

The Gospel According to Mark

Commentary by Daniel Rogers



Anástasis

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Introduction

I'm very excited to be writing this commentary on the Book of Mark. At the moment, I plan on posting portions of this work on my website www.labornotinvain.com on Friday. While I do not know how often or how much I will be able to put this material out, I do hope that it will be beneficial to those that read.

The picture on the first page is a work entitled *Anastasis*. It depicts Jesus having conquered the gates of Hades and holding the hands of Adam and Eve. This painting is a depiction of the corporate nature of the resurrection and it is fitting for our study on Mark since Mark frames the entire story of Jesus in a New Exodus setting.

Jesus's life, death, and resurrection serve as the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies concerning the return to the land, the resurrection, the Davidic kingdom, and the reconciliation of the nations.

In this short introduction, I will not be talking about the author or the date of this work. Personally, I believe that such endeavors can only produce educated guesses at best and, at the end of the day, do not change the central message or theme of the gospel account. Instead, I simply wish to state my purpose and some sort of a philosophy in approaching the gospel accounts.

Notice, if you will, that I say gospel account and not simply gospel. The reason is that there are not four gospels but one. Each account is a telling of the same gospel message. Furthermore, the events, order, and details of the various gospels differ, are left out, or are included because the authors were often making theological points on top of telling the story of Jesus.

Had they wanted to stick to rigid, twenty-first century guidelines of storytelling, we would not have four accounts but one.

That being said, I will make no attempt in this commentary to “reconcile” or “harmonize” the gospels. That is not to say that those who do such

work are laboring in vain; I believe they are doing good. For me, however, such a task in this work is unnecessary because I am more concerned with what Mark has to say, what order he chooses to use, what details he wishes to include or omit, and why.

Harmonizing the gospel accounts, though necessary in some contexts, can cause one to miss additional themes of the individual books. In many cases we “murder to dissect.”

One of my reasons for wanting to study the gospel accounts in greater detail is because of my fascination with atonement theory. I am hoping that through a casual study of the gospels I will begin to see more clearly the *how* behind the death of Jesus.

Another goal I have is to examine the teaching of Jesus in answering the question “how then shall we live” in light of our belief in fulfilled prophecy. I want to see what Jesus’s vision of the world is and how we can incorporate His healing ministry, feeding of the poor, and critique of the rulers of His

day into our own lives in an attempt to let God's will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. That is, I want to bring the realities of the New Heavens and Earth into the world. I want to move them from their existence in academia into practical application for every person on Earth.

My desire is the same as God's: "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). I truly believe that preterism properly applied can make that more of a reality than any of us have previously thought.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, the gospel according to Mark.

Mark 1:1-8 – The Beginning

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; 3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.' " 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His

sandals. 8 “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Mark 1:1

“The beginning...”

The very first word of the book is the word *beginning*, from the Greek word *archē*. This word is used fifty-five times in the New Testament. Most notably, it is used in relation to the creation of Genesis 1 (Mark 10:6; Mark 13:19). It is utilized by John to start his gospel account as well in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Mark’s purpose here is to draw attention the work of Jesus in building a new creation. What I mean by that is, Mark’s desire is to show his readers a more excellent Way to live that is counterintuitive considering the lifestyle prescribed by the Roman Empire. Paul calls this the “foolishness of the Cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Since Genesis 3, man has traveled further and further East of Eden. Jesus’s main mission was to

“reconcile all things to Himself... whether things on earth or things in heaven.” This reconciliation of all things is bringing man back to Eden – not physically but spiritually. This is the essence of the good news. See notes on verse 2 for more information regarding the “beginning” in relation to the specific context of the chapter.

“...of the gospel...”

The term gospel, as many are aware, means good news. Originally, it was used in relation to reports of victory from the battlefield as in 1 Samuel 31:9:

“They cut off his head and stripped off his weapons, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the **good news** to the house of their idols and to the people.”

Thus, the expression “gospel of Jesus Christ” is a reference to the victory that Jesus had over Satan. The defeat of Satan means life and freedom for those who were in bondage because of the original lie told in Genesis 3 that murdered Adam and Eve.

The Hebrews writer spoke of the power that Satan had over the descendants of Abraham and all people:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Hebrews 2:14-15; cf. John 8:31-47).

Jesus adds to the discussion by calling to our attention how Satan murdered Adam and Eve:

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

The original lie was that they were not good enough in their original state. Although God had made them in His image and fellowshiped with them continually, the Devil convinced them they needed something else, so she ate of the tree to be like God.

She wanted to reach another level of life on her own merits, but this only brought death because once the question is asked if a person is good enough or not, there is no end to the doubts, questions, and insecurities produced by that line of inquiry because fault will always be found at some level.

Jesus saves us from this lie by demonstrating the perfect love of God through the Cross. That is good news.

“...of Jesus Christ...”

This good news is concerning Jesus the Christ. Inserting the word “the” between Jesus and Christ brings about an important clarification that isn’t seen when simply reading the translation: Christ is

not Jesus's last name but is a term meaning The Anointed One. This designation identifies Jesus as The One who descended from David that would reconcile Israel in the last days.

This designation is used to describe prophets, priest, and kings in the Old Testament. Jesus, as all three, is the ultimate Anointed One and fulfills all these roles for all time.

Some are afraid to change the description "church of Christ" on their building because they do not want to remove the name of Jesus from the sign. While these brothers and sisters have good intentions, their reasoning is flawed because the term Christ is a title or description – not the name of Jesus.

"...the Son of God."

The title Son of God is highly political. People who claim that religion and politics don't mix have missed out on the deliberate choices that Jesus and His followers used in their words and actions: kingdom of God, good news, and Son of God are

just a few of the terms that the first century saints used to pointedly criticize Rome for their empire of violence and oppression. This also served as a critique of the leaders of the Jewish people who were in league with Rome and benefited from the high taxation and mistreatment of their people.

This is why there are so many accusations levied at Jesus and His disciples for attempting to overthrow Rome. It was upon this basis that several of this number were brought to trial in the first century.

Peter, to help protect his flock, encouraged his audience to submit themselves to every human institution (1 Peter 2:12). This was done so that any slander their enemies would bring against them would be seen to be nothing (1 Peter 2:12, 15).

Armed with the terms Son of God, Christ, gospel, and kingdom, Mark is on a mission to distinguish the true Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, from the so-called sons of god that ruled in Rome. This distinction is important because the lives of the sons of god told one story about how

the world works while Jesus would reveal an alternative Way to live and, directly related to that, who God really is.

Mark 1:2-3

“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...”

The quotation here is from Isaiah 40:3. This is one of the only passages that is quoted in every gospel account near the beginning. There is, however, another passage cited here: Malachi 3:1. This passage, and its context, will be helpful to us when studying the ministry of John the Baptist as well as deciphering Jesus’s comments concerning the coming judgement.

While Mark calls this “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” it is interesting to note that the account of Jesus’s birth, persecution as a child by Herod, flight to Egypt, and events as a twelve-year-old are left out of Mark’s account.

“The beginning,” according to him, really begins with this quotation of Isaiah followed by the ministry of John the Baptist.

The importance of this quotation will be seen in the coming commentary, but just know for now that this text is in the midst of a discourse on the “New” or “Second Exodus.”

This frames the entirety of Mark’s account of the life of Christ in a New Exodus setting. That is, Mark believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the promises in the Old Testament prophets concerning resurrection, a return to the land, reconciliation of the nations, and the Davidic kingdom.

Each of the other authors of the gospel accounts, likewise, place the ministry of Jesus in a similar context, but the extent of that will not be seen in this commentary.

“BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY...”

The first quotation comes from Malachi 3:1-4. The full passage reads,

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And

the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

This passage reveals that John the Baptist was not just to announce the earthly ministry of Jesus, but he was an eschatological figure whose arrival marks the beginning of the last days and the arrival of the end of the age.

His ministry would prepare the people for the arrival of Jesus who would purify the priesthood so that the offering to God would be pleasing.

The following text indicates that God would come near to the people in order to judge them for their many sorcerers, adulterers, liars, oppressors of the poor, oppressors of the fatherless and widow, those who turn aside the foreigner, and those that do not fear God (Malachi 3:5). This list bears a close resemblance to one in Revelation 21:8 which is also a picture of God coming in judgement.

Malachi 4 also contains a message of judgement and is applied to the ministry of John the Baptist by Jesus in Mark 9:13 (cf. Malachi 4:5). In that passage, Malachi warns of the day of God in which the arrogant and evil doers would be burned like chaff and would be left neither root nor branch. This language closely resembles John's in Matthew's account of his ministry:

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown

into the fire. 11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:10-12).

Thus, Mark’s use of Malachi 3 invokes a larger context of judgement and makes John into an eschatological figure and not simply one who would announce Jesus’s earthly ministry.

This connection between John and the last days will play a part in our understanding of Jesus’s message concerning judgement later in the gospel account.

There is another text that is possibly behind this passage:

Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. (Exodus 23:20).

This echo further confirms and supports what we know from Malachi and Isaiah, as seen below. John is the *angelos* that would prepare the people for their entrance into the kingdom of God.

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.”

The next passage introduced is the one that Mark names: Isaiah 40:3. The context of Isaiah 40 is fascinating and reveals just how powerful the first century saints viewed the gospel in its ability to restore Israel.

The chapter begins by Isaiah pronouncing that peace would finally come to Jerusalem.

Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has

received of the LORD'S hand Double for all
her sins. (Isaiah 40:2)

This second verse of Isaiah 40 is connected both
directly and indirectly to multiple Old and New
Testament themes.

Her warfare has ended

This theme began at the beginning of the book in
Isaiah's vision for the last days:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2
Now it will come about that In the last days
The mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the
mountains, And will be raised above the
hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3
And many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the
LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths." For
the law will go forth from Zion And the
word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And

He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:1-4)

Jesus, in His ministry, spoke about bringing peace to His disciples. This would be a type of peace that the world cannot offer, and it is one that they would not understand, Paul says:

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (John 14:27)

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

That her iniquity has been removed

This short statement is incredibly important for understanding many Old Testament and New Testament texts. For example, Daniel saw a day when iniquity would be removed as well: at the end of the seventy weeks.

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. (Daniel 9:24)

This passage would be fulfilled when they would see the “abomination of desolation” (Daniel 9:27). The abomination of desolation is also the time of the resurrection according to Daniel 12:2, 11. This is significant because Jesus said that the abomination of desolation would happen within the lifetime of His disciples:

Therefore when you see the
ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which

was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (Matthew 24:15-16)

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Matthew 24:34)

So, the time of the taking away of the iniquity is the time when Israel would be restored. But the time of the taking away of the iniquity would be when the resurrection would take place. And this would be at the abomination of desolation which Jesus said would happen within that generation.

This means that, just in referencing Isaiah 40, Mark believed that the restoration of Israel, the taking away of the iniquity, the resurrection, and the abomination of desolation would take place within that generation and that John was the catalyst to kickstart these last day events.

Another key New Testament passage that depends upon Isaiah 40:3 is found in Romans.

In one of the most difficult sections of Scripture, according to many, the apostle Paul declares:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.” 27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

This idea, of taking away of the sins of Israel, goes back to Isaiah 27:9. It is in a passage about judgement, resurrection, vindication, and banqueting with God.

This all takes place “on this mountain” which is yet another reference to Isaiah 2, as mentioned above.

Isaiah 25-27 is also the source of Paul’s doctrine of the resurrection:

He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 27:8)

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:54)

Hopefully, you are starting to see the rich history behind this simple reference and the amazing implications of Mark invoking this remarkable context at the beginning of his gospel account.

This incredible observation that many have recognized is even more fascinating when one considers that every gospel writer also quotes this passage towards the beginning of their gospel account (Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23).

That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins

This text is alluded to by John in Revelation 18: 6.

Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

This connects not only this passage but also texts such as Matthew 23 and 1 Thessalonians 2 together as well:

“So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 34 “Therefore, behold,

I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Matthew 23:31-36)

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the

measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

The proximity of Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 should come to our minds when we consider this connection found between Matthew 23 and 1 Thessalonians 2.

The first century saints did not view a future with multiple comings of the Lord separated by thousands of years but a soon-to-come event that would take place within that generation at the fall of the second temple.

There is much more that could be discussed in Isaiah 40, such as “the glory of the Lord will be revealed” and “all flesh will see it.” But since this is a commentary on Mark, hopefully this small taste of the theological background to the opening passages in Mark will at least make you aware of the saint’s expectations.

Mark 1:4
“John the Baptist...”

“...appeared in the wilderness...”

“...preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”