

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Mark

SB_MK2_Chapters 1-8

Since this study is intended to be a survey of the book of Mark, we will only focus upon a few selected passages. In our previous lesson (SB_MK1_Introduction), we obtained an understanding of the author, the date of writing, the recipients, the major theme(s), some literary features of particular note, and we briefly discussed some of the passages found in Mark that were not in Matthew's Gospel account. In the way of a brief review, here are some highlights from that lesson:

Author	➤ Mark (Roman name) or John (Jewish name)	➤ A cousin of Barnabas ➤ Enjoyed significant contact with the leaders of the Jerusalem church
Date of Writing	➤ Circa A.D. 64 to 65	➤ Under Peter's supervision ➤ Written in Rome
Recipients	➤ Gentile Christians primarily in Rome	➤ Mark doesn't assume a familiarity with Hebrew Scripture and traditions
Major Themes	➤ The nature and cost of discipleship	➤ The Gentile audience in Rome was facing persecution and martyrdom
Literary Features of Note	➤ Emphasis upon the deeds of Christ	➤ The adverb "immediately" is used 42 times – more than in all of the rest of the NT combined

John's Baptism (1:4-11)

In this passage, Mark provides a brief description of John's person and ministry. Next to Jesus Christ and perhaps Peter, John the Baptist is the most prominent person in the Gospels.¹ As we saw in our study of Matthew, if Israel had received Jesus as her Messiah, John would have been the predicted Elijah (Matt 17:10-13 cf. Matt 11:14; Mal 3:1; 4:5, 6).

Mark indicates that "all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem" went out to John and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River. Matthew makes a similar statement in Matthew 3:5. While it is doubtful that Mark (or Matthew) meant that every single person who lived in Jerusalem or Judea came out to be baptized, there is no doubt that a great number did receive John's baptism. John's baptism was a recurring event that drew large crowds and Mark (and Matthew) seems to present a picture of a continuous stream of followers who trekked through the wilderness to be baptized by John.

All three of the Synoptic Gospels identify the place of John's ministry as the wilderness. As the son of a priest (Lu 1:5, 13), John could have succeeded his father in a priestly ministry in the temple in Jerusalem. However, God called John to a unique ministry that began outside the established religious system, both geographically and from the standpoint of what he preached.²

¹ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 28.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ – A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1981), 82.

Many times in history, the most significant spiritual impact has occurred outside the realm of established and accepted religious circles.

When the temple was originally built, God occupied the temple as His dwelling place (2 Chron 5:13-14). As Israel became increasingly rebellious and failed to maintain their separate identity, eventually the shekinah glory of God departed from the temple (Ezek 10-11). The 5th Cycle of Discipline and the deportation of the nation to Babylon followed. God would return to the nation from outside of Jerusalem and the temple first. John was the messenger of the Messiah and Israel would have to manifest a willingness to receive the Messiah by going to the outside wilderness and accepting John's message.³

The Subject of Baptism in the Context of Mark's Gospel

While this study is meant to be a survey, I believe it is necessary to point out a few other facts about the concept of baptism since the subject has been raised. This will not constitute an exhaustive treatment of the subject since that would be well outside the scope of this lesson's purpose.

The Greek word βαπτίζω (baptizo) literally means to dip or to dye and it was a common term used in the fuller's trade. It came to have a metaphorical meaning in addition to its literal meaning. Metaphorically, it referred to a change of identity or relationship.⁴

Some suppose that baptism was first introduced as a "religious ritual" by John and later adopted by the Church of the first century. However, this is not a correct understanding of the practice of water baptism. As we noted in our study of Matthew, baptisms were common in most ancient near Eastern religions and the Jewish religion was no exception. Baptism was considered a form of ceremonial purification. The rituals associated with the Mosaic Law had many baptism rites that had been practiced for many years prior to John's arrival on the scene. Not only the priests and other individuals were baptized, but clothing, utensils, and articles of furniture were subjected to ceremonial cleansing. Examples include:

- Leviticus 8:6 – Moses took Aaron and his sons and washed them with water to symbolize their dedication to the Lord.
- Leviticus 15:8 – the unclean person had to wash himself with water to symbolize the removal of uncleanness before he could be restored to fellowship.
- Leviticus 16:4 – before the high priest could perform the functions of the Day of Atonement, he had to wash himself with water. "This washing not only signified that the high priest had been cleansed from ceremonial defilement but also that he was set apart to God to perform a specific office and function on behalf of the nation Israel."⁵
- Exodus 19:10-14 – Moses is commanded to instruct the people to wash their clothes and consecrate themselves (a reference to purification rites) for two days prior to the Lord's appearance to them at the base of Mt. Sinai.
- Mark 7:3-4 – Mark explains to his readers in Rome the traditions of the Jews that involved such purification rites.
- Hebrews 9:6-10 – The writer of Hebrews explains the limitations of the ceremonial rites of the priests under the Law to complete the reconciliation to God that was accomplished

³ While Pentecost doesn't use some of the same terms to describe Israel's experience of deportation, he expresses the same view of John's ministry in relation to Israel's history. See Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 82.

⁴ This is a widely recognized understanding of the meaning of this Greek word in many sources. Two sources include Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 131 and Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 83.

⁵ Pentecost, 83.

through Christ. This included “various washings” and other activities that had to be repeated in contrast to the work of Christ.

John’s baptism was not merely the Old Testament ritual of ceremonial and symbolic cleansing. There is no indication that John was functioning as a priest and using water as part of a fulfillment of the requirements of the Mosaic Law.

John’s Baptism and Repentance

John’s baptism was directly related to “repentance for the remission of sins”. By calling the nation to repentance in view of the coming of the Messiah (Matt 3:2), John was functioning as a prophet. John’s baptism did not mean that one was baptized to receive forgiveness of sins. It symbolized the inward change that had occurred in the thinking of the person being baptized. The person being baptized had accepted John’s message that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2) and was admitting the fact that he/she had committed personal sins and need a saving Messiah.

The Baptism of Jesus Predicted by John

In Mark 1:8, John predicts that the coming Messiah would not baptize with water, but He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Both Matthew (Matt 3:11) and Luke (Lu 3:16) add that the Messiah will also baptize believers with fire in addition to the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a reference to the new sign associated with the Messianic Kingdom and which would identify God’s people. It had been promised in Joel 2:28ff and Ezekiel 36:25-27 and John’s prophecy was initially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as we have studied in our survey of the book of Matthew and the special series on the transition period from the Age of Israel to the Age of the Church. The baptism on the day of Pentecost is entirely different than the baptism described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13 wherein the Holy Spirit is said to baptize the believer into the Body of Christ. The former is a baptism **with** the Holy Spirit and the latter is a baptism **by** the Holy Spirit.

The “baptism with fire” is a reference to the judgment that God will pour out upon the unbelieving world at the Second Advent of Christ. Through this baptism, unbelievers will be taken in judgment and believers left to enter into the Messianic kingdom (see Mal 4:1 cf. Matt 24:40-41; 25:31-46). In the judgment associated with the Second Advent, the “wheat” (believers) are gathered into the “barn” (the Messianic/Millennial kingdom). On the other hand, the “chaff” (unbelievers) are burned up with an unquenchable fire (a likely reference to the Lake of Fire into which they will be thrown after standing before Christ at the Great White Judgment Throne).

John’s Baptism of Jesus

If John’s baptism symbolized that inward change had occurred in the one being baptized, then one must ask why Jesus would present Himself as a candidate for baptism? Only Matthew records that John raised this question (Matt 3:14). The answer is that Jesus was allowing Himself to be identified with the kingdom of heaven through accepting John’s baptism. Jesus did not have any reason to repent or any personal sin to acknowledge. However, for the sake of Israel’s repentant group of believers, He needed to be identified with John’s message of “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The anointing by the Holy Spirit which followed Jesus’ baptism validated not only Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah, but it validated John’s message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. John’s baptism of Jesus represented the identification and consecration (being set apart) part of John’s baptism, but not the repentance part of John’s baptism.

Summary of the Different Types of Baptism in the Scriptures

Type	Passage	Description
1. Baptism of Moses	1 Corinthians 10:1-2	The Jews of the Exodus were identified with Moses and set apart through the cloud and the Red Sea. Exodus 14:31 indicates that all of Israel were believers after the Red Sea crossing. The same wording for believe is used of Abraham's saving faith in Genesis 15:6 (cf. Rom 4).
2. Baptism of "the Cup"	Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38-39 cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24	This baptism is Jesus' identification with the sins of the world as a propitiatory (satisfactory) sacrifice.
3. Baptism with the Holy Spirit	Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 cf. Acts 2:4, 17-18, 38	This is the identification of believers with the kingdom of heaven as anticipated via the gospel of the kingdom preached by John, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples as well as Peter in such passages as Acts 3:19
4. Baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ	1 Corinthians 12:13 cf. Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26, 27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:9-12	This is the spiritual identification of the Church Age believer with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection
5. Baptism of fire	Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16	This is the identification of believers and unbelievers with the fire of judgment at Jesus' Second Advent. Anyone living at that time will experience the judgments associated with the Second Advent and the wheat will be separated from the chaff (Matt 3:12) and the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:32-33)
6. Baptism of John	Matthew 3:6, 11a; Mark 1:5	This is an identification with the kingdom of heaven and was preceded by repentance.
7. Baptism of Jesus	Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11	This was Jesus' identification with the kingdom of heaven and validated John's message
8. Ceremonial baptism	Exodus 19:10-14; Leviticus 8:6 cf. Hebrews 9:10	This was ceremonial and symbolic cleansing of articles to be set apart for use in fulfilling the ritual requirements of the Mosaic Law
9. Baptism by the disciples in anticipation of the Messianic Kingdom	Matthew 28:19 cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19	This is very similar to John's baptism, except it was after Jesus' death and resurrection and occurred during the

		transition period between the Age of Israel and the Church Age
10. Baptism for the dead	1 Corinthians 15:29	Only one reference

Jesus Casts Out a Demon (1:21-28)

The town of Capernaum was a sort of ministry headquarters for Jesus (see Matthew 4:12-13). It is mentioned 22 times in the Gospels; whereas there is only one recorded event that took place in His home town of Nazareth (Lu 4:16 – Jesus reading in the synagogue from Isaiah 49:8-9 and 61:1-2).⁶ Jairus was the chief ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum and no doubt this incident of casting out a demon was a key event that motivated Jairus to later beg Jesus to heal his daughter (5:21ff).

The Jewish custom was to permit any qualified man to read and interpret the Scriptures in the synagogue. Those who heard Jesus were amazed at the content of and authority with which Jesus taught. The Scribes were religious and as such, they relied upon the authority of tradition, which has no real inherent authority. The only authority of tradition is the fear of ostracism and that fear is fed by the lust for approval and acceptance into a group, i.e. approbation. To say the least, this is a weak bonding element for any group.

The hearers must have questioned Jesus' authority to teach as He did. However, evidence to support His authority was soon presented. Apparently, the demon cried out to "let us alone" because it was speaking on behalf of all of the demonic realm. There were exorcists in Israel (Matt 12:27 cf. Acts 19:13) and exorcisms were performed by incantation.⁷ However, none of them spoke with the authority that Jesus did nor were any recognized by the demonic realm as the "Holy One of God" (1:24). The demon knew that before the kingdom of heaven is established on earth (i.e. the Messianic kingdom), Satan would be bound along with the demonic realm. Jesus told the demon to be quiet because His authority was not based upon the testimony of the demonic realm, but it would be based upon His person and works. The nation needed to acknowledge Him based upon Who He was and not on the basis of the testimony of demons.

Jesus is Questioned About Fasting (2:18-22)

It was right for John and his disciples to fast, for they were calling people to repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom. In contrast, Jesus was the King presenting His kingdom. Jesus describes His kingdom as a great feast similar to a wedding banquet. A feast is often used in Scripture to portray God's kingdom on earth (see 8:11; 25:10; Is 25:6; Lk 14:15-24; Jn 2:1-11; Rev 19:7-9). Since the King was present, it was not appropriate that He or His disciples fast. At a wedding banquet, people are happy, not mourning or fasting.

Jesus did not come to patch up an old system like sewing a new unshrunk cloth on an old garment which would then tear. He did not bring the wine of a new kingdom to be poured into the law of another age (the Mosaic Law of the Age of Israel). Jesus had come to lead a group out of Judaism into the kingdom that was based upon His righteousness and not the self-righteousness

⁶ The Nelson Study Bible makes some interesting observations in its footnotes to this passage. It notes that forty-two percent of Mark's verses contain some mention of teaching; however, as we noted in last week's introduction to Mark, Mark omits most of Jesus' main discourses. This was to emphasize Jesus' works as a Servant Son of God. Also, Jesus constantly confronted demonic possession in His public ministry. About twenty percent of the approximately thirty-five miracles recorded about Jesus involved helping those troubled by demons. See Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, editors, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1641.

⁷ Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 145.

that had become so commonplace in Judaism. The righteousness of the Kingdom offered by Jesus was not built upon the Law or upon Pharisaic tradition.

Jesus is Greater Than the Sabbath (2:23-28)

The event to which Jesus refers in verses 3-4 is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and the regulations concerning the consecrated bread are found in Leviticus 24:5-9. It is very likely that David and his men ate the showbread on the Sabbath since 1 Samuel 21:5-6 sounds as if the consecrated bread had just been changed. Both David and his men ate what should only have been eaten by the priests and did so after lying to the priest about their mission. Note that Jesus makes nothing of David's deceit. Jesus' point is that the Scriptures did not condemn David for his action; therefore the legalism of the Pharisees is not consistent with Scripture. Also, Jesus uses this example of an apparent or perceived violation of the Sabbath in the life of David as if to say that He is at least as special as David. When mercy is lacking, then religious formalities are meaningless.

The Unpardonable Sin (3:28-30)

This passage must be interpreted in this context. Jesus has just been accused by the religious leaders of performing these miracles in the power of Satan and not the power of God. Jesus is simply stating the principle to these religious leaders that to reject the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit with regard to the source of these miracles is unforgivable, i.e. to attribute the power behind Christ's miracles to Satan was tantamount to rejection of Him as the Messiah and unbelief. Since Jesus is not present today, this sin cannot be committed.

The Parable of the Sower (4:3-9)

The parable of the Sower teaches principles relating to the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. This gospel of the kingdom will be preached during the Age of Israel, both pre-Church and post-Church (i.e. Tribulation). The different types of soil represent different responses to the preaching of the kingdom gospel. Jesus explains the parable in 4:13-20. For instance:

- Wayside soil - the one who doesn't understand and whose heart is hardened
- Stony soil - initial joy but no depth for the seed to take root
- Thorny soil - the effect of the Word is choked out by the details of life
- Good soil - the heart that receives the Word and becomes productive

A Parable to Illustrate the Effect of a Positive Volitional Response to Christ (4:21-29)

Those disciples of Jesus who had heard and who were believing in Jesus would be given more instruction. However, those who rejected His teaching (i.e. Jewish religious leaders) would have their status and special position as Jews taken away from them. One scenario under which this will occur will be at the Second Advent and the consequent establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

The Hypocrisy of the Jewish Religious Leaders (7:9-13)

Jesus points out to the Pharisees that they have broken the written Law through clever maneuverings with their oral tradition. In Leviticus 27:9, 16, a son could dedicate certain assets as *korban* or a gift devoted to God and set aside for the temple treasury. Later such a vow could be annulled in various ways based upon tradition. In this manner, the Pharisees could cleverly maneuver to withhold assets from the parents. This was tantamount to having broken the fifth commandment – honor your father and mother (Ex 20:12). Therefore, a needy set of parents would not have their needs met simply because the son's assets had been declared *korban*. Jesus uses this example to point out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15)

Here the picture of leaven interacting with the whole of the dough is a good picture of the manner in which evil has a tendency to permeate the thoughts of all those with whom it interacts. In much the same manner that a little yeast affects the whole lump of dough, so false doctrine affects the entire perspective of the believer. The false doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees stemmed from their respective distortions of the Law (see previous lesson) into a means of salvation or evidence of salvation. Other distortions of these two groups either centered around or derived from that basic distortion. The grave danger of false doctrine to the believer is that it affects a believer's ability in several ways:

- Improper understanding of the spiritual life (e.g. legalism in Phase 1 & 2 and no grace orientation to life)
- Lack of objectivity in life (e.g. exaggerated self opinion or improper view of humility, no spiritually grounded self esteem, inability to deal with injustice in life, no orientation to authority or true humility, improper view of the purpose of human history, improper view of God's interactions with man, distraction with human good endeavors)
- Deception regarding one's relationship and fellowship with God

Jesus Heals a Blind Man in Stages (8:22-26)

Jesus healed this man in stages and most likely this paralleled the disciples imperfect perception of Jesus. This is the only two-stage miracle of Jesus that is recorded. Sight was a commonly used metaphor for understanding.

Assignment for Next Week:

1. Read chapters 9 to 16 and highlight the words noting rapid progression and action, e.g. "immediately", etc.
2. Compare the last eight chapters to the parallel passages in Matthew. Note the discourses in which Jesus engaged that are described in Matthew. How are they treated in Mark?