

**UNIT 9 LESSON 1.****MARK 1:1-15****INTRODUCTION.**

The Gospel of Mark is a historical narrative, which sets forth a representative picture of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is brief, pictorial, curt, clear-cut and forceful. The subject of the Gospel is adequately summed up in the opening verse "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Whether the words are an ancient heading given to the Gospel, or the one chosen by the writer, they are an appropriate introduction to its content. The person of Christ dominates the narrative throughout. His works are the chief source of interest, and his death and resurrection in Jerusalem bring the story to a challenging climax.

**1. WHO WROTE THIS GOSPEL?**

Nowhere does the book mention him by name. Yet the authorship of Mark, the associate of Peter, has never seriously been questioned. Although Mark (Marcus) was one of the commonest of Latin names, there is little doubt that this Mark is the "John whose other name is Mark", who is mentioned 8 times in the N.T. He was a relative of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). Evidence for Mark's authorship is abundant in the writings of the Church Fathers of the first four centuries. Papias, Justin Martyn, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome all refer to it.

Eusebius (who wrote in the 4th Century) quoted Papias of the 2nd century as saying,

"Mark became the interpreter of Peter and he wrote down accurately, but not in order, as much as he remembered of the sayings and doings of Christ. For he was not a hearer or a follower of the Lord, but afterwards, as I said, of Peter who adapted His teachings to the needs of the moment and did not make an ordered exposition of the sayings of the Lord. And so Mark made no mistake when he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them; for he made it his especial care to omit nothing of what he heard and to make no false statement therein."

(Bettenson: *Documents of the Christian Church* 2nd Ed.p39).

If Mark wrote this gospel about the time of Peter's death (about 64AD) then it was 30 years after Jesus' crucifixion. It was the first written gospel to come into existence.

**2. 'A' GOSPEL or 'THE' GOSPEL?**

Verse 1 talks about "good news" (NRSV). Other versions say "gospel". "Good news" is the literal meaning of the Greek word that we usually call Gospel. The Gospel is different from a gospel. A gospel is one of the four books at the beginning of the N.T. They, and the rest of the Bible, contain the message that comprises the Gospel.



### 3. THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL. JOHN THE BAPTIST Verses 2-8.

Mark's Gospel starts with the baptism, not the birth, of Jesus. It was the baptism which marked the "beginning of the Gospel" because it marked out Jesus as the Son of God, commissioned and empowered for service.

a) Verses two and three.

These two verses are actually quoting two O.T. prophets. (Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3) and both in their original setting speak of the drawing near of God to his people. Mark uses these two prophecies to show the nature of John the Baptist's mission, as a preparation for the coming of the Messiah. John's ministry was only a forerunner to the more excellent one of Jesus which was to follow.

b) Verse four.

John's task was to prepare the way for Jesus and his method by preaching. The content of his preaching was a stern uncompromising call to men to prepare themselves for the divine coming. John's baptism was not Christian Baptism but an outward symbol of the inner changes in the hearts of the people. He called people to a change of heart and purpose, which would result in forgiveness of their sins by God. In other Gospels we see that John demanded a changed life as proof of a truly changed heart. (Luke 3:1-20).

### 4. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS. Verses 9-11

Jesus came to receive John's baptism not because of any sin but through a desire to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15) i.e., to fulfil all God's rules for his people. It was also an act of identification with the rest of humanity and thirdly an act of dedication to his ministry.

In verses 10 and 11 we see one of the great 'Trinitarian' passages of the N.T. As Alan Cole says, "Here the Spirit and the Father both bear witness to the Son. As in the book of Genesis God created by His word and through the Spirit, so it was fitting that, at the very commencement of God's new work of recreation in the hearts of men, there should be the same operation of the whole Godhead." (See p.58).

### 5. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS. Verses 12 to 13.

Thus prepared for ministry it would have been expected that Jesus could commence to preach, but there is an intervening period. The wilderness and wild animals were horrifying to Jewish people. Yet the Spirit 'drove him out' into that environment for temptation. Before Jesus could enter into a ministry whose purpose was to challenge and break the power of Satan in others, that enemy had to be met and defeated on the battle-ground of his own life. The encounter was real; Satan was real, (seeking to divert Jesus from the path of obedience); the Angels were real. ( A fuller account of the temptations is given in Matthew 4:1-11). To a lesser degree, every disciple called to some high task, must expect similar conflict and enjoy similar victory.

**6. JESUS COMMENCES HIS PUBLIC PREACHING. Verses 14,15.**

Only after his temptation can Jesus begin his ministry. John's work is over (v. 14) and Jesus builds on his foundation (v.15). He announces that God is at last moving in for his personal reign. "Kingdom of God" does not refer to a domain or area. The subjects of the King are those who change their mind about themselves and God (Repent). They are required to repent and believe. (These are the two key words of the Gospel on its human side). They are to believe in Jesus, who is not only the messenger of salvation, like the prophets were, but is the means of salvation.

**QUESTION 1:**

Why is the story of Jesus "good news"? These references will help: Acts 3:8; Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 4:6,7. What others come at once to mind?

**QUESTION 2:**

How do we know John's message was popular? What did he wear? Why did he dress this way? (see 2 Kings 1:8).

**QUESTION 3:**

Do you think Jesus found it any easier to face temptation than you do? Why? What other temptations did he face? (e.g. Mark 14:32-36; Luke 22:44). How can Jesus' victory over temptation help us? (Heb. 2:7-18, 4:14-15).

**QUESTION 4:**

Mark doesn't give a reason for writing this Gospel, but it is probably for much the same reason Luke and John wrote theirs. Summarize Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:30,31 as a possible reason why Mark wrote this gospel.

**QUESTION 5:**

What is meant by "the Kingdom of God"?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

In what ways would John's ministry prepare the people for the Messiah? How does repentance prepare us to receive a saviour? What difference does John point out between himself and the one to come?