

NB A man ... possessed by an evil spirit (1:23).

Mark uses the term “unclean [akatharton] spirit” rather than “evil [ponēron] spirit.” This is not a medical diagnosis, but a religious term. In the OT, that which is unclean has evaded the control of the divine holiness and causes humans to be banished from God’s presence. Jesus, endued with the Holy Spirit, has come to purify what is unclean.

Mark draws a distinction between those who are demonized and those who are sick (1:32, 34). Unlike the sick, those identified as controlled by demons have extraordinary strength (5:4) and suffer violently (5:5; 9:22). The demons, agitated by Jesus’ presence, usually howl their alarm (1:24; 5:7) and often do some kind of harm when they depart. The possession is caused by an evil power that requires a greater power to expel it.

ARNOLD

- 7 (a) What impression of Jesus do you get from the account of his visit to the home of Simon and Andrew?
- (b) How does Mark emphasize the completeness of Simon's mother-in-law's cure?
- (c) Why do you think the people came to him at sundown?

N.B. *Again Jesus forbids the demons to speak.*



Read Mark 1: 35 - 39.

- 8 (a) What do these verses tell us about the priorities of Jesus?
- (b) What sort of picture do you get of his ministry?
- (c) How does Jesus exercise his authority differently from kings, dictators and other human authorities?
- (d) How do these accounts of Jesus' activity relate to his announcement in verse 15?

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

SESSION 1:

CHAPTER 1: 1-13

"THE BEGINNINGS...."



This Gospel is the shortest and most concise of all the accounts of the Life of Jesus and partly for that reason was never too popular in the early church.

It has now found a new importance because it is generally accepted as having been written first among the Synoptic Gospels and that possibly Matthew and Luke used it as a basis for their accounts of the Good News.

As a book, it is not a very polished production. Mark's Greek is the sort of colloquial language most of us would associate with the tabloid press in Britain today. It is however a compelling story told with great gusto and fervour and has many touches of detail which suggest it was based on the recollections of people who had actually been there.

Someone has described it briefly in these terms:

Mark is an action-packed gospel for Roman readers about the serving Son of God, bearing Peter's stamp.

We are hopefully going to determine for ourselves the accuracy of such a statement.

Read Mark 1:1-13

QUESTIONS:

- 1(a) What might you have expected to have heard about in these opening verses concerning the life of Jesus?
- (b) What does v.1 reveal about the events that Mark is about to describe?

How does he describe Jesus?

- (c) What do you think "Good News" would normally have meant to a 1st century inhabitant of the Roman Empire? What does Mark mean?

What do we consider to be "Good New" today?

- (d) Why do you think that Mark begins by explaining who Jesus is?
- (d) Verses 2 & 3 combine quotations from Mal. 3:1 and Is. 40:3.

What do these two quotations have in common?

Why has Mark mentioned them?



N.B. *Isaiah is cited first because it was customary for biblical writers to credit the more prominent prophet*

- (e) Verses 2 & 3 suggest preparations being made for a coming king. Who does Mark suggest this coming King is?
Who is the messenger?
- 2 (a) How does John's ministry prepare the way for Jesus?
Why do you think he based himself in the desert?
- (b) Malachi 4:5 describes this messenger as one having a ministry like that of the prophet Elijah. In what ways does Mark emphasize the similarities between John and Elijah?
(cf. 2Kings 1:8)
- (c) Malachi wrote more than 400 years before the coming of Jesus, and Isaiah wrote almost 400 years before him.
What do you make of such references?
Is it important to ground our faith in historical fact?



- 3 (a) How did the crowd respond to John?
What does such a response say about their need?
- (b) How does John emphasize the greatness of the one who will come after him?
- (c) Despite his greatness, Jesus comes to John for baptism. Why?
- (d) How do you understand the Father's response to this event and the term "heaven opening"? What was visible?

NB The rabbis taught that a student owed his teacher any service except untying his shoe

- 4 (a) How do the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus prepare him for the temptations in the wilderness?
- (b) It is believed that many of Mark's readers were in Rome facing wild animals in the arena under Neronian persecution. How do you think they responded to Mark's descriptions of their Lord's temptations?
- (c) What encouragement do you find here for facing your own temptations? (cf. Hebrews 4:15-6)
- (d) How has Mark set the scene thus far for what is to come?

"THE MINISTRY AND MISSION OF JESUS"

In 1:1-13 Mark has told us that Jesus has come as king to fulfil the Old Testament longings for the Lord's rule over all the earth, but what kind of king is he? Mark knows that a picture is worth a thousand words. So, rather than offering an abstract character analysis, he shows us what almost looks like a "Day in the Life of Jesus"!

Read Mark 1:14 - 20

QUESTIONS:

- 5 (a) What does Mark imply is the impetus that seems to trigger the mission of Jesus?
- (b) We have already seen a close connection between John and Jesus (*Luke tells us that they were related*).
What differences can you detect between the "messages" of Jesus and John and the responses that they called for?
- (c) What did Jesus do to encourage others do share in his mission?
- (d) How does the command "Follow me" summarize the essence of discipleship?
- (e) What sort of people were the first four disciples?
What do we know about their backgrounds?

NB The teachers of the law had disciples who came to them to be instructed in the law, but none ever said to anyone, "Come, follow me." The disciple, rather, always chose the master and moved on when he believed that he had learned as much from him as possible about the tradition. Jesus does not wait for volunteers but chooses his own disciples and requires absolute obedience. Mark shows Jesus calling disciples with divine authority, just as God called the prophets in the OT and expected the relationship to be permanent. He also does not call them to a house of study but to an itinerant ministry. ARNOLD

Read Mark 1: 21 - 34

N.B. *Capernaum was the largest of more than 30 fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee at that time and it appears that Jesus made it his HQ.*

- 6 (a) On the Sabbath, Jesus goes to the Synagogue. What happens while he is there and how do the people respond?
- (b) How is the authority of Jesus demonstrated?
- (c) What might be some of the reasons that Jesus silences the unclean spirit about who he is?
- 6 (d) What is it about Jesus that goes throughout the region of Galilee?