



The Gospel of Mark - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not feel the need to discuss Jesus' birth or infancy narrative, or to trace his human ancestry to King David, as foretold in the prophecies. Instead, he starts immediately with the forerunner to Jesus, the last of the OT era prophets John the Baptist, whose role was to prepare the people's hearts and minds in order to receive their long awaited Christ. To do this they needed to repent of their sins and be baptised with water, calling on their heavenly Father to forgive their apostasy and neglect of him.

While John was baptising in the River Jordan, Jesus arrived and was baptised by John. Then God spoke audibly from heaven, giving acclamation and claiming ownership of Jesus as his only Son. The Holy Spirit then descended upon Jesus, giving a unique image of the Trinitarian Godhead working in complete and equal partnership.

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan in his first encounter on earth with his arch enemy; an encounter in which Jesus triumphed, although few details are recorded in Mark's Gospel.

One of Jesus' primary purposes for his ministry was to prepare disciples who would take the Gospel message to the world. He began this process by calling four local Galilæan fishermen into his service. These men would form the inner core of a much wider group of disciples that would follow Jesus during the early days of his ministry.

Jesus was teaching in a Capernaum synagogue, when he encountered a demon possessed man. By driving the demon out of the man, Jesus demonstrated the authority he had in action as well as his words.

From there he went to Simon Peter's home and cured his mother-in-law of a fever. Later that evening many sick and demon possessed people came to him and he cured them all as well.

Early on in his Gospel, Mark records just how important communion with the

Father was to Jesus, who rose early in the morning to seek solitude. He then went around to many of the surrounding villages in order to preach the Gospel.

The chapter ends with Jesus curing a man of leprosy, an infectious skin disease that would have kept the man isolated from his community and in a desperate state. After cleansing him, Jesus commanded the man to say nothing of who had healed him but the man ignored Jesus' command. Thus news of Jesus spread quickly, making it difficult for him to avoid the crowds that were continually seeking him, often just for the sake of the miracle.

I. Mark 1:1-15 - Introduction

Mark begins his account with the public ministry of John the Baptist, the one chosen by God to prepare the way of Jesus as the Messiah. There is a contrasting parallelism between Mark's presentation of John and of Jesus. Both are characterised by a word from the Lord (vv.2-3 and v.11); both are described in their character and function (vv.4-6 and vv.12-13); and both of their messages are summarised (vv.7-8 and vv.14-15).

I.a Mark 1:1-8 - John the Baptist Prepares the Way

It was foretold by the OT prophets that God would send a messenger ahead of the Messiah in order to prepare the people's hearts so they might recognise the Christ when he came. John had lived a life in the wilderness, dressed accordingly and ate sparsely from the land, giving him a distinctive character and appearance. As he came before the Messiah, he was considered to still be part of the OT era, although he was a witness to the dawning of the new covenant era.

This was an amazing event since the Word of God had not come to any prophet for public proclamation since Malachi in about 460BC. After a silence of over 400 years, God was once again speaking to his people. His message was for the Jews to come back to God by repenting their sins and being baptised with water to cleanse them from the impurities of their past life.

John was clearly a charismatic person and his message was divinely inspired. Therefore, there were many people from Judæa and Jerusalem that responded to his message, submitting themselves to God.

¹ The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,

Mark 1:1

Rather than emphasising the events leading up to Jesus' public ministry in terms of his genealogy and childhood, as do Matthew and Luke, or in terms of its theological foundation, as does John, Mark focuses on the actual beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry.

The good news or Gospel is the fulfilment of God's promises. In the OT: <<*You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"*>> (Isaiah 40:9), <<*How*

beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!">> (Isaiah 52:7), and: <<Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfil your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed>> (Nahum 1:15), good news is connected with the saving intervention of God to help his people.

About Jesus the Messiah. The good news is proclaimed by Jesus the Messiah but, in a secondary sense, the good news is the report about Jesus. Mark communicates both at the beginning and end of his Gospel that Jesus is the Son of God: <<And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!">> (Mark 15:39).

It is known that the Messiah would be a prophetic leader as Moses had declared: <<The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him>> (Deuteronomy 18:15), and that he would carry the governmental duties of Israel on behalf of God: <<For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace>> (Isaiah 9:6). Almost two thousand years earlier, the Patriarch Jacob had spoken of the time of his coming: <<The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be>> (Genesis 49:10 KJV), for the Romans now had full authority throughout the Promised Land and it was shown in Luke Chapter One that they were registering the Jews for the purposes of taxation. The sceptre of government had departed from Judah so indeed Shiloh did come but not leading a mighty army as some had expected a descendant of King David might. Instead: <<The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth>> (John 1:14).

² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way” –

³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him’”.

Mark 1:2-3

By combining quotes from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, with a time interval of approximately 300 years between them, Mark identifies John the Baptist as the predicted one who prepared the way for the Lord.

Written in Isaiah the prophet. In fact, all the prophets from Moses onward, who spoke about the reconciliation of man to God, had spoken of the coming of the

Christ that is now revealed in this Gospel account. The apostle Paul confirmed this as he stood before the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa II: *<<But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles>>* (Acts 26:22-23). The details in the prophecies are quite remarkable and all of them were fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Isaiah the prophet is named because he was the more prominent one, and much of the quoted material in the NT comes from him. When the text is expounded in the following verses, Mark refers only to the Isaiah citation.

John, the messenger, would later be identified by Jesus as the one who came in the spirit of Elijah: *<<And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him”>>* (Mark 9:11-13), fulfilling the prophecy: *<<See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes>>* (Malachi 4:5).

I will send my messenger. John the Baptist was the messenger as Jesus would later confirm: *<<As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you”>>* (Matthew 11:7-10).

The way is to be prepared for the Lord, and surprisingly the one who comes after John is both the Lord and the Messiah: *<<“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah”>>* (Mark 8:29). It was a surprise for the Jews had expected a warrior king in the likeness of David. They did not expect God himself to be the Messiah! The following Gospel account demonstrates that Jesus, the Messiah, is also a member of the Godhead.

Make straight paths for him. The way of man had once again become corrupted, something God had noted before: *<<The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time>>* (Genesis 6:5), and injustice reigned under the weight of Rome, the arrogance of the religious leaders, who had gone astray following their traditions rather than God, and the general decline of a nation that had been in servitude for hundreds of years due to their hardheartedness and apostasy. John’s role was to straighten out the wrongs in order to prepare hearts and minds to hear the Kingdom message of the Gospel: *<<The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it>>* (Luke 16:16).

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:4

John the Baptist prepared the way by calling people to repentance, turning away from sin and turning to God for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance had to precede baptism, and thus baptism was not the means by which sins were forgiven but rather was a sign indicating that one had truly repented.

Teaching on the repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be the commission Jesus would give to all his disciples: *<<Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high”>>* (Luke 24:45-47).

John laboured in the wilderness as a place of purification and fulfilment of prophecy quoted in v.3 that is from Isaiah 40:3.

Repentance. To repent calls for a change of one’s mind that in the OT called for a change in a person’s attitude toward God that impacted one’s actions and life choices; it involved the idea of turning; that is, from one way of thinking and living to a different way. Common external signs of repentance included prayers of remorse, as well as confession and renouncing of sin. Paul advised disciples: *<<Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will>>* (Romans 12:2).

John had many attributes as a preacher and proclinator of God’s word:

1. He was an affectionate preacher: exhorting and beseeching, he pressed his message home upon his hearers, followed his doctrine closely and was fully sincere.
2. He was a practical preacher: much of his message lifted people to seek their duty before God, directing them to their work but amusing them with matters of subtle speculation.
3. He was a popular preacher: although he had the religious leaders among his followers, it was the common man who was his target audience. He spoke at their level of understanding by keeping his message simple and jargon free.
4. He was an evangelical preacher: bringing the Gospel to the people in all his exhortations, he directed people to the Christ to come; exciting and encouraging them in their expectations of him. All messengers should press upon their recipients the need to come to Christ, both for righteousness and for strength.
5. He was a copious preacher: the Bible tells us he preached many things. He preached a great deal, shunned not to declare the whole Counsel of

God and he varied his preaching so that those who were not reached and touched by one truth, might be by another, but each being effectively the same truth.

⁵ The whole Judæan countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

Mark 1:5

The whole Judæan countryside and all the people of Jerusalem. John's ministry represents a fulfilment of the promise of a new exodus: <<A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young>> (Isaiah 40:3-11), <<I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them>> (Isaiah 42:16), and: <<When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made>> (Isaiah 43:2-7), in which Israel is delivered from the wilderness and, so to speak, enters into the Jordan river again, as in Joshua 3:1-4:24, to receive God's promises of end-time salvation.

Confessing their sins. God was working in people's hearts, calling them to turn back to himself, in preparation for the coming Messiah.

John did not have to go into the city or the towns for the people came flocking out to him in repentance, for they knew they were in the wrong. King David may have had this in mind when he wrote: *<<Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew>>* (Psalm 110:3 NASB).

⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Mark 1:6

The image painted of John is one of a man who had a holy contempt for the world. He was the son of a priest and could have claimed his heritage, with the priestly status that would have given him. However, that was not his mission in life. His chosen lifestyle for God was one of abstinence and non-conformity toward the society around him, so that he could not be accused of anything contra to his divine mission, for he was a sincere servant of God.

John was selected by God for this mission before his birth as recounted by Luke when an angel appeared to John's father, the priest Zechariah: *<<Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord">>* (Luke 1:11-17). The world however viewed him differently, as Jesus noted: *<<For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'>>* (Luke 7:33).

John had been raised in the wilderness from birth: *<<And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel>>* (Luke 1:80). His clothing and food, i.e. locusts and wild honey, correspond to that of other preachers in the desert, such as Elijah: *<<You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there>>* (1 Kings 17:4).

Locusts and wild honey were not an unusual source of food for people living in the desert. The desert locust, Greek akris, is a large grasshopper, still eaten today by poorer people in the Middle East and Africa.

Moses had indicated that wild honey would be in abundance when the Israelites possessed the Promised Land: *<<Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their*

descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey>> (Deuteronomy 11:8-9), Samson had no problem locating honey: <<Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass>> (Judges 14:8-9), and it almost cost Jonathan his life when his father King Saul swore that anyone who ate before the end of the battle would be put to death: <<The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened>> (1 Samuel 14:25-27).

⁷ And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit".

Mark 1:7-8

John's expectation of the one more powerful is connected with Isaiah 40:3. The coming one (Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1), is both human, wearing sandals, and divine, referenced as the Lord in Isaiah 40:3, and he will baptise his followers with the Holy Spirit. John's water baptism will be superseded by the baptism associated with the Coming One. Those who repent and trust in the coming Messiah will receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit: <<And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days>> (Joel 2:28-29), while the unrepentant will receive the judgment of eternal fire, and even the repentant may undergo a purifying fire: <<But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap>> (Malachi 3:2), and: <<These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed>> (1 Peter 1:7).

Untying the straps of sandals would be the responsibility of a low servant, and it was something that a Jewish person was not supposed to do for anyone else. The baptism with the Spirit represents the fulfilment of God's promises in the OT: <<The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest>> (Isaiah 32:15), <<For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants>> (Isaiah 44:3), and: <<They will return to it and remove all its

vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh>> (Ezekiel 11:18-19).

I baptise you with water. Water baptism continues to be a key ceremony in most churches today although there is much debate as to whether it requires full emersion as indicated by someone requiring a river to be baptised in, or simply a sprinkling of water from a font, as is also practiced. Baptism itself is not a means to salvation but is a public act that acknowledges a person has repented of their sins, has accepted Christ as their Saviour and will attempt to live a life that would bring honour and glory to God. The apostle Peter writes of this in his first epistle: *<<After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him>> (1 Peter 3:19-22).*

I.b Mark 1:9-13 - The Baptism and Testing of Jesus

In just a few short verses, Mark covers the dramatic scene of Jesus’ baptism and his 40 days of being tempted by the devil in the desert wilderness. Although they were cousins, refer to Luke Chapter One, John and Jesus had never met. A full account of the baptism and testing of Christ can be found in Matthew Chapters 3-4.

Mark does not indicate John’s reaction to seeing Jesus, but it is recorded elsewhere: *<<Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented>> (Matthew 3:13-15), and: <<Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One>> (John 1:32-34).*

God the Father gave audible affirmation to this as Jesus came up out of the water and the Holy Spirit did indeed alight on Jesus at that time. This was a scene that was both visual and audible for those that were eyewitnesses of the event.

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.

Mark 1:9

At that time. None of the Gospel writers give accurate dates that so many scholars and historians would have wished to have. It is known from Scripture that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great: *<<After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judæa, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came*

to Jerusalem>> (Matthew 2:1). Since King Herod died in 4BC, Jesus would probably have been born sometime between 6-4BC. It is also recorded that John the Baptist started his ministry: *<<In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judæa, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene>>* (Luke 3:1), which would have been between 27-29AD, dependant on the method of counting years, i.e. actual years or inclusive years, both of which were used in the 1st Century. Thus Jesus would have been between 31-35 years old when he started his earthly ministry, confirmed again by Luke: *<<Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry>>* (Luke 3:23a).

Was baptised. Jesus identified himself with the sins of his people, even though he himself is free from all sin: *<<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>>* (2 Corinthians 5:21). In all humility, he submitted himself to his Father's will in this his first public appearance. He would do so again for his final public appearance - on the Cross! In Jesus' own words: *<<For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified>>* (John 17:19).

This initial baptism of John would be, in part, a splitting of the nation: *<<All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptised by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptised by John>>* (Luke 7:29-30), although some would later reject Christ even though they had undergone John's baptism and had accepted what Jesus had taught them in the beginning.

That Mark states Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee indicates that his intended readers were not from Palestine and would, therefore, be unfamiliar with the town's location, supporting the idea that his initial intended readership were predominantly Gentiles.

Excavations at Nazareth have located tombs, olive presses, wells and vaulted cells for wine and oil storage, indicating that the village was a small agricultural settlement. Nazareth was located on a road leading from nearby Sepphoris into Samaria.

The current Church of the Annunciation is located above previous early Byzantine church structures and caves from the 4th Century or possibly earlier. These commemorated the early life of Jesus and his family. See the image.

Galilee was the region west of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee and north of Samaria. In the NT era, Galilee was



successively ruled by Herod the Great, his son Herod Antipas, and then by Herod Antipas' nephew Herod Agrippa I. For more information on Herod the Great refer to the comments made on Luke 1:5-7 of this series.

In the Jordan. The precise location of Jesus' baptism is disputed, and today competing venues vie for visitors. The traditional baptism site is Qasr el-Yahud, on the western bank of the River Jordan. However, the scene might instead be identified with 'Bethany across the Jordan', i.e. on the eastern bank, as noted in John 1:28, although this text may imply that John had baptised Jesus earlier and perhaps in a different locale. It is known that John baptised people in more than one location: *<<Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptised>>* (John 3:23).

¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased".

Mark 1:10-11

For most commentators **coming up out of the water** indicates **Jesus** underwent a full emersion baptism. Opponents of this method of baptism claim that it means he was coming up out of the water onto the river bank.

Other translations have **immediately he saw heaven being torn open**, where **immediately** is a favourite word of Mark's for which he uses Greek euthys, for **immediately** or at once 41 times in the Gospel. It imparts a sense of speed and urgency, often introducing a new incident or a surprising turn of events within an incident.

Many people will fail to see **heaven open** to them but Jesus here, not only has a clear sight of his suffering that was to come but also of his future glory. Stephen too saw this glory as heaven was opened to him shortly before his martyrdom: *<<When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God">>* (Acts 7:54-56).

There are two other occasions in the Gospel when God's voice is clearly heard from heaven. The first is at his transfiguration, reported in all the Synoptic Gospels: *<<Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!">>* (Mark 9:7), and in Jerusalem itself when Jesus said: *<<Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again">>* (John 12:28).

The Spirit of God **descends** upon Jesus in his baptism, empowering and anointing him as Israel's King and Messiah, commissioning him as God's righteous servant: *<<Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will*

put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations>> (Isaiah 42:1). Jesus is thus commissioned for a unique service: <<The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord - and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears>> (Isaiah 11:2-3), and: <<The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour>> (Isaiah 61:1-3). Mark's allusions to the OT here involve Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, as prophesied by David: <<I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father">> (Psalm 2:7), and the servant of God as recently noted.

Like a dove. This simile does not necessarily mean that the Spirit actually assumed the form of a dove but it does indicate a bodily form of something like a dove. It was probably ephemeral.

The voice from heaven confirmed the eternal, love-filled Sonship of Jesus. This beloved Son is the triumphant messianic King, yet he is also the humble servant into whose hands the Father is well pleased to place the mission to bring salvation to the nations. Note that all three persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are equally involved here.

You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Mark records this as a personal communication by the Father for his Son, which is confirmed in Luke 3:22, where Luke probably used Mark for his source. Matthew, however, records it as a proclamation for the people who were witnesses: <<And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased">> (Matthew 3:17). Either way, the Father owns the Son and his ministry, demonstrating his love for him and the pleasure it always brings him.

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Mark 1:12-13

At once again demonstrates both the immediacy of the action following the baptism and the urgency that was felt in the Godhead that Jesus should face his adversary at the very start of his earthly ministry to set the scene.

The Spirit sent him out in no way implies any hierarchy in the Godhead for all three persons are fully and equally God. It implies the role that God the Father has passed on to the person of God the Spirit to ensure the fulfilment of his plan for Salvation History.

At the commencement of Jesus' public ministry, it is paradoxically the Holy Spirit who drives him into the wilderness, to be tempted by Satan. The Holy Spirit guided Jesus in his earthly life, providing a pattern for Jesus' followers to be empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. Here, it is noted that Jesus' battle against the powers of darkness had begun.

Forty days is reminiscent of Israel's 40 years of wilderness wandering, which came about after 10 of the 12 spies had given a bad report due to lack of faith in God. The Lord spoke unto all Israel saying: <<*For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you*>> (Numbers 14:34). Also, the 40-day fasts by Moses: <<*Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments*>> (Exodus 34:28). Also: <<*When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water*>> (Deuteronomy 9:9), and with Elijah: <<*So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God*>> (1 Kings 19:8).

Jesus' experience of 40 days of fasting in the wilderness corresponds to Israel's experience of 40 years of testing in the wilderness. Jesus endured his testing victoriously and obediently. Moses also fasted and prayed for 40 days and 40 nights on two occasions, and Elijah at least once. Fasting was and still is a means of focusing intently on prayer. Forty days is about the longest a human can fast without permanent bodily damage. For most people, liquids should be taken during extended periods of fasting and medical advice might be prudent before undertaking any periods of fasting that last more than a day or so.

Being tempted indicates that the temptations happened over the entire 40-day period and were not confined to the three temptations mentioned in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. There is no sin in being tempted; it is giving in to that temptation that leads to sin. Jesus showed that even in a remote place then a believer can rely on God in order to avoid the temptations that may come their way and he will protect them.

About a year before writing this I had a great conversation with a former pastor, who has experienced this same wilderness and described that it was far from being a 'God-forsaken' place, but rather a place where 'the presence of God is so powerfully evident'. This makes the temptation of Christ, and of us, all the more interesting when it comes in a place where the presence of God is felt and known, i.e. at times when we feel most at ease, as opposed to the times when we may feel abandoned, alone or at risk!

Surrounded by evil and in danger from wild animals, Jesus was nevertheless not abandoned, for he had the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the angels were ministering to him, at least they were there at the end of the period, when their ministering probably included providing much needed physical sustenance. All of heaven knew the significance of Jesus' initial victory in this cosmic battle.

Although it was not likely for a period of tempting but one of reflection, Paul too headed for the wilderness of Arabia when he first came to faith: <<*I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus*>> (Galatians 1:17).

I.c Mark 1:14-15 - Jesus Announces the Good News

Jesus' public ministry had now commenced. Luke records that he had the opportunity to speak in his home synagogue in Nazareth, where he was handed the scroll to read Isaiah 61:1, which Jesus modified slightly to suit the purposes at the start of his ministry: <<*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"*>> (Luke 4:18-19).

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison refers to him being arrested for speaking out against King Herod Antipas, who had married Herodias, the ex-wife of his still living brother Philip. This account will be given in Mark Chapter 6. What is significant is that Jesus could now step more into the limelight because attention had been focused on John during his six to twelve months of ministry. This is how John recorded it shortly before his arrest: <<*He must become greater; I must become less*>> (John 3:30), showing both his humility and understanding of the Messiah's role. What is also clear is that the silencing of one messenger does not silence the message of the Gospel that will always prevail, as Jesus would later confirm: <<*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*>> (Mark 13:31).

Jesus went into Galilee. Jesus was already living in Nazareth in Galilee, although he would have travelled to Jerusalem on several occasions to attend the great festivals that were a requirement for all Jewish men: <<*Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field*>> (Exodus 23:14-16). It was during such visits that Jesus had commenced his early teaching in Judæa as recorded in John Chapters 2-3, which is largely ignored in the Synoptic Gospels but possibly referenced by Mark here. What Mark may also be referring to is that Jesus now was going out publically teaching and healing. His true public ministry had begun.

The Kingdom of God. This is the first of fourteen occurrences of this title in Mark's Gospel. All four Gospel writers use this term although John uses it only

twice and Matthew prefers the Kingdom of Heaven, which he uses 31 times compared to four uses of God.

These verses summarise Jesus' preaching ministry. The good news is the that the Gospel message is proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has come near, which means that God's rule over people's hearts and lives is now being established. Therefore, people should repent and believe in the good news.

Repentance and baptism on its own do not lead to salvation; faith in Christ as the Saviour does. However, the need to have faith is implied both in the command to repent and also in the command to be baptised, as demonstrated by Peter at Pentecost: <<*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit">> (Acts 2:38).*

The Kingdom of God is more than simply the rule of the Spirit within people, since the Kingdom will ultimately include the restoration of all creation: <<*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea>> (Revelation 21:1). However, Jesus has not yet revealed the fact that the Kingdom will come in stages. How Jesus relates to this Kingdom will be seen in the following chapters. Initially, he is the one who proclaims the coming saving rule of God.*

II. Mark 1:16-8:26 - Demonstration of Jesus' Authority

The first half of Mark's Gospel is dedicated to the demonstration of Jesus' authority over sickness, laws of nature and the demonic world. He also calls, appoints and sends out his disciples, while regularly teaching in a unique and authoritative way.

This major section covers a period of two to three years, focusing on the work that Jesus performed in and around the region of Galilee.

II.a Mark 1:16-3:12 - Jesus' early Galilæan ministry

The call of the disciples is intertwined with narrative descriptions of Jesus' authority over demons and sickness, as well as with authoritative teaching. The duration of Jesus' ministry has traditionally been thought to have been three to three and a half years: up to a year of obscurity, a year of popularity, and a year or so of increasing rejection. Mark and the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, largely omit discussing the first, obscure year, but it is recounted in the first four chapters of John's Gospel. What is generally accepted is that this moment in history fulfilled another prophecy: <<*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned>> (Isaiah 9:2).*

II.a.i Mark 1:16-20 - Jesus Calls His First Disciples

Jesus had decided that the best way to build his church and to get the Gospel message disseminated throughout the whole world was to start with a small, select group of men who would become his closer associates in his ministry. He started by calling four Galilæan fishermen.

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Mark 1:16

He saw Simon. Jesus renamed Simon to Cephas or Peter, which means a piece of rock, although many prefer to say just rock: <<*And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter)*>> (John 1:42).

Casting a net into the lake. It appears they were not in their boat at this time but on the shore, although Luke tells it slightly differently: <<*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch”>> (Luke 5:4). Mark will, in part, return to Luke’s account: <<*Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him*>> (Mark 3:9). Since Mark is not explicit, his reference in this chapter could simply be an abbreviation of the events for, as he does with other similar accounts he refers to, the full detail is less important. The overall message is the same in all accounts as Jesus explained: <<*Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish*>> (Matthew 13:47). That is, it doesn’t matter where or how it is done, providing the Gospel is faithfully preached to all who will hear.*

According to John Chapter One, John and Andrew had previously encountered Jesus, and then spent some time with him before introducing Peter to him. John’s account does not conflict with the following calling of the disciples. It simply records a previous meeting between Jesus and the men.

¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.

Mark 1:17

Jesus calls his disciples to fish for people or to become fishers of men, an assignment they will fulfil as they have continual fellowship with him in order to carry out the mission that Jesus gave them: <<*He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons*>> (Mark 3:14-15). Jesus’ words recall Jeremiah 16:14-17, where ‘fishers’ and ‘hunters’ of men will call people back from idols to God after judgment has occurred: <<*“However, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ but it will be said, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.’ For I will restore them to the land I gave their ancestors. “But now I will send for many fishermen,” declares the Lord, “and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks. My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes>>. This call happens in a context of purification (Jeremiah 16:17), and will include Gentiles: <<*Lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will**

come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our ancestors possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good">> (Jeremiah 16:19).

¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Mark 1:18

At once they left their nets and followed him. Again, Mark highlights the urgency with which Peter and Andrew responded to follow Jesus. It was not just their nets they left behind, it was their entire business and their whole lifestyle: <<*Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!">> (Mark 10:28), showing that true discipleship was and will always be sacrificial.*

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Mark 1:19-20

They left their father with the hired men. Several of Jesus' first disciples were not poor but were self-employed fishermen or, as in the case of James and John, were part of a family business. Levi was a fairly well-to-do tax collector, employed by the Romans, as noted in Mark 2:14, where it is stated: <<*As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him>>. Levi is better known as Matthew, the author of the first Gospel.*

Most people might think that Zebedee would have been angry with his sons for deserting him like this, but actually to have a Rabbi call his sons to discipleship would have been a source of great pride and he was no doubt thrilled with what had happened to them.

Anyway, the calling of Christ on their lives clearly had a profound impact on these men, who so willingly gave up their earthly obligations to become his disciples. It is shown with the calling of Levi or Matthew: <<*After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him>> (Luke 5:27), and Philip: <<The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me">> (John 1:43). Yet the prophet had spoken of him that: <<He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him>> (Isaiah 53:2). Clearly for these men though there was something about him. Perhaps just his status as a Rabbi, perhaps more, much more!*

II.a.ii Mark 1:21-28 - Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit

Jesus had relocated from Nazareth to set up his main base in the larger town of Capernaum. He taught in the synagogue, amazing the people with his authority, something they had not seen in their own religious leaders. While he was there, he

encountered a man who was demon-possessed. The demon immediately recognised Jesus and had no option but to leave the man when ordered to do so by Jesus.

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.

Mark 1:21

Excavations at Capernaum, modern day Talhum, have revealed residential structures, a synagogue, and an octagonal Christian site. Capernaum's prominent, well-preserved synagogue has been dated, based on thousands of coins found below its pavement, to the 4th or 5th Century AD, although some argue it is earlier.



The remains of Peter's house

However, beneath this were found walls of a previous structure, which is very likely the synagogue of Jesus' day.

The 5th Century octagonal building, designed like many Byzantine commemorative Christian holy places, stands over a 4th Century church, built by modifying a 1st Century house. This marks the traditional site of Peter's home. See the image

In cities other than Jerusalem, the synagogue was the centre of Jewish worship during the time of Christ. Synagogues were located in most of the leading towns of Israel. Although very little remains of the original 1st Century synagogue at Nazareth, extensive archaeological evidence exists for a typical Jewish synagogue in the town of Gamla, which would have had much in common with the synagogues Jesus visited in Nazareth and other towns. See the image.



²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

Mark 1:22

The core purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was teaching, rather than performing miracles or casting out demons, actions which accompanied his teaching and attested to God's presence within him.

The teachers of the law or scribes mentioned here may have been a local group of pious, literate men who taught in the synagogues, in distinction from the higher-ranking scribes who came down from Jerusalem and were bold enough to challenge Jesus directly: <<***And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons”***>> (Mark 3:22).

He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. The scribes, like most well-educated Jews, would have learned the Scriptures completely by heart. Their teaching appears to have been by rote from their heads, whereas Jesus could open up the Scriptures from his heart and into theirs, thus he taught with authority, the same authority that is within God himself: <<***Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work***>> (John 14:10).

²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!”

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”

Mark 1:23-25

An impure spirit may have tried to resist Jesus’ power and his teaching on the Kingdom of God, but he correctly feared that Jesus has come to destroy him. An impure spirit suggests it has become unclean through its subordination to the evil forces of Satan rather than abiding in nature with the pureness of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus of Nazareth? The impure spirit recognised Jesus as the Messiah, the Holy One of God, but deliberately refers to him by his earthly title to try to confuse those listening who knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: <<***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times***>> (Micah 5:2). Confusion and deception are key weapons in the arsenal of the devil and it even had Nathanael doubting Jesus before he met him: <<***Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip***>> (John 1:45-46). This was something that confused the Pharisees and other religious leaders too: <<***Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?” They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee***>> (John 7:50-52). Had they taken the time to enquire they would have found out that Jesus had in fact been born in Bethlehem as recorded in Matthew 2:1 and Luke 2:4. However, for Jesus it was not so much the location of his physical birth that was important but having faith in the one who had sent him: <<***Very truly I tell you,***

whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life>> (John 5:24).

Have you come to destroy us? The use of the first person plural could either mean that this spirit had some affinity with similar spirits in posing this question or that the man was being possessed by multiple spirits, as with the man in the region of the Gerasenes: <<*Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him*>> (Luke 8:30).

The act of naming Jesus as the Holy One of God may have displayed the demon’s attempt at exercising power over Jesus, a futile gesture if that were the case. Jesus easily resisted any power the spirit had and ordered the impure spirit to be quiet.

It is worthy of note that the spirits recognise the Holy Spirit in the followers of Jesus too, as seen in Philippi: <<Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved”>> (Acts 16:16-17).

Be quiet or be silent translates the Greek word phimotheti, which is literally ‘be muzzled’. Jesus did not want the impure spirit to speak any longer, either to propagate his father’s lies or to widen speculation about Jesus’ true identity.

²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

Mark 1:26

The anger and violence of the impure spirit’s response was probably a fearful reaction when it realised it was in opposition to a far superior power, despite any claims that its master may have made. Its expulsion may have been a painful experience causing the shriek, although it is likely he did it in order to instil a sense of fear in the onlookers.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him”. ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Mark 1:27-28

The people were all so amazed. Casting out this demon reinforced Jesus’ authority to teach.

During that period of history there were many itinerant sorcerers and magicians who earned their living by claiming to have power over evil spirits. Luke writes of one such group of people: <<Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom

Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding>> (Acts 19:13-16). Even invoking the name of Jesus seemed to produce little success for such people and it would seem that most others had similar results for the people noted that Jesus clearly had authority that others did not have and judging by their reaction to him, his capabilities were unprecedented in their experience.

II.a.iii Mark 1:29-34 - Jesus Heals Many

Having finished his message in the Synagogue, Jesus went with Peter and Andrew to their home only to find Peter’s mother-in-law was ill. Jesus immediately healed her so she got up and served them, as was the custom or duty of Jewish women.

After the Sabbath had ended at sunset, many people, who were ill or demons possessed, came to Jesus and he healed them all!

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

Mark 1:29-31

They went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. These four men, especially Peter, John and James, would form the nucleus of Jesus’ apostles.

Simon’s mother-in-law. Simon, better known as Peter, is the only apostle that is referred to as being married although his wife is never mentioned. Even though there was no hierarchical structure in the apostolic group, Peter would become the natural leader, as Rabbi’s often had an older student to fulfil this role, and he is seen as their spokesman on many occasions; perhaps he was the first among equals. His marriage and the Scripture passage: <<***But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours***>> (Matthew 17:27), indicate that Peter was over 20 years of age, the age when the temple tax became obligatory. Matthew, or Levi, as a tax collector employed by the Roman authorities, was also probably over 20 years old, but it is generally accepted that the other apostles were still teenagers when they followed Jesus; this would have been a typical age group to be disciples of a Rabbi.

They immediately told Jesus about her shows they had a high level of concern, indicating that the woman was extremely ill and needed urgent medical attention. This heightens the tension and demonstrates the greatness of the miracle cure.

He took her hand and helped her up. There are times when Jesus would pray before a miracle: <<***So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and***>>

said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me”>> (John 11:41-42). On such occasions he does so for the benefit of others around him, but here Jesus does not even have to speak a word, for he has authority. When Jairus’ daughter died Jesus took her by the hand and spoke a simple command to restore to life again: <<He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished>> (Mark 5:41-42), and similarly a spirit-possessed boy who appeared to be dead: <<The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up>> (Mark 9:26-27).

The fever left her and she began to wait on them. As can be seen on so many occasions, when Jesus healed people the effect was immediate and complete, i.e. there was no recuperation time needed or any lingering effects from the fever that would normally be experienced by anyone being cured by modern-day drugs in the 21st Century. The woman was able to continue what she would have seen to be her duty toward her male family and their guests.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Mark 1:32-34

Sunset marked the end of the Sabbath, which would have occurred at approximately 18:00 on the Saturday; people were then permitted to move about freely and to come to Jesus to have their needs met.

Jesus heals mercifully and casts out demons, thereby substantiating the authority given him by his heavenly Father. When Jesus casts out demons, it shows that the Kingdom of God is advancing, driving back the power of the enemy over people’s lives.

In a corresponding passage, it states: <<When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases”>> (Matthew 8:16-17), where Matthew quotes from Isaiah 53:4, a reference to Isaiah’s prophecy of the servant, focusing on Jesus’ messianic role as healer. The fact that not all sicknesses have a demonic origin is seen in the distinction between the healings of the sick and the casting out of spirits from those who were demon-possessed.

Luke records another detail not included by Mark: <<At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them>> (Luke 4:40), showing just how much Jesus cared. He has the power to cure all of the people instantaneously but, despite it

having been a long day with an early start the following morning, Jesus took the time to heal each one individually.

The whole town gathered is not to be taken literally but is symbolic of the large gathering that Jesus once again would deal with in love and compassion.

II.a.iv Mark 1:35-39 - Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

Jesus the man knew the importance of being in the Father's presence, maintained through solitary prayer. Here, Jesus got up very early to do just that before being joined by his disciples and heading out to the surrounding villages to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God; a primary reason why he had come.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

Four verbs: got up, left, went and prayed, emphasise Jesus' resolve to have fellowship with his Father. Jesus prayed at a very early hour, while it was still dark.

³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come".

Mark 1:36-38

Everyone is looking for you. The crowds may have gathered because there were more sick or spirit-possessed people, or just because they liked being part of the crowd in order to witness the miracles. Peter and the others only saw the needs and therefore did not understand why Jesus went away to pray (v.35). Jesus intentionally removed himself from the crowds and then went on to the nearby villages, being always obedient the Father's call to preach the Gospel.

³⁹ So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Mark 1:39

Although it can be seen from John's Gospel that Jesus went to several festivals in Jerusalem, especially in the first year of his ministry, Mark focuses on the work he undertook in Galilee.

That he was preaching in their synagogues shows a certain level of acceptance or recognition, or at least a sense of intrigue about what he was saying to them; a new teaching with authority (v.27).

Driving out demons. Jesus' war against Satan and his disciples is timeless but not endless, for a time will come: *<<And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven,*

having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time>> (Revelation 20:1-3).

II.a.v Mark 1:40-45 -Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

Jesus healed a man with leprosy, a term used to denote many skin diseases that would render a person unclean and therefore isolate them from their community. Such a cleansing would have been highly significant and, despite Jesus instructing the man to tell no one how he was healed, he clearly did spread the story, bring fame to Jesus, which was not what Jesus wanted at that point in his ministry.

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean”.

Mark 1:40

A man with leprosy is ceremonially unclean: <<*Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp*>> (Leviticus 13:45-46). As an outcast, he was financially and socially isolated, dependent on charity.

Leprosy comes from the Greek term lepra, which included a variety of serious skin diseases and was not limited to what is today called leprosy or Hansen’s disease. The OT provided specific guidelines for the examination and treatment of those with a variety of skin diseases generally called leprosy, many of which were highly contagious and is dealt with in detail in Leviticus Chapters 13-14.

Begged him on his knees. The man may have had some notion who Jesus was or more likely he held him to be a great prophet from God. Either way, he showed Jesus the appropriate respect in all humility.

If you are willing is probably the reason Jesus became indignant; see comments made on v.41.

You can make me clean. This statement appears to be free of doubt. The man had faith to be healed and thus Jesus would cleanse him, probably spiritually as well.

⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Mark 1:41-42

The latest NIV translation says that Jesus was indignant that the man had come to him and touched him, whereas former NIV and other translations have **filled with compassion** or similar expressions. This would fit better with the character of

Christ when dealing with those in society who were in need of his compassion, love and miraculous healing powers.

It is unclear if they use indignant in the sense of Jesus' response to the man's approach and being touched by him, although it seems more likely that he was indignant because the man should ask: <<***If you are willing***>> (v.40), perhaps showing a lack of understanding of the character of Jesus. Either way, he responded in the way that has become expected of Jesus - he showed compassion and healed him.

Touched the man. Jesus' compassion, genuine love, mercy and power are such that his touch did not make Jesus unclean, but actually made the leper clean, i.e. he was cleansed and his skin returned to a normal healthy state. Note the apparently simplicity as well as tone of authority in Jesus' command: be clean! The bible states: <<***Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched***>> (1 Samuel 10:26). Jesus not only actually touches those who need healing physically, emotionally or spiritually, he reaches out to touch their hearts and their souls so that the whole being is changed and then belongs to him.

"I am willing", he said. "Be clean!" Jesus shows compassion toward the man, a key characteristic he so frequently displays. He is not only willing, he is able: <<***He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave***>> (Psalm 107:20). The words Jesus would later say to his disciples comes to mind here to: <<***You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you***>> (John 15:3); not just physically cleansed but spiritually as well through the power of God: <<***Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth***>> (John 17:17).

Immediately the leprosy left him. Christ does not heal in stages. The impact of his work, whether for physical, emotional or spiritual healing, is immediate: <<***Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering***>> (Mark 5:29), <<***Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished***>> (Mark 5:42), <<***"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road***>> (Mark 10:52), <<***Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God***>> (Luke 13:13), and through the faithful work of others: <<***Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength***>> (Acts 9:18-19). There are those who do not always recognise the immediacy of their healing, especially if it is emotional or spiritual!

He was cleansed. This would be one of the indications that Jesus would give to John the Baptist that he was the Messiah, for John had sent his own disciples to ask the question of Jesus: <<***So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor***>> (Luke 7:22).

⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning:

Mark 1:43

This may indicate that the man wanted to follow him, as did Legion when he was cured: <<*The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you."* So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him>> (Luke 8:38-39), the key difference being that Legion was on the Gentile side of the lake and his proclamation would not cause the same reaction as it would on the Jewish side, who were expecting their warrior king Messiah to come to oppose Rome, so Jesus issued a strong warning to this man.

⁴⁴ "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them".

Mark 1:44

Don't tell this to anyone. This is Mark's first report of Jesus telling a healed person not to tell anyone of his being healed. As recently noted, Israel was expecting a warrior king Messiah, so Jesus carefully avoided stirring up a misunderstanding of his messianic identity. Although miracles attest to the authenticity of his message concerning the Kingdom's arrival, he did not want to draw crowds who would come simply for the sake of miracles, nor did he want to attract the attention of the Roman authorities too early on, which may have led to a situation that would have made it more difficult for Jesus to so openly proclaim the Kingdom message.

Show yourself to the priest is commanded so that the healed person will be declared ceremonially clean in order to be socially rehabilitated, as described in Leviticus 14:2-31. It may be commanded in a secondary sense to bear witness to the priest, as a testimony to them, providing proof of his having been healed by Jesus.

⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 1:45

He went out and began to talk freely. This is understandable from a human perspective for being healed of anything is a cause for joyous celebration. This can especially be seen in that era when leprosy was seen as an affliction by God for a specific sin. However, when instructed by God not to do something it would be wise to obey him for to do otherwise, however well intentioned, is to sin. There is warning of this elsewhere, when Jesus had healed a man crippled possibly as a result of sin: <<*Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you"*>> (John 5:14).

Talk freely. It was written of the Messiah that he would not go around seeking his own honour or glory but would work in all humility: <<**He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets**>> (Isaiah 42:2). In fact, King Solomon had warned that people should not seek their own glory in this way: <<**It is not good to eat much honey, Nor is it glory to search out one's own glory**>> (Proverbs 25:27 NASB).

The idea that leprosy was an affliction sent by God is understandable for there are several instances in Scripture to support such an idea. For example, Moses' sister Miriam, along with his brother Aaron, had spoken out against Moses' God-given authority, so that: <<**The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous – it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed**>> (Numbers 12:9-11), Gehazi, who became greedy and wanted to accept the gifts from Naaman after his master Elisha had already declined them: <<**But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes – or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves? Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever."** Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous – it had become as white as snow>> (2 Kings 5:26-27), and King Uzziah effectively lost his kingship, when he went to burn incense in the Temple, something forbidden by God to all but the priests: <<**Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead**>> (2 Chronicles 26:19).

The joy of the healed man overrides Jesus' injunction to silence and therefore Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, lest he be mobbed. Although Jesus cannot stay hidden, nor would he have wanted to. However, a primary part of Jesus' early ministry was to train his disciples, as they would be the ones to take the Gospel message to the world after Jesus' departure. Finding the time and a place of solitude to do this became increasingly difficult as his fame spread: <<**Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."** So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them>> (Mark 6:31-33). Mark often emphasises how the crowds' excessive attention toward Jesus' miracles was a frequent problem, causing the crowds to miss the true purpose of his ministry, i.e. the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom.

This verse does not imply that Jesus then started to operate covertly for: <<**"I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret"**>> (John 18:20). This has apostolic confirmation by Paul when he was before the Roman governor Festus and King Agrippa II in Caesarea: <<**At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. "You are out of your mind, Paul!"** he

shouted. *“Your great learning is driving you insane.” “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner>>* (Acts 26:24-26), and by Peter at the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in the same city: 22.12 *<<You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judæa, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him>>* (Acts 10:36-38). All of these proclamations show just how well known the ministry had become to both the Jews and the Gentiles in that region.

The difficulties that Jesus had in operating among such crowds and the limitations he had in being confined to one place at any one time shows why there was the need for him to return to the Father and send the Holy Spirit: *<<But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you>>* (John 14:26), who by nature is omniscient, omnipotent and most importantly in this context - omnipresent.