

Introducing Jesus, *the Son of God*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

FOUR ACCOUNTS, ONE LORD. Each of the four Gospel writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has a particular emphasis on the life and ministry of Jesus. Each begins his Gospel in a manner that hints at the portrait he will develop. Matthew’s first words are: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). That is, Jesus is not only Jewish but He is of the royal line. Matthew pitches his Gospel especially to Jewish readers as he shows that Jesus was Israel’s true King. Luke, on the other hand, addresses his account to “most excellent Theophilus” (1:1-4). He has Gentile readers in view and uses an introduction that they will be familiar with. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). Throughout his Gospel we are conscious that Jesus is the Word made flesh, “full of grace and truth” (1:14).

This week we’ll take a look at Mark’s inspired opening and the special emphasis he conveyed.

The Week at a Glance: What does Mark’s opening of his account of Christ’s life suggest from the outset? What kind of start did Mark have in ministry? What did he mean by the term *gospel*? Why the emphasis on Jesus as “the Son of God”?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 1:1-20.*

Memory Text: “A voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’” (*Mark 1:11, RSV*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 2.*

The Writer, John Mark

The Gospel we are studying this quarter does not mention the name of the writer, but it was early attributed to Mark, and rightly so. Mark was not a prominent person in the early church; thus, it would be highly unlikely for him to be dubbed the author unless he really was. That's one of the great things about what our God can do: He can take even the lowliest of people and place them in positions of great prominence and influence (*see Genesis 40, 41*).

Mark, though, didn't actually have the greatest start in ministry. In fact, early on he proved himself unworthy of the high calling that this work involved.

Read Acts 15:36-40. Why was Paul so determined not to allow Mark to come with them?

“It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 169, 170.

How did Paul's attitude toward Mark later change? *2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24.*

What an incredible change on the part of Paul toward Mark. Do you think that Paul simply became more tolerant of someone who abandoned him; or, perhaps, was it more likely that Mark had indeed changed into someone whom Paul could now trust?

Look back in your own life to where you utterly blew it yet were given an opportunity to redeem yourself. How much did that new opportunity mean to you? How does that reflect, in a small way, the great principles of grace and forgiveness that God gives to us? Maybe there's someone whom you need to do the same for now, as well?

The Gospel Begins (*Mark 1:1*).

Read Mark 1:1 and contrast it with the openings of the other Gospels. What main difference do you see?

Mark's beginning seems abrupt. He passes over Jesus' genealogy, His miraculous conception, and His dramatic birth. He gives not a hint of the visit of the Magi, the revelation to the shepherds, or King Herod's diabolical plot to kill the Baby. We hear nothing about Jesus' flight to Egypt or His early years as a carpenter in Nazareth. It isn't that these facts are unimportant—they are important. But for Mark, and for us, they aren't most important. What Mark wants the reader to get from the outset is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Study other biblical references to learn what “Son of God” means. Note especially Luke 1:34, 35; John 10:30; Phil.2:5-11; Col.1:13-19; Heb. 1:1-3. What do these texts tell us about who Jesus really is? Why is knowledge about His identity so important to us?

The unique role of the Holy Spirit in Mary's conception shows us that the Man Jesus was also the Son of God. But the term “Son of God” has a much greater meaning: It tells us that He shares the very nature of God—that He is truly God, always has been and always will be. Thus, the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists declare under article 4: “God the Eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. . . . Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, p. 36.

Mark makes no reference to the virgin birth, most likely because he wants to emphasize the eternal Sonship of Jesus. And he calls this the “gospel,” which is an old Greek term (*euaggelion*) that originally meant “news of victory” in war. For the followers of Jesus, that term no longer meant good news in general but the good news that centers in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He IS the good news, He IS the gospel! Using this idea of the gospel as “news of victory” as the background, what is the victory that you have in your life now because of Jesus? What was won for you? What was defeated? What difference does this victory mean for you now, today?

The Messenger *(Mark 1:2-8).*

Before all the great interventions of God in history, He sends a message to prepare the people. “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NIV*). So, before the greatest event this world ever will see, He raised up a messenger, John the Baptist. And, just as Messiah’s coming was foretold in Bible prophecy, the messenger also was predicted. Notice that Mark quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, although he mentions only Isaiah as the source.

What was John the Baptist’s role and message?

Mark 1:2, 3

Mark 1:4

Mark 1:7

John’s mission pointed beyond himself. He was a forerunner, a herald, to proclaim that One far greater than he was about to appear and to get the people ready to meet Him.

The texts emphasize preparing the way. The picture is one of road building. Just as today engineers involved in constructing highways cut through mountains, fill in holes and depressions, and straighten curves, so John was a “road builder” for Jesus, the Son of God (notice how Isaiah 40:4 elaborates on the highway construction illustration). John carried out his mission in three ways: (1) by announcing that Messiah was about to appear, (2) by calling the people to get ready by turning from their sins, and (3) by baptizing them as a public demonstration that they had heeded the message of the Coming One.

John never sought to draw attention to himself. He seemed devoid of self-seeking; his head was not turned by the crowds that flocked to hear him. This self-effacing messenger could say from the heart: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (*John 3:30*).

We Seventh-day Adventists believe that, like John, God has raised us up to sound a prophetic message about the coming of Jesus. What can we learn from John the Baptist as we seek to be true to our mission? In what way or ways is our task similar to and different from John’s mission? What must you change in your own life to be better suited to take part in this task?

The Commissioning

Compare Mark's account of the Baptist's ministry with the other Gospels (*Matthew 3, Mark 1:4-11, Luke 3:1-22, John 1:6-8, 19-35*). What parallels do you see? What differences? What advantages are there to having different accounts, different perspectives, of the same events? Should they always be expected to agree on every point? If not, why not?

Mark's treatment of John the Baptist is by far the shortest of the four Gospels. Mark is focused on Jesus the Son of God, and he cuts through all the information about John the Baptist to get to Jesus. John's part in the story is twofold: He is the forerunner of the Messiah, and he baptized Jesus. Mark tells us nothing about the circumstances of John's birth, as does Luke; he is saying nothing of the later work of the Baptist, as do Matthew and John. The only other reference to John the Baptist after the brief description of Mark 1:9-13 is a description of John's death, slotted into the ongoing account of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (*Mark 6:14-29*).

Read Mark 1:10, 11. How does this event fit in with the opening line of Mark's account of Jesus? What crucial point is being emphasized?

By the heavenly dove of the Spirit and the Voice from heaven, the Godhead demonstrated to the world that Jesus of Nazareth was not just another human. He was truly human, but He was much more—He was God's Son, truly God. Under divine inspiration, Mark stresses this point, for it's an important one for the Christian faith.

Suppose you believed that Jesus were just a great man, rather than the Son of God Himself. How would that impact your faith, your deeds, your whole Christian life in general? What difference does it make that He is the Son of God?

The Ministry Begins *(Mark 1:14-20).*

What place did Jesus give to the element of time as He began His public ministry? (*Matt. 3:2, 4:17, NIV; compare Mark 1:4, 15.*)

The first message of Jesus was identical with John the Baptist's: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (*1:4, 15; compare Matt. 3:2, 4:17*). But Jesus added a new dimension: Whereas John preached that the long-awaited Messiah was about to come, Jesus proclaimed: "The time has come!"

Seventh-day Adventists are much attuned to the importance of time in God's plan. Thus, we see in Jesus' dramatic statement "The time has come!" not only a general reference to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah but a specific reference to the time prophecies of Daniel. In his great 70 weeks of years prediction (*Dan. 9:24-27*), the ancient seer foretold the precise time of Messiah's appearance. And, we believe, just as Jesus appeared right on time at His first coming, so He will come again right on God's time. The apostle Paul wrote: "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son" (*Gal. 4:4, NIV*). That was true at the Incarnation; it will be true again for the glorious Second Advent.

Study the account of the call of the first disciples in Mark 1:16-20. **Put yourself in the scene by the lake; join Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they cast nets for fish or get ready to fish. Then Jesus walks by and calls, "Come; follow Me!" And without hesitation—"at once"—they drop their nets and follow Him. Why should you find it surprising that they would leave their all so abruptly? How do you account for their apparently spontaneous response? What would it take to get you to do the same thing?**

The fishermen who left their nets and boats to follow Jesus were not seeking financial reward. Fishing was hard work, but they knew it well and could maintain their livelihood. But Jesus of Nazareth had neither riches, fame, nor an organized movement. Following Him meant indeed launching out into the deep in ways they had never before experienced. Only one fact can account for their actions, which to others would not have made sense; they saw something in Jesus that touched their souls. Seeing Him, hearing His voice, they were moved to a decision that would change their lives.

If you are a follower of Christ, what have you had to give up for Him? If your answer is "Nothing," what might 2 Corinthians 13:5 say to you?

Further Study: Compare Matthew's and Luke's accounts with the verses in Mark we studied this week: *Matthew 3:1–4:22*, *Luke 3:1–22, 5:1–11*. Read “Misrepresentations of the Godhead,” *Evangelism*, pp. 613–617; “The Baptism” and “The Call by the Sea,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 109–113, pp. 244–251.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Why could an angel not be our Savior? What if Christ were not eternally God but a “god” created by God—what difference would that make? Think of the marvelous confidence we can have in Jesus, our Savior, Lord, and great High Priest. Discuss in class the implications of the deity of Christ.
- 2** Suppose you were there at the baptism of Jesus; you saw the Spirit descending, you heard the Voice from heaven. What kind of excuses could you make that could cause you to doubt that it really was something from God? How do people, today, do the same thing with evidence for God's existence, power, and care? In what ways do we, even as believers, have to be careful of falling into the same trap?
- 3** The disciples had to make some radical changes in their lives in order to follow Jesus. What about us? Have we had to make radical changes, as well? If you haven't, what might that tell you about your walk with the Lord?
- 4** Have someone in class explain the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. Why should every Christian understand this important prophecy?

Summary: In the first words of his Gospel, Mark introduces Jesus as “Son of God.” This expression, which points to Jesus' oneness and equality with God, will underline the entire Gospel of Mark. In the passage that opens this Gospel and that was the focus of our study this week, we immediately found evidences of Jesus' divine Sonship: (1) He came in fulfillment of prophecy, (2) He came right on God's time, and (3) at the baptism that inaugurated His public ministry, the Father declared Him to be “My beloved Son.”

Finding Faith in North Korea

John McGhee

There are faithful Christians in North Korea. No one knows just how many, but we know they are there. Here is the story of one of them.

Mrs. Kim* became a Seventh-day Adventist almost 50 years ago. Following the Korean War, she was trapped in North Korea, separated from family and friends.

Recently Mrs. Kim managed to travel from North Korea via the Korean “underground railroad” to China and on to South Korea. Her accomplices created a new identity for her so that she could visit her family in South Korea. While in Seoul she told church leaders about her amazing epic of faith.

She has been isolated from other Adventists, but she has talked with God constantly, daily sensed His presence, and often heard Him communicate with her. For years she kept her precious Bible hidden in a small cupboard, knowing that if the authorities ever caught her with it, she would be tortured and perhaps killed.

One day several years ago, Mrs. Kim felt a strong impression to put her Bible into her son’s backpack. A few minutes later she answered a knock on her door and found two policemen. The men brushed her aside, strode into her kitchen, and walked straight to the cupboard where she normally kept her Bible. She is sure that it was God who had warned her to move her Bible.

She had to find someplace to hide her Bible. That evening she dug a hole near the utility pole near her front door, placed her carefully wrapped Bible into the hole, and covered it with dirt.

Daily Mrs. Kim dug up the Bible and read it. She grew stronger spiritually and physically. Then one afternoon three men, including a guard and two utility workers, knocked on her door. “We need to move the pole in your front yard,” one of them said.

Instantly praying, she heard a voice, Invite them inside for tea! She invited them in, and they accepted. While the men sipped tea and ate crackers, a crack of thunder exploded in the air. Rain began to fall, and the men jumped from their chairs. Hurriedly the men ran to the truck, shouting, “We’ll come back tomorrow!”

The men did return the following day. But by that time, the Bible was safely moved to a new hiding place.

As Mrs. Kim finished her testimony, she said, “Almost all the other Adventists my age are already dead. I don’t know why God has allowed me to live 79 years. The believers I know in North Korea end their prayers with a request to be faithful martyrs when the time comes.”

* Not her real name.

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