

Mark | *Commentary*



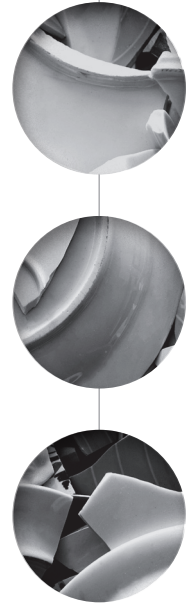
EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Fall 2023

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITER

Argile Smith serves as pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Biloxi, MS. He graduated from William Carey College (BA) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv, PhD).

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Amber Vaden
Team Leader

Dwayne McCrary
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

Brian Daniel
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments to
Team Leader by email:
amber.vaden@lifeway.com;
or by mail to
Team Leader

Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary
200 Powell Place, Suite 100
Brentwood, TN 37027-7707;
or make comments on the web at
lifeway.com.

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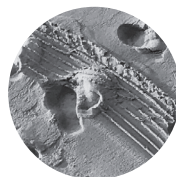
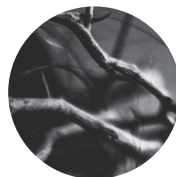
FROM THE TEAM LEADER

I've heard it said, "If you really want to get to know someone, drive across the state of Texas together in the summer without air conditioning. You'll see what they're really like." It's true. We get a front-row seat to a person's character and priorities when we spend time together, especially when challenges arise creating a less-than-comfortable experience. Difficulties reveal our communication skills and our ability to persevere through trials, among other qualities. Experiences like this can forge a strong, tested relationship, taking us beyond a superficial friendship.

The Gospel of Mark is a fast-paced account of Jesus's earthly ministry detailing numerous events and experiences He encountered. Mark gives us a vivid depiction of who Jesus is, what He is like, and what He came to do. We get to know Jesus in the pages of Mark's narrative. In the very first verse, Mark identified Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus's divine nature is a major emphasis for Mark (1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62). We also see Jesus's humanity in this Gospel (4:38; 5:30; 8:12; 13:32). Jesus experienced hunger, tiredness, and a whole range of emotions, just like we do. Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension conclude this Gospel account, irrefutable evidence of Jesus's identity.

Jesus is both fully divine and fully man. He is God's Son and the long-awaited Messiah. Mark's narrative affords us an up-close view of this truth—and it is such good news. It is the foundation of our relationship with Him.

In Him,
Amber Vaden
amber.vaden@lifeway.com



BIBLICAL **BACKGROUND**

The Gospel of Mark is the second book in the New Testament. It is the shortest of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

AUTHOR

The Gospel of Mark itself does not provide any information regarding the identity of the person who wrote it. However, in the second century, Mark's name became associated with this Gospel. Mark was also known as John Mark. He was a Jewish believer, and his mother, Mary, and his cousin Barnabas were also devoted followers of Christ (Acts 12:12; Col. 4:10). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch after their relief mission to Jerusalem, they brought Mark with them (Acts 12:25). As they set out from Antioch on their first missionary journey (AD 47–48), they took Mark with them (13:5). He accompanied them as they worked in Cyprus, which was familiar territory for him and Barnabas. However, Mark traveled with them only a little farther before he returned to Jerusalem (v. 13). For that reason, Paul did not want to take Mark along on their second missionary journey (AD 50–52).

The question of not taking Mark fostered such a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that they decided to take different routes as they continued their missionary work (15:36–41). However, years later (around AD 66), while a prisoner in Rome for a second time, Paul wrote to Timothy requesting he bring Mark along with him on his next visit. He affirmed that Mark would be helpful to him in his ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).

According to what Paul and Peter wrote in their epistles, Mark lived in Rome for a while. While Paul was under house arrest during his first imprisonment in Rome, he wrote his letter to the Colossian church (about AD 61). In the letter, he mentioned that Mark was with him (Col. 4:10). In Paul's letter to Philemon, which he also wrote in Rome (about AD 60–61), he referred to Mark as one of his co-laborers (Philem. 24).

Mark also enjoyed an enduring friendship with Peter. Their relationship placed Mark in Rome as well. The spiritual kinship Peter and Mark shared can be seen in Peter's first letter, written from Rome in the early AD 60s. Peter referred to Mark as his son (1 Pet. 5:13). The remainder of Mark's life has been veiled in obscurity. According to tradition Mark served the Lord in Egypt, where he died as a martyr.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The relationship between Mark and the apostle Peter helps in dating Mark's Gospel. Peter was martyred during the reign of Roman Emperor

Nero (ruled AD 54–68). Nero accused Christians of setting fire to the city of Rome. In reality, Nero had set the fire himself, but he placed the blame on Christians in order to escape culpability. The persecution of Christians under Nero began in AD 64, and Peter’s execution occurred in about AD 64–65. During Mark’s stay in Rome, he served as Peter’s interpreter. Peter spoke Aramaic, a Hebrew dialect that was commonly used among Jewish people at that time. Mark spoke both Aramaic and Greek. He interpreted Peter’s messages for Greek-speaking believers who lived in Rome. While suggested dates for Mark’s Gospel vary, Mark most likely wrote his Gospel account shortly before or after Peter was martyred in Rome. He based his account on the messages that Peter preached.

AUDIENCE

The initial readers of Mark’s Gospel account lived with the awareness that they would face persecution as believers because they lived in Rome. Mark wrote with them and the threat of persecution in mind. While Mark provided a robust perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus, he wrote about the messianic mission of Jesus with a view toward encouraging His followers as they faced persecution. For instance, Mark wrote that Jesus encouraged His disciples to look ahead to the blessings of eternal life as well as the persecution that would come their way (Mark 10:30). Mark also provided them with Jesus’s instructions about expecting persecution and the need for endurance through such persecution knowing that eternal life was waiting for them in the end (13:9-13).

Mark wrote his Gospel for an audience of Gentile believers. Consequently, they would have had only a limited understanding of the language, customs, and traditions of Judaism. In order to help them to understand the Jewish context of the ministry of Jesus, Mark translated Aramaic words in his Gospel into the Greek language.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT

Mark’s Gospel was probably being circulated among the Christian churches before the other three Gospels were completed. The content and structure in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke reflect distinct connections with Mark’s account.

Mark set out to write about Jesus in a way that would allow the Lord’s followers to grasp His messianic ministry. As a result, they would be able to learn more about the gospel message that centered on Jesus and live it out as they served Him. At the outset of his Gospel, Mark declared that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God (1:1). As he detailed what Jesus said and did in His ministry, Mark portrayed Jesus as the Messiah who came to serve and to suffer.

In the first ten chapters of his Gospel account, Mark portrayed Jesus as Messiah who came to serve. He shared a selection of the formative episodes in the beginning of Jesus's messianic ministry (1:2-13). He then related the key events in Jesus's ministry in Galilee (1:14-8:21). Jesus came to serve by what He taught, the miracles He performed, the demons He drove out, and the individuals He healed. Mark emphasized that Jesus stayed focused on His redemptive ministry as Messiah. Jesus's servant heart can be seen in the accounts of what He said and did in relation to His disciples, the crowds, and the Jewish leaders who opposed Him.

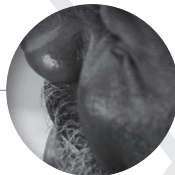
Following Jesus's Galilean ministry, Mark detailed Jesus's pivotal journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52). The journey began with the healing of a blind man (8:22-26) and Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is Messiah (vv. 27-30). The purpose for the journey to Jerusalem is explained when Jesus tells His disciples for the first time about His impending crucifixion, death, and resurrection (v. 31). Then Mark detailed Jesus's transfiguration and His instruction to His disciples about the link between spiritual power and fervent prayer (chap. 9). As Jesus led His disciples closer to Jerusalem, He told them once more that He would die and rise again (9:31). Mark included accounts in which Jesus reinforced His teachings about the kingdom of God. In addition, he shared various interactions of Jesus with His disciples and with other individuals who met Him on His way to Jerusalem.

In chapters 11-16 of his Gospel, Mark portrayed Jesus as Messiah who came to suffer. Jesus's suffering was in keeping with His Father's will and plan of redemption. This part of the Gospel relates Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem, His arrest, His death, and His resurrection (11:1-16:20). Specific events in this section include Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11), His cleansing of the temple (vv. 15-18), the religious leaders' plot to arrest and kill Jesus (11:18; 12:12; 14:1-2), His anointing at Bethany (14:3-9), His Passover meal with His disciples (vv. 17-26), and Jesus's prayer and agony in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal (vv. 32-42). Throughout this section of Mark's Gospel are Jesus's teachings to both His disciples and the crowds who gathered around Him.

Mark conveyed the pain and suffering Jesus endured during His betrayal, arrest, and trials, which then culminated in His crucifixion (14:43-15:41). Jesus suffered and died on the cross, and He defeated death when He rose from the grave. Mark ends his Gospel by detailing Jesus's resurrection appearances (16:1-13), His mandate that His disciples share the good news of the gospel of salvation with the entire world (vv. 14-28), and finally Jesus's ascension into heaven (vv. 19-20).

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue to the Gospel (1:1-13)
- II. Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (1:14-8:21)
- III. On the Way to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52)
- IV. A Week in Jerusalem (11:1-16:8)
- V. Appendix: Jesus's Appearances (16:9-20)



Introduced!

Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

Have you ever watched the inauguration of the President of the United States? Because of our access to television and other video resources, we're able to witness the fanfare associated with that important celebration. The ceremonies scheduled throughout the inauguration day emphasize the significance of the occasion. Early in the morning, the presidential entourage gathers for a time of worship. From there the First Family proceeds through a series of special events that have been planned to display their arrival. Eventually they make their way to the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building. There, selected leaders in government gather with them for the most meaningful ceremony of the entire day. After appropriate prayers and songs, the president stands before the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and takes the oath of office. By taking the oath, the president pledges to lead the nation in keeping with the Constitution. Then comes the presidential speech that serves to cast a vision for Americans to embrace over the next four years.

In other countries, monarchs play a role in government. In those nations, citizens affirm a new king or queen with equally impressive rituals and traditions. Elaborate attire and an extravagant parade often mark the beginning of the royal ceremony that takes the nation through the activities leading to the coronation. The parade ends with the monarch arriving at the site of the coronation and then taking slow and steady steps toward the majestic throne of royalty. Seated on the throne, the coronation commences. There, before the entire country, the crown is placed on the monarch's head. A rich display of endorsement follows the placement of the crown.

Jesus began His public ministry without extraordinary displays of the affirmation afforded to presidents or monarchs. He didn't make a speech before political leaders, and He didn't wear a regal robe. Neither did He have a crown of royalty placed on His head. However, His introduction turned out to be far from ordinary. An unequaled display of divine affirmation underscored the beginning of His public ministry. Mark began His account of the ministry of Jesus by relating His identity, His baptism, and the heavenly responses to His introduction as the eternal Son of God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Mark 1:1-13

In Mark's brief and direct introduction to his Gospel account, he brought Jesus into view with a singular purpose in mind. He set out to demonstrate the certainty that Jesus is Messiah. Just as important, he intended to show that Jesus is God's beloved Son who came to live, die, and live again. Mark introduced Jesus as He made His way to the Jordan River in order to be baptized. The details surrounding His baptism gave Mark plenty of evidence to affirm Jesus, God's Son, as Messiah.

However, before Mark proceeded to share information about Jesus, he introduced John the Baptist. He started by showing how the Old Testament prophets anticipated John's ministry. The Old Testament passages in Mark's introduction served him well to present a portrait of John's ministry that had been painted with words proclaimed by prophets who lived centuries earlier (Mark 1:1-3).

Speaking of prophets, God's people had not heard the voice of a prophet for four hundred years. They had been depending on messages from the prophets that had been recorded in the Old Testament. Then John the Baptist entered the scene, and God's people heard the voice of a living prophet who proclaimed a message brimming with messianic hope. His voice called them to the Judean wilderness. There they repented when he preached, and they confessed their sins. John baptized them in keeping with their willingness to ask God to forgive them of their sins. The Jordan River became the site of a large, growing gathering of God's people who prepared their hearts for the arrival of Messiah (vv. 4-8).

When Mark introduced Jesus, he didn't provide any information about Jesus's birth or lineage. He simply noted that Jesus had been living in a Galilean village called Nazareth. Mark laid out the facts clearly and simply. John baptized Jesus, and the Holy Spirit descended from the sky that had been opened and settled on Him. Then God the Father spoke, affirming His love for Jesus, His faithful Son. In that scene, the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—appeared together for the purpose of affirming Jesus as Messiah (vv. 9-11).

Instead of directing Jesus to move forward immediately with His mission of proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God and calling people to repentance (vv. 14-15), the Holy Spirit drove Him into the wilderness where He remained for forty days. During those days, Jesus faced fierce temptations at the hands of Satan, His adversary who wanted to defeat

Him. Unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13), Mark does not detail the individual temptations Jesus faced nor does he indicate how Jesus was victorious over each temptation. During His time in the wilderness Jesus was in the presence of wild animals, and angels served Him (Mark 1:12-13).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Prophecy (Mark 1:1-3)

Mark introduced his account by explaining that his testimony was about the gospel of Jesus, whom he recognized to be the Son of God. Mark pointed to Old Testament prophecies that a messenger would prepare the way for the Messiah. The fulfillment of these prophecies and others about the coming of the Messiah is one way we can have confidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

VERSE 1

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark gave no details as to the events surrounding the birth and early life of Jesus (Matt. 1-2; Luke 1-2). Rather, Mark introduced his Gospel concisely with the words, **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** The word *gospel* comes from a Greek word (*euaggelion*) that means “good news.” Until the middle of the second century AD, the term *gospel* referred not to the four books we know as the Gospels, but rather to the Christian message of the salvation available through Jesus Christ. With this gospel in mind, Mark took a unique approach to introducing his account of the Messiah’s life and work. His reference to *the beginning* echoes the words of Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” He wrote about the beginning—or source—of the good news about Jesus the Messiah.

The name *Jesus* had deep roots among God’s people. It came from the Hebrew word for “Joshua,” and means “God saves.” The name *Jesus* emphasizes the Messiah’s humanity while the title *Christ* points to His divinity. (Jesus is God the Son.) *Christ* is not meant as Jesus’s last name. Rather the term means “anointed one” and is a synonym for the Hebrew word translated as “Messiah.” Mark also identified Jesus as *the*

Son of God. Throughout Mark's account, he demonstrated the messianic link between the words and actions of Jesus and the living God. He validated that God kept His promise regarding Messiah when Jesus came to make the gift of salvation available to everyone who repents and places their faith in Christ through His life, death, and resurrection.

VERSE 2

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.

After Mark introduced the purpose of his Gospel account, he turned his attention to the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. In those days, when a king planned to go on a journey, he dispatched forerunners who prepared the way for his travel. They would take every step necessary to guarantee that the king would be able to complete his travel plans in a fashion worthy of his majestic royalty. Likewise, Mark noted that a forerunner had been dispatched to prepare for the arrival of Jesus, God's Messiah. While he identified **Isaiah the prophet** by name, before he referenced the words of Isaiah Mark quoted another Old Testament passage from the prophet Malachi. In Malachi 3:1 God spoke to His people about His messenger. This messenger would have a distinct purpose—to **prepare** the way for God's Messiah. With the appearance of this messenger, God's people could look forward to Messiah's arrival as well. Those who responded appropriately to the message of this forerunner would be spiritually prepared for the appearance of Messiah.

VERSE 3

A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!

Mark's reference to God's promise of a messenger in Malachi 3:1 served as a backdrop for the prophecy about Messiah and His forerunner in Isaiah 40:3. According to the passage, God identified His messenger by calling attention to his actions. He was a **voice of one crying out**. The word for *crying out* (*boao*) doesn't suggest lamenting or wailing. Rather, it carries the idea of exclaiming or proclaiming. The picture of the forerunner of Messiah calling out to God's people fits the description of this voice.

The location from which this messenger would cry out was in **the wilderness**. In Israel, *the wilderness* referred to areas that were dry, rocky, and barren. Mentioning the wilderness would have brought to

mind the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. God led them faithfully through the wilderness to the promised land. Isaiah's prophecy pointed to a time in the future when God's people would be led through yet another wilderness experience.

The proclamation they would hear from the voice in the wilderness would be about preparing for the arrival of **the Lord**. Of course, the prophecy pointed clearly to Jesus as Messiah and John the Baptist as His forerunner. John would pave the way for the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, by preparing God's people. God would use John to make the **paths** between God's people and Messiah **straight**. Here the notion of *paths* refers to one's lifestyle. To make one's path *straight* required repentance and a change in behavior. The term *Lord* used in reference to Jesus "suggests his deity, dominion, and direction."¹

Explore Further

Read the article "Forerunner" on page 589 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How did both John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah fulfill the role of a forerunner?

Prepared (Mark 1:4-8)

Responding to the call that Jesus is the Savior involves commitment, repentance, and spiritual transformation. Our sins have to be taken away and we need to be born again so how we think and live can begin to be changed. John the Baptist as the forerunner to the Messiah prepared the hearts of the people for the arrival of Jesus by leading them to confess their sins.

VERSE 4

John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah, a priest, and Elizabeth, his wife. John was born six months before Jesus. The Lord's angel told Zechariah concerning John, "he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient

to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people” (Luke 1:17). John would prepare the people for the arrival of Messiah. Part of this preparation was baptism. John baptized **in the wilderness**, specifically a barren gorge through which the Jordan River flowed. “In the Bible [the wilderness] is more than a geographical place; it is the place where God meets, reveals himself to, tests, and saves his people.”²

John proclaimed a message about the need for people to prepare themselves spiritually for the arrival of Messiah. **Repentance** played a central role in their spiritual preparation. By repenting, they agreed with God about their sins and sought His forgiveness. When they repented, God forgave them. Confessing their sins reoriented their hearts toward God in expectation of the arrival of God’s Messiah. John’s baptism, the immersing of the people into the Jordan River, symbolized the **forgiveness** an individual received through repentance and confession of their **sins**. This forgiveness is grounded in the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah.

VERSE 5

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

John’s message of repentance spoke to the hearts of God’s people, and an incredibly large number of them went out to him in the wilderness. They came from everywhere, from both the **Judean countryside** and specifically from **Jerusalem**. The city of Jerusalem was the center of Jewish culture, theology, worship, and practice. For that reason, the people’s growing presence in the wilderness to hear John’s message underscored the remarkable influence of his proclamation. They had been taught to believe that they belonged to God because they were Jewish. Yet, John’s straightforward message about the need to repent drew them to him.

The people repented in response to John’s message, and he baptized them. **The Jordan River** served as the site for John’s baptism. As part of their baptism, they confessed **their sins**. John’s baptism did not incorporate an emphasis on death or resurrection. Such an emphasis would be incorporated into the baptism of new believers only after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

VERSE 6

John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

John the Baptist lived in simplicity. He wore a **garment** made of **camel hair** and wore a **leather belt** around his waist. Such attire would not have set him apart. It was the garb of wilderness nomads. However, his attire would have reminded God's people of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 2), who like John had a powerful ministry. John's diet consisted of simple food found in the wilderness. God permitted His people to eat **locusts** along with crickets and grasshoppers (Lev. 11:22). Combs of **wild honey** could be found in the crevasses of rocks.

VERSE 7

He proclaimed, "One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals."

John compared himself to the coming Messiah, whom he said was **more powerful** than him. In his comparison, he brought up a household custom. People who grew up in Judaism in those days would have understood it quite well. The removal of another's **sandals** was the most menial of tasks. Such a chore was considered to be beneath the dignity of a Jewish person. As John described himself in relation to the Messiah, he had the custom in mind as he declared his unworthiness.

VERSE 8

"I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Elaborating on the power of Messiah, John brought baptism into view once more. He baptized people who had repented of their sins so as to receive God's forgiveness. They had been immersed in the **water** of the Jordan River to emphasize the reality that through their repentance their hearts had been reorientated toward God in expectation of the Messiah's arrival. At that point, John's proclamation about repentance gave way to a prophetic message about something that would happen to them in the future. He pointed to a time when they would experience another baptism. John baptized with water. However, only the Lord Himself would be capable of baptizing with **the Holy Spirit**. The baptism with the Holy Spirit fulfills the words of several Old Testament prophets (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; Joel 2:28-29). John's baptism in the water of the Jordan River was an external symbol of what had happened in the hearts of repentant people. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit would have a more profound impact on the people because it would take

place within them and through that baptism believers would experience all the aspects of the Christian life.³

Explore Further

Compare Mark 1:1-8 with Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-18; and John 1:19-36. How do all these passages together give a fuller picture of John the Baptist and the nature of his ministry?

Baptized (Mark 1:9-13)

At various stages in Jesus's ministry, God the Father affirmed Jesus's identity as His Son and Messiah. Following Jesus's baptism, the Holy Spirit settled on Jesus, and the Father affirmed with His own voice that Jesus is His beloved Son.

VERSE 9

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

On one of those days when John was preaching about repentance in preparation for the Messiah's arrival, **Jesus** came to him. Jesus had been living in **Nazareth**, a small village in the hill country of lower **Galilee** situated about halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. After His birth in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Nazareth, their hometown (Matt. 2:23; Luke 1:26-27; 2:39-40). When Jesus left Nazareth to begin His ministry, He made His way to John. He didn't greet Jesus as a stranger. Mary's relative, Elizabeth, gave birth to John six months before the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26). After Mary learned that she would give birth to Jesus, she rushed to tell Elizabeth the news. Not yet born, John leaped in his mother's womb (vv. 39-45). Now about thirty years later, John **baptized** Jesus in the Jordan River. Jesus didn't need to be baptized in keeping with a need to repent because He never sinned. The baptism of Jesus underscored His willingness to be obedient to God His Father and identified Him with humanity. At the same time, His baptism linked John's ministry of repentance as the forerunner with Jesus's work as Messiah.

VERSE 10

As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

Like others whom John had baptized, Jesus went into the Jordan River to be immersed. As soon as He came up out of the water, Jesus saw **the heavens being torn open** and the Holy Spirit **descending on him like a dove**. That the heavens were *torn open* may suggest that a new era had begun in which God was accessible to an extent He had not been before.⁴ Both the heavens opening and the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus validated Jesus as being Messiah.

VERSE 11

And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”

The voice of God the Father **came from heaven** declaring His unique relationship with Jesus, His **beloved Son**. God’s declaration of His eternal love for Jesus as *my beloved Son* will also be spoken at Jesus’s transfiguration (Mark 9:7). The Father also stated that He was **well-pleased** with Jesus, His Son. In regard to His messianic mission, Jesus’s obedience had begun with His incarnation and continued through the years as He grew to be a man. Jesus would now continue to be obedient to the Father as He lived out His ministry, doing only what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19-20). He shared His Father’s desire to save sinners, which would be accomplished through the Son’s sacrificing Himself to atone for humanity’s sins (1:29,36; 10:14-18).

VERSE 12

Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness.

Mark used the word **immediately** seventeen times in his Gospel to convey a sense of urgency in Jesus’s ministry as He quickly moves from one event to another. Here it conveys the idea of urgent necessity, not reluctance on the part of Jesus to head into the wilderness. It was the same Holy Spirit who had descended on Jesus that now **drove Him into the wilderness**. As noted above, the Judean wilderness is a dry, rocky, barren region. Jesus had come to the wilderness so John could baptize Him. His baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry. However, the next step for Him did not include moving ahead with the work of preaching, teaching, and calling His disciples. Rather, the Holy Spirit led

Jesus to go alone into the vast expanse of open territory that composed the wilderness.

VERSE 13

He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

Jesus stayed in the wilderness **forty days**, which recalls several Old Testament episodes. Moses stayed on Mount Sinai meeting with God for the same amount of time (Ex. 24:18). Also, Elijah traveled forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb after he fled from Jezebel's wrath (1 Kings 19:1-3,8). The forty days in the wilderness proved to be a time of serious trials for Jesus. There He encountered the devil, **Satan**. The term *Satan* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "adversary." Satan was Jesus's adversary throughout His earthly ministry. **Tempted** suggests a test through which the quality of a person and his behavior could be ascertained. The trials that Jesus endured in the wilderness presented Him with the same temptations all people are exposed to, but He did not give in to them. *Forty days* may also be an echo of the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness during the exodus. Whereas the Israelites failed time and time again to obey God, Jesus remained perfectly obedient during all His trials and temptations in the wilderness as well as throughout His entire ministry. Although nobody accompanied Jesus to the wilderness, He didn't remain completely alone. **Wild animals** were close at hand. **Angels** were present as well. They cared for Jesus, although Mark does not indicate whether the angels cared for and strengthened Jesus during His trials or ministered to Him after those trials were over.

Explore Further

After studying this passage, spend some time in prayer thanking God for sending Jesus, His Son, as Messiah. Ask Him to help you to live joyfully in the certainty that comes with following Jesus, the Messiah and Savior.

1. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 40.
2. Ibid.
3. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 72-73.
4. Brooks, *Mark*, 43.