifixion and death (15:16–41)
 - i. Mocking and crucifixion (15:16–32)
 - (1) Humiliation by the soldiers (15:16–20)
 - (2) Bearing the cross (15:21)
 - (3) Refusing the narcotic (15:22–23)
 - (4) Crucifixion: early events (15:24–27)
 - (a) Dividing up of Jesus’s clothes (15:24)
 - (b) Third hour: plaque with the charge (15:25–26)
 - (c) Two rebels crucified with Jesus (15:27)
 - (5) The taunts—unconscious prophecies (15:29–32)
 - ii. The death throes (15:33–37)
 - iii. The results (15:38–41)
 - (1) The supernatural act: temple veil torn in two (15:38)
 - (2) The centurion’s cry: “Son of God” (15:39)
 - (3) The faithful remnant: the women witnesses (15:40–41)
- f. Jesus’s burial (15:42–47)
- 6. Jesus’s resurrection (16:1–8)
 - a. The trip to the tomb (16:1–4)
 - b. The events at the tomb (16:5–7)
 - c. Failure—fear and silence (16:8)
 - [d. The problem of the longer ending (16:9–20)]



Grant R. Osborne, Mark

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Jesus’s Identity as Messiah and Son of God Established

Big Idea *The good news centers on Jesus the Messiah, who shows himself to be the Son of God by inaugurating God’s kingdom age. He is declared as such first by Old Testament prophecy and then by the wilderness voice, his forerunner John the Baptist.*

Understanding the Text

The Text in Context

This passage is the “prologue” to Mark (cf. John 1:1–18), and the purpose is to inform the reader about the primary truths in the book, especially the identification of Jesus. In the rest of the book we will see the primary groups (disciples, crowds, leaders, demons) wrestle with the truths that we, the readers, know from this prologue: Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God who has come to bring God’s final kingdom to reality and fulfill all the hopes of the Old Testament. By centering the action on John the Baptist as the forerunner and on Satan as the primary opponent, Mark also introduces us to the conflict and polar oppositions occasioned by Jesus. The passage is framed by Jesus’s Son of God status, stated at the outset (1:1) and confirmed by the very voice of God (1:11).

Structure

This prologue is framed (introduction, vv. 1–3; conclusion, vv. 14–15) with the

gospel, the arrival of God’s kingdom with Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. There are three intersecting main sections: John, who via baptism announces the need for repentance and forgiveness; the baptism of Jesus, which launches the new age of the Spirit; and Jesus’s defeat of Satan in the wilderness.

Interpretive Insights

1:1 *The beginning of the good news.* This can refer to the opening of this prologue alone or to the start of Mark’s Gospel as a whole. Since this verse is a proper heading for the whole book, the latter is the

In Mark’s prologue he refers to Jesus as the Messiah. This theological concept, most fully developed in Christianity, has also been found in the writings of the community at Qumran (second century BC to first century AD), which came to light when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in nearby caves. Scholars continue to study the Qumran community’s use of the term “messiah” and their hope of a coming messianic figure. This photo shows cave 4, where the largest collection of the Qumran community manuscripts was found.



primary thrust. Mark tells us what he wants us to conclude after reading his Gospel. In fact, as the first writer, Mark has in a real sense invented the genre of “gospel,” from a Greek term that in its verbal form (*euangelizomai*) means “to proclaim, inform” and as a noun (*euangelion*) is used often in both the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the Hellenistic world for “a good report” (e.g., the birth of an emperor) or “news of victory.” In the New Testament it also describes the “good news” or “joyous message” of God’s intervention in a sinful world by sending his Son to bring salvation to humankind.

Key Themes of Mark 1:1–8

- Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, which is the core of the kingdom message.
- As messianic forerunner, John introduces the fulfillment of the Isaianic promise by preparing the way for the coming of Jesus.
- As wilderness prophet, John introduces the nation to the need for repentance and confession for forgiveness.

Jesus as Messiah and Son of God

Messiah. The idea of a messiah (Heb. “anointed one”) began with the expectation of a restored Davidic monarchy centered on a figure who would fulfill the hope of an eternal Davidic king (see Ps. 110:1; Isa. 7:14; 9:1–6; 11:1; Jer. 33:14–26; Ezek. 17:22–24; Mic. 5:1–4; Zech. 9:9–10). At times this took the form of two messiahs (a royal “messiah of Israel” and a priestly “messiah of Aaron” at Qumran [1QS 9:9–11; CD-A 12:22–23]), but mainly the expectations centered on a divinely sent conqueror who would defeat the enemies of Israel and return the nation to the glory days of David (1 En. 39:6; 46:1–3; 48:8–10; 4 Ezra 7:26–44; Pss. Sol. 17:21–45). Jesus fulfilled this role as royal messiah, but in his first advent he came as Suffering Servant (Isa. 52–53; cf. Mark 8:31; 9:30–31; 10:32–34). The throne whereupon Jesus becomes Davidic Messiah is the cross, and he enters his glory (Mark 12:35–37) not just at the resurrection but also at his sacrificial death “for many” (10:45; 14:24). He will be the conquering king at his second coming (13:24–27; 14:62).

Son of God. All four Gospels describe Jesus in terms of divine sonship, and this is a major theme in Mark. In the Old Testament the phrase/concept “son of God” is used of angels (Gen. 6:2; Dan. 3:25), Israel (Exod. 4:22–23; Mal. 2:10), and the king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7), with all specifying a unique relationship to God. In the Old Testament and Judaism in general the title was rarely used of the coming Messiah, though it is anchored in 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7; 89:26–27 and was utilized this way at Qumran (4Q174 1:10–14; 4Q246). For Jesus and the early church it was a key designation, describing the uniqueness of his intimacy with his Father, tantamount in many ways to a declaration of his divinity. Jesus is declared by God to be his “beloved son” (Mark 1:11; 9:7 [cf. Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1]). The demons recognize this status (3:11; 5:7), as does the centurion at the cross (15:39), but the disciples in Mark seemingly fail to come to this realization (cf. Mark 6:52 with Matt. 14:33). For Mark this status is a culmination of his Gospel, and Jesus’s exclusive and exalted status is closely connected to his resurrection (12:10–11) and second coming (8:38 [“the glory of his Father”]; 13:32).

about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. The TNIV places “Son of God” in a footnote because it is missing in a couple of ancient manuscripts; however, it is found in the vast majority and may have been simply passed over by a couple of copyists (so the new NIV [2011] restored it). The Greek has “gospel of Jesus,” most likely an objective genitive best translated as here “about Jesus.” The two titles sum up the primary christological emphasis in Mark: Jesus (whose Hebrew name, “Yehoshua,” means “Yahweh is salvation”) is both the Messiah (though in the Greek text it occurs without the article, it is certainly a title)¹ and the Son of God (see the sidebar). As the Messiah, Jesus fulfills the promise of a final Davidic ruler as well as the Isaianic Suffering Servant who will become king by giving himself as the sacrifice for us on the cross. As the Son of God, he is defined by his unique sonship (eight times in Mark), with God as his Father (four times in Mark).

1:2 *written in Isaiah the prophet.* Referring primarily to Isaiah 40:3, what follows also incorporates Exodus 23:20 (on the “messenger of the covenant,” an angel in Exodus) and Malachi 3:1 (on the messianic “preparer”). Isaiah 40 is the turning point in that book, pivoting from the prediction

of the exile (39:5–6) to God’s promise to “comfort” his people (40:1). The supreme comfort is to be found in the final return from exile to be accomplished in the coming of Jesus Christ.

messenger . . . who will prepare your way. Here this applies to John the Baptist, the messianic forerunner. This is the only fulfillment passage in Mark (Matthew has eleven), and this shows that every element of the launching of Jesus’s messianic ministry comes on the basis of God’s predetermined plan. John is the God-sent “messenger” (*angelos*) from Exodus 23:20, fulfilling the role of the angel in the exodus who went before the nation on the way through the wilderness. This may well depict the coming of Jesus (“your way” refers to Israel in Exod. 23:20 but to Jesus here, perhaps as the true Israel), so a “new exodus”² is taking place in his arrival. From Malachi 3:1 comes the prophecy that God will send this messenger to “prepare the way before me” as he arrives to bring judgment to a recalcitrant nation. Again this forerunner is John, who comes bearing a message of deliverance through repentance and of judgment. But the primary figure is Jesus, who is the presence of God arriving in justice and judgment, bringing with him a new exodus from sin.



“John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:4). The region where John ministered, most likely west of the Dead Sea near the mouth of the Jordan River, was desolate and barren.

1:3 *a voice of one calling in the wilderness.* The themes binding the three Old Testament texts are of a messenger from the wilderness preparing the way for the Messiah. Isaiah 40:3 is the primary text, and it was a core text for both Qumran (1QS 8:13–14) and Christianity (the early church even called itself “the Way” [e.g., Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23], probably on the basis of this). It stated God’s intention to bring the exiles home on a divinely prepared highway from Babylon to Zion, with God removing all obstacles. Here both the return from exile and the exodus are fulfilled in Jesus, and John is the wilderness voice proclaiming the return to God through the arrival of Jesus of those exiled from God through their sin and unbelief. The final promises of God are now inaugurated, and this is a kind of Roman “triumph,” a victory procession as the king comes. The wilderness is the place of testing and messianic crisis (the Essenes went into the desert to signify the necessity of purifying an unclean nation) and also of divine succor and comfort (1 Kings 19:4–18; Rev. 12:6, 14). Both ideas are part of the wilderness motif in Mark.

1:4 *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* John’s baptizing was a startling event. At Qumran adherents went through daily lustrations in a ritual pool (1QS 5:12–14), and Jewish people experienced many ceremonial washings (e.g., Num. 19). Neither provides close parallels. Gentile proselytes experienced a one-time baptism as an initiation rite, and that would provide an interesting parallel (John would be saying that the nation had become like Gentiles), but there is no evidence of such a practice before AD 50.³ It may be best to see this as a unique event, as God led John

to provide a brand-new metaphor on spiritual purity attained through repentance (a change of heart involving not only sorrow for sin but also a new lifestyle) signified by baptism (as in 2 Kings 5:14, where Naaman immerses himself in the Jordan). Repentance and confession (1:5) for forgiveness (the judicial result) are God’s requirements for anyone to be right with him, and this is closely connected with “believe the gospel” in 1:15 below.

1:5 *whole Judean countryside . . . went out.* John’s immense appeal prepares for Jesus’s popularity with the crowds, and this will be one of the primary themes in Mark 1. The fact that they “went out” is a further part of the “new exodus” motif (cf. Exod. 13:4, 8; Deut. 23:4).

1:6 *camel’s hair . . . leather belt . . . locusts and wild honey.* John’s clothing and ascetic diet present him as a prophet like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), continuing John’s fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, 4:5–6 as the Elijah-like forerunner of the Messiah. The answer to the spiritual needs of Israel cannot come from the well-dressed Jerusalem establishment but rather will arise through a wilderness prophet who rejects the fine things of this world (cf. Jesus having “no place to lay his head” in Matt. 8:20).

1:7–8 *one more powerful than I.* John’s message is powerful, but he is preparing for one who is incomparably greater, who possesses the “power” of God himself. John is not even worthy to be his slave, to “untie” the straps of his sandals (the act of a slave). This coming one will show his power by “baptizing with the Spirit,” a messianic reference to the prophesied outpouring of the Spirit, a sign of the last days (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:25–27; Joel 2:28). In Isaiah 11:2

the Messiah is infused with “the Spirit . . . of might,” so this great power is seen not just in miracles and a mighty ministry but also in his baptism with the Spirit, meaning that not only will he possess the Spirit, but also he will immerse his followers in the Spirit (Ezek. 35:25–27), a power that only God possessed. This was fulfilled at Pentecost but is also fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit upon all believers at conversion (Rom. 8:14–17).

Theological Insights

Mark here introduces the primary purpose of his Gospel: to tell the world about Jesus Messiah, Son of God. He is a prophet yet more than a prophet. He is God’s promised Messiah, the anointed Son who has been sent into this world to sacrifice himself for the salvation of humankind. Second, Mark centers on fulfillment, the finalization of the expectations of the Old Testament saints and prophets for God to intervene in this world. The Old Testament again and again points forward to the coming of Jesus. Finally, this section centers on the “gospel” (1:1, 15), the “good news” about God’s redemptive work in Jesus, anticipated in the Baptist’s ministry calling upon the people to “repent” and receive “the forgiveness of sins.”

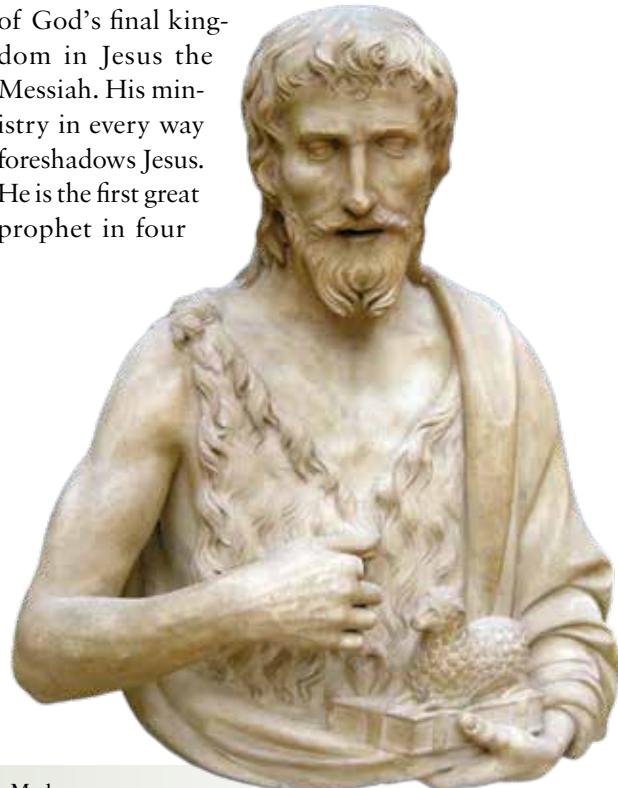
Teaching the Text

1. *Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God.* This is the core theme of Mark’s Christology, developed throughout his work. We

Mark points to John the Baptist as the messenger who will prepare the way for Jesus. This sculpture depicts John the Baptist wearing clothing of camel hair (Jacopo Sansovino, sixteenth century AD).

must help people to recognize that Jesus is more than their friend; he is their Lord. As Messiah, Jesus is our “anointed” king. There are two aspects: he is the royal or Davidic Messiah, the one who sits at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; cf. Mark 12:35–37) and is exalted to the heavens. At the same time he is the suffering Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52–53 who will give his life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, making it possible for “many” to experience God’s salvation (Mark 10:45; 14:25–27). His “Son of God” status dominates this passage (1:1, 11) and the Christology of Mark. He is the unique Son who himself is very God and, as God, brings final salvation into this evil world.

2. *John the Baptist is the messianic forerunner.* John fulfills Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 by becoming the one who “prepares the way” for the coming of God’s final kingdom in Jesus the Messiah. His ministry in every way foreshadows Jesus. He is the first great prophet in four



hundred years, the one coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), yet he gives way to Jesus, the greater prophet (a major emphasis in Luke 1–3) who will perform the miracles of Elijah and bring God’s salvation to humankind. He preaches repentance (Mark 1:4), preparing for Jesus’s proclamation, “Repent and believe” (1:15). His task is to prepare the highway so that Jesus can lead lost humankind to Zion, bringing redemption to all.

Illustrating the Text

Jesus the Messiah as the Suffering Servant

Popular Culture: When a person meets the queen of England, a complicated royal etiquette is to be followed. This includes a “no touch” rule, which all visitors, including dignitaries, are to follow. In 1992 Australian prime minister Paul Keating was assailed by the media when he put his arm around the queen. The queen’s position demands that the royal etiquette be followed in every detail. But this is not Jesus. Although he is our anointed king, he came as the Suffering Servant who would eat with sinners, touch lepers, and heal the broken. He came to serve us by suffering on a cross so that we might have life.

Preparing the way for Jesus

Testimony: The role of John the Baptist was to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of the Messiah. Tell (or invite someone else to tell) about a person God has used in your life, or how God has used you in the life of another, to prepare the way for Jesus. Challenge your listeners to think of one or two people whom God has placed in their lives who do not know Jesus. Encourage them to ask God, “How can you use me to prepare the way for Jesus?”

A message of repentance

Sports: “Repentance” means changing one’s mind in order to change one’s actions. On October 25, 1964, Jim Marshall of the Minnesota Vikings recovered a fumble and ran sixty-six yards in the wrong direction into his own end zone, resulting in a safety for the other team. Marshall’s perspective was confused when he recovered the fumble, and it led him to run the wrong way with the ball. We too are often confused with regard to our perspective in life, and it leads us to make poor life choices. We think that we see clearly, but actually we are moving in the wrong direction and need to repent. When we lose perspective and head in the wrong direction, it usually costs a lot more than points on a scoreboard.