

## SESSION ONE

### The Coming of Christ: *The Basis of Our Devotion (Mark 1:1-13)*

“It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and most profound mystery in all the universe.” ~W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 563

#### I. Overview

Have you questioned what it really means to follow Jesus? Is it really worth it? Or in the midst of suffering, have you contemplated the value of continuing in the Christian faith? These questions become a driving force behind the penning of Mark’s Gospel. The author focuses upon the suffering of Jesus and the importance of discipleship despite the circumstances. Jesus’ willingness to suffer not only becomes the model and encouragement for the believer to persevere in his faith, but His life also demonstrates that He alone serves as the Redeemer and Healer of the world.

#### II. The Content

##### A. The Header (1:1)

The first thirteen verses set the scene for the narrative. In these verses, Mark presents the three credentials of Jesus’ messiahship: the presentation of a messianic forerunner, an identification of Jesus with the people through baptism, and the demonstration of Jesus’ holiness through the forty days in the wilderness. All three events are seen prior to Jesus’ ministry in each of the four gospels, which in turn serves as the “beginning of the gospel.”

This “good news,” or joyful tidings, is christological in nature as it presents Jesus as both the Christ/Messiah and as the “Son of God.” Considering that Mark is writing primarily to Gentiles, the latter title, “Son of God,” would imply divinity. Support for this portrayal of Jesus as more than a mere man can be seen throughout Mark’s narrative (e.g., 3:11; 8:38; 9:7; 15:39).

##### B. The Prologue (1:2-13)

###### 1. The Forerunner to Christ (1:2-8)

vv 2-3 These verses define the nature of this “beginning” in Mark’s longest quotation from the Old Testament. While the author attributes the reference to Isaiah, the quote is actually a combination of Isaiah 40:3, Exodus 23:20, and Malachi 3:1. Such a construction was common in ancient literature for the purpose of understanding the quote in a particular framework.

Isaiah 40:3 -

Exodus 23:20 -

Malachi 3:1 -

vv. 4-5 This term “wilderness” directly correlates with vv. 2-3 and further draws a connection with the quotation from Isaiah 40:3.

As William Lane writes, “The willingness to return to the wilderness signifies the acknowledgment of Israel’s history as one of disobedience and rebellion, and a desire to begin once more.”  
(*The Gospel of Mark*, 50-51).

v. 6 Mark draws a clear parallel between John the Baptist and the expected Elijah. Note the following:

- the location (cf. 1 Kgs 17:5; 2 Kgs 2:1-22) -
- the apparel (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8) -
- the diet (cf. Lev 11:22) -

As the narrative unfolds, the author will continue to make a strong connection between John the Baptist and the messenger of Malachi 3 (cf. 6:14-29 and 9:12-13).

vv. 7-8 Serving as the messianic forerunner, John’s message centers upon this “Coming One.” The importance of this coming figure is observed first in John’s analysis of his relationship with Jesus (v. 7). Secondly, John highlights the role this Coming One will play in the immediate future. While John had baptized with water, this coming figure will baptize by means of the Holy Spirit (v. 8).

## 2. The Credentials Necessary for Christ (1:9-13)

vv. 9-11 With an explanation of the messenger, Mark now proceeds to describe the Messiah.

**Take Note:** The word “immediately” occurs over forty times in these sixteen chapters! This word reiterates the urgency and speed for which Mark retells the life of Jesus.

Unlike the other gospel writers, Mark utilizes a unique term to describe the heavens opening. His reference to “rendering” echoes Isaiah 64:1, which reads, “If only you would tear apart the sky and come down! The mountains would tremble before you!” (also, cf. Ezek 1:1).

This scene climaxes with a declaration from the heavens concerning both Jesus’ personhood and his relationship to His Father. This declaration reveals Jesus’ unique role as the Son (cf. Isa 42:1b and Ps 2:7) and signals His inauguration into this messianic office (cf. Mt 3:11-15).

vv. 12-13 Again, the term “immediately” is utilized to link the following material with the preceding content. The Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness for the purpose of testing Him. Jesus must not only identify with the Israelites through baptism, but He must also be found sinless when faced with a myriad of temptations.

Compared to Matthew and Luke, Mark’s brief account of the temptation contains two primary distinctions: the references to the “wild beasts” and “the ministering of angels” (v. 13). In both cases, Mark is indicating that this is a cursed region—a realm of desolation. One is also reminded of the promise in the Old Testament where the wilderness will become a paradise, and all vicious beasts will be removed (cf. Isa 35:9; Ezek 34:23-28).

### III. The Intersect

A. We can be certain that God will **always** keep His \_\_\_\_\_.

2 Peter 3:8-9a -

B. We can take comfort in knowing that God \_\_\_\_\_ with humanity. God is not disengaged from His world. He came and encountered life’s hardships and disappointments, and He faced every form of temptation while remaining sinless.

Hebrews 4:14-16 -

C. Christ is the **only** means for radical \_\_\_\_\_.

Ephesians 1:1-8 -

“Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.” ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer