

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?

Key Text: *Mark 1:1*

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish the fact that each of the Gospels plays a unique part in revealing Christ's character.
2. To understand why Mark introduced Christ as he did.
3. To demonstrate how Mark reveals Jesus as the Son of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. Author and Authorship (*Acts 15:37-39*).

- A. Although the book of Mark does not name its author, the traditions that say it is the historical person of Mark are reliable.
- B. Mark is an example of someone whose character Christ transformed.
- C. The fact that Mark wrote his Gospel is an indication of God's grace.

II. Christ's Early Life and Ministry (*Mark 1:9-11*).

- A. The beginning of Mark is abrupt. It includes no nativity story.
- B. Most of the information Mark presents concerns Christ's Sonship.

III. Christ's Message and Ministry (*Mark 1:14, 15*).

- A. The Jesus presented by Mark is a Messianic figure.
- B. Mark presents Jesus' message as prophetic and apocalyptic.
- C. Mark portrays Jesus as fulfilling the time prophecies of Daniel.

Summary: While the four Gospels tell essentially the same story, they tell it in different ways to different audiences. A close examination of the Gospels leads us to the conclusion that they complement rather than contradict one another. The Gospel of Mark is notable for the succinct manner in which it presents the essentials of Jesus' ministry and message.

COMMENTARY

Mark generally is accepted by scholars as the first Gospel to have been written. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means "to see together," indicating the three Gospels have much in common. A comparison of them shows that Mark is an important source from "which Matthew and Luke drew in composing their accounts of Jesus."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 178. For example, of Mark's 661 verses, Matthew utilizes 606, and Luke uses 320 (see William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* [Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977], p. 2).

Mark's key text could well be 10:45: " 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many' " (*NKJV*). Service and sacrifice define the ministry

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?

of Mark's Jesus. Mark records more miracles than any other Gospel and devotes nearly half his writing to the Passion Week.

This week's lesson presents the nature of the gospel, the preparation for the gospel, and the beginning of Christ's ministry.

I. The Gospel: Its Nature.

Mark makes it clear that the gospel is not of human making. The good news of salvation can neither originate in, nor be made effective by, human thought or effort. The gospel is and always shall be that of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (*Mark 1:1*). Its origin goes back to eternity and the throne room of God. Before sin raised its ugly head on earth, before the foundation of the world was laid (*1 Pet. 1:20, Rev. 13:8*), the Godhead conceived a plan to deal with sin. This plan is for the Son of God to become the "Son of Man . . . to give His life a ransom for many" (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*). Christ's divinity makes the gospel effective. His humanity makes it possible.

II. The Gospel: Preparing the Way.

Although God's plan had to await the Incarnation, He did not leave His people in darkness. The Old Testament is a series of promises revealed through the covenant, the sanctuary system, and the prophets. The Old Testament, then, is the anticipation of the good news of salvation; the New Testament is the fulfillment.

Mark identifies this continuity between the Old and the New Testaments in the ministry of John the Baptist, whose mission strides across the promises and their fulfillment. Foretold by Isaiah and Malachi (*Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:2, 3*) and prepared by God's Spirit, John became the pavior of the Savior. He was the paver of the road, and the paving involved calling sinners to repentance and baptizing them in anticipation of the soon coming of the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (*Mark 1:4-8*). To prepare the way for the Savior's work is still life's highest calling.

III. The Gospel: The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry.

Mark begins Jesus' ministry with His baptism. Jesus did not need to be baptized. Rather, He did so to identify "Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111. Jesus saw this identification with humanity as necessary for the fulfillment of His work on the cross—"a baptism to be baptized with" (*Luke 12:50; see also Rom. 6:1-4*).

Baptism also was important to Jesus, because at His baptism He was affirmed as an equal part of the Trinity. The Father's voice from heaven and the seal of the Holy Spirit (*Mark 1:9-11*) left no doubt on earth or in heaven that, as a member of the Godhead, Christ is the Gospel—the only way to salvation.

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?

Hell's fury immediately followed Heaven's approval, as Satan attacked Jesus after He spent 40 days in the wilderness (*vss. 12, 13*). The closer one is to God, the stronger the enemy's attack. But Jesus showed that to be victorious is to rely on God's promises (*see Matt. 4:4, 7, 10*).

Having been divinely commissioned, Jesus began His ministry with this historic announcement, " 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' " (*Mark 1:15; see also Gal. 4:4*). God works according to His own schedule; and the strikes of the heavenly clock produce inevitable action. God knows neither haste nor delay.

The kingdom Jesus preached about involves both a call and a fel-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 1:1-20*

- ❶ The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written by different individuals with different audiences in mind. Which is your favorite? What makes it your favorite? How is your choice a reflection of you and your Christian experience?
- ❷ The first sentence of Mark's Gospel begins by claiming that Jesus Christ is "the Son of God" (*Mark 1:1*). The rest of the book is dedicated to showing how, by word and deed, Jesus demonstrated His divinity. What evidence in your life indicates Jesus is the Son of God and your life has been touched by His power?
- ❸ The ministry of John the Baptist is a type of the ministry God's people will assume before Jesus returns (*Mark 1:2, 3*). In what ways should we be preparing the way for the Lord? What are the elements of our message to the world? Can you summarize the message in one sentence? In one word?
- ❹ Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry. The event was solemnized by a demonstration that was both visible and audible. Can you think of other Bible characters whose public ministry began with a similar type of demonstration? Has there been a time in your experience when you felt God anointing you for a particular purpose or ministry? If so, what was it, and how did He call you to serve Him?
- ❺ Jesus' first disciples were not learned or theologically sophisticated; yet, Jesus called them to follow Him. What characteristics made them useful for Christ's purposes? What rough edges still needed to be smoothed out? What correlation is there between their experience and ours?

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?

lowship. The call is basic: Turn away from sin and believe in Jesus. But a call without fellowship renders the kingdom an empty philosophy; and fellowship without a call renders the kingdom nothing but a social club. From the inception, Jesus preached the good news and built a discipleship to witness to His saving power. *Repent, believe, follow*, and *go* thus became the bricks of Christian discipleship.

Witnessing

The core, the very heart, of the account of Jesus' ministry that the Gospel writer Mark shares with us is that Jesus and His Father are One. Jesus was not a created being; He was not suddenly brought into existence for the purpose of ministering to humankind and just doing good works. No, Jesus IS God; He has always been; His existence has no beginning and no end. He is forever and ever. The plan of salvation, culminating in His death on the cross, was conceived by God the Father and God the Son. God the Son, Jesus, came from heaven to planet Earth to accomplish the mission of salvation, and to do this He accepted humanity's likeness and form. However, He never lost, exchanged, or compromised His divinity. How blessed we are to know that this God who became a man loves us so very much that He would go to such lengths to set us free from sin and ensure our future salvation! Our gratitude should know no bounds.

So, when someone saves your life, how do you express your enormous gratitude? How do you begin to thank this person adequately for the gift of life? How do you repay him or her?

Jesus has shared with us how we may best reward and thank Him. He just asks that we follow Him, that we honor His law, and that we share the good news of salvation with others.

Sharing the good news with others should be as natural for us as breathing. It will be that natural if we have truly accepted Jesus and His way of life.

Most people are constantly looking for new and better ways to improve themselves and their lifestyles. So, one way to witness for Him (and improve your own health at the same time) is to drop by a gym regularly or attend an exercise class (go to one in the community so you can meet nonchurch members). Get to know the people. You'll have a wonderful opportunity to share a common interest—the quest for better health and improved healthful living practices. Over time, you'll find more opportunities to share God's love and the plan of salvation with them.

Witnessing from the heart daily shows Jesus how much we love Him and how eternally grateful we are for His supreme sacrifice on our behalf.

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?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “When Billy Graham preached in Shreveport, Louisiana, liquor sales dropped by 40 per cent and the sale of Bibles increased 300 per cent. During a mission in Seattle, amongst the results there is stated quite simply, ‘Several impending divorce actions were cancelled.’ In Greensboro, North Carolina, the report was that ‘the entire social structure of the city was affected.’ . . .

“Where Christ is allowed to come the antiseptic of the Christian faith cleanses the moral poison of society and leaves it pure and clean.”—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 13.

Thought Questions:

① Monday’s lesson explains the gospel as the “news of victory.” John the Baptist was the bearer of this good news. What reactions do you think took place as a result of John’s message? What is the reaction of the world today to the “news of victory”? In what ways is our church, as did John the Baptist or Billy Graham, shaking up towns? What kinds of improvement can be made to our methods of delivering the gospel?

② John the Baptist was by no means “mainstream.” Everything about him—his clothing, his food, his mannerisms—was a contradiction to the institutions and cultures of Jerusalem. Were his peculiarities necessary to his function as the bearer of news? Explain. Parallels his peculiarities to that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. How does our peculiar “culture” help us in the spreading of the gospel? Does it deter in any way?

Application Questions:

① When Christianity touches a community, there most certainly will be positive changes. Identify the needs of your community. Then come up with at least three specific ways Christianity and your church can fulfill these needs.

② The Gospel of Mark leaves out many of the details recorded in the other three Gospels. Mark’s emphasis is the Sonship of the divine Jesus. Mark is careful not to clutter his message with trivia. His strong focus on the divinity of Jesus makes the book powerful. How can our church, as did Mark, eliminate the clutter and focus on the crux of our message? And what is the crux?

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.”