

The Prologue of the Gospel of Mark (1:1-8)

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God). ²As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. ³A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’” ⁴John (the) Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. ⁶John was clothed in camel’s hair; with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”



An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

This shortest of all New Testament gospels is likely the first to have been written, yet it often tells of Jesus’ ministry in more detail than either Matthew or Luke. It recounts what Jesus did in a vivid style, where one incident follows directly upon another. In this almost breathless narrative, Mark stresses Jesus’ message about the kingdom of God now breaking into human life as good news and Jesus himself as the gospel of God. The metanarrative is succinctly: Jesus is the Son whom God has sent to rescue humanity by serving and by sacrificing his life: “*For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45).

The action begins with the appearance of John the Baptist, a messenger of God attested by scripture. But John points to a mightier one, Jesus, at whose baptism God speaks from heaven, declaring Jesus his Son. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, who eventually, it is promised, will baptize “*with the holy Spirit*.” This presentation of who Jesus’ true identity is rounded out with a brief reference to the temptation of Jesus and how Satan’s attack fails. Jesus as Son of God will be victorious, a point to be remembered as one reads of Jesus’ death and the enigmatic ending to Mark’s Gospel.

Perhaps a key verse to provide context for Jesus' ministry is Mk 1:14–15 - “*After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: ‘This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’*” It serves as a summary of the good news that Jesus proclaims: fulfillment, the nearness of the kingdom, and therefore the need for repentance and for faith.

Jesus will call disciples, engage in teaching and preaching, will heal and exorcise, all of which has parallels in the other gospels. The content of Jesus' teaching is only rarely stated, and then chiefly in parables about the kingdom. His cures, especially on the sabbath; his claim, like God, to forgive sins; his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners; and much more all stir up opposition that will lead to Jesus' death.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' greatest concern is with discipleship. The disciples do not grasp the mystery being revealed; one of them will betray him; one will deny him; all eleven will desert him at Calvary. The Gospel of Mark ends in the most ancient manuscripts with an abrupt scene at Jesus' tomb, which the women find empty - yet some manuscripts have “longer endings.”

Christology is quite clear in the Gospel of Mark: Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the anointed king of Davidic descent, and the *Christos*, that by the time Mark wrote, become in effect a proper name. Jesus is also seen as Son of Man, a term used in Mark not simply as a substitute for “I” or for humanity in general but also with reference to a mighty figure who is to come.

Although the book is anonymous, apart from the ancient heading “According to Mark” in manuscripts, it has traditionally been assigned to John Mark, in whose mother's house in Jerusalem Christians gathered (Acts 12:12). This Mark was a cousin of Barnabas and accompanied Barnabas and Paul on a missionary journey. He appears in Pauline letters and with Peter. Papias (ca. A.D. 135) described Mark as Peter's “interpreter,” a view found in other patristic writers. It is believed that Mark put together various oral and possibly written sources—miracle stories, parables, sayings, stories of controversies, and the passion that took final written form as this Gospel.

Traditionally, the gospel is said to have been written shortly before A.D. 70 in Rome, at a time of impending persecution and when destruction loomed over Jerusalem. Its audience seems to have been Gentile, unfamiliar with Jewish customs. The book aimed to equip such Christians to stand faithful in the face of persecution, while going on with the proclamation of the gospel begun in Galilee.

The Prologue of Mark

Mark 1:1-13 is generally considered the “prologue” for this oldest of the gospels. The reason for this designation is that these verses supply the key to the entire Gospel by introducing the central figure of the account. In accordance with the prophetic word, Jesus appears in the wilderness of Judea, summoned by the call of John the Baptist. His baptism and sojourn there constitute his first public acts and provide the foundation for his subsequent ministry. The Gospel of Mark will be the account of Jesus' trial, throughout which he decisively encounters Satan and receives help from God. This is what it means for Jesus to go out to the wilderness.

The motif of the wilderness dominates the prologue. The prophetic note of the voice of one crying in the wilderness (v.3) serves to introduce John the Baptist, whose ministry in the Jordan valley attracts Jesus of Nazareth (vv.4–8). Situating John “*in the wilderness*” connects the account of John's ministry to the prophetic announcement of vv. 2–3: “*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’*”

Mark connects the baptisms in the Jordan River to the wilderness. The lower Jordan valley is part of the wilderness scene and was called “desert” in both the Old and New Testament periods. Subsequent to the baptism of Jesus the wilderness remains prominent as the arena where he was tempted (vv.12–13). Thus in the Prologue the wilderness is the location common to the several events related, and serves to underline the unity of the initial section. In v. 14 the locality changes: Jesus leaves the wilderness and returns to Galilee to begin his ministry following the imprisonment of John.

In the prologue, the primary unifying term is “wilderness.” But there is also repeated reference to the person of the Spirit within this section (vv. 8, 10, 12). The allusion to the one who baptizes with the Spirit in the summary of John’s message (v. 8) prepares for the reference to the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, and connects the role of the Spirit in the temptation (vv. 12–13). The fact that the Spirit is introduced into the record only rarely beyond the prologue suggests that Mark has consciously unified his opening statement by a threefold reference to the Spirit.

The most striking characteristics of the Marcan prologue are its abruptness and its silences. This is surprising because the one introduced is not an ordinary person but the Son of God, acknowledged by the heavenly voice, who in the initial phases of his public ministry provokes wonder and astonishment by the authority of his teaching and the power of his mighty acts. The evangelist makes no attempt to provide an historical explanation for John’s presence in the wilderness or for Jesus’ appearance before John. The prophetic voice and the Son of God appear, veiled in mystery from the very beginning. Yet their appearance in the wilderness is full of meaning for all precisely because the veil has been removed and the significance which it has in the divine plan of redemption has been disclosed.

With a few broad strokes the prologue associates Jesus with the preaching and baptizing activity of John, and with trial in the wilderness. It indicates that the Messiah, who is divinely chosen and qualified for his ministry, has come. The accent falls upon the disclosure that Jesus is the Messiah, the very Son of God, whose mission is to affirm his sonship in the wilderness. His encounter with Satan provides the background for the delineation of the conflict between the Son of God and the forces of Satan which is so prominent an element in the Marcan narrative of Jesus’ ministry.

Questions At The Beginning

Mark begins his writing with a statement by the narrator: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God).*” The appearance of parentheses indicates that not all ancient manuscripts contain the phrase, but most do.

Right from the beginning, we, the readers, know more than most of the characters in the narrative. We are already anticipating this writing to be “good news” – which is a comment about what the writing does to us, rather than just what it says. We are already anticipating ways that Jesus will be attested as the Messiah, the Son of God – and watching how the characters come to realize this – if they ever do.

This first verse raises some important questions. What exactly is the “*beginning of the gospel*”? Does this statement refer to: (a) just the prologue or (b) the entire book? Does it intentionally have reference to the start of *Genesis* in that God is initiating redemption for humanity? Is this intended to have the emphasis fall upon the unity of God’s action in its historical unfolding; the whole complex of events from Creation to this point in time? There are at least 10 scholarly views on the meaning of “*beginning of the gospel*.”

That simply leads to the next question, what exactly is the “gospel” (good news) of Jesus Christ? The scholars seem to divide into views as follows: (a) the gospel proclaimed by Jesus, or (b) the gospel about Jesus, or (c) both at the same time. It is the latter position that most accept.

Schweizer (*The Good News According to Mark*) states: “The Greek word *euaggelion* denotes ‘good news,’ primarily of a victory in battle. This term figures prominently in stories of the lives of the Roman emperors who were honored as gods” (p. 30).

James Edwards (*The Gospel According to Mark*, 24) expands on Schweizer’s comments:

In 9 B.C., within a decade of Jesus’ birth, the birthday of Caesar Augustus (63 B.C. - A.D. 14) was hailed as *euangelion* (pl.). Since he was hailed as a god, Augustus’s “birthday signaled the beginning of Good News for the world.” In the Greco-Roman world the word always appears in the plural, meaning one good tidings among others; but in the NT *euangelion* appears only in the singular: *the* good news of God in Jesus Christ, beside which there is no other. The concept of “good news” was not limited to military and political victories, however. In the prophet Isaiah “good news” is transferred to the inbreaking of God’s final saving act when peace, good news, and release from oppression will be showered on God’s people (Isa 52:7; 61:1-3). For Mark, the advent of Jesus is the beginning of the fulfillment of the “good news” heralded by Isaiah.”

Brian Stoffregen writes:

I think that *euaggelion* is a word that evokes a response. It is like shouting, “We won!” or “Victory is ours.” When game show contestants are told that they’ve won, there is shouting and jumping and waving of arms. The words are more than just information. They are an event that engulfs the hearers.

What if these opening words were paraphrased: “The beginning of the **victory** of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God”? How might that color our reading/hearing of the rest of the story? I think that, among other things, we might be better able to see the many ironies in this story of Jesus – the many times when the victor appears much more like a victim.

Perhaps Mark already anticipates how many times the disciples will not understand the terms “Christ” and “Son of God” and thus purposely used *euaggelion* at the beginning to remind them all that happens is “good news.”

That all brings us to a third question: What was meant by “Christ”? Is it a title? Is it part of Jesus’ name? Some linguists note that “*christos*” might well have confused a Roman audience in that the athletes, who greased themselves up for competition, would have appeared as “*christos*” - the greasy ones. The Jewish Christians would at least have OT references to the use of the “Messiah” or “anointed (one)”. But then again the word is used of levitical priests, kings - even the Persian King Cyrus! - also of prophets. Especially in the Psalms the word refers to God giving victory to a king (his “anointed”). Would the Jews have understood the term “Christ” to refer to a conquering king? an anointed priest? a prophet?

While everyone is sorting all that out, another question arises: what is meant by “Son of God”? As noted above, this phrase (two words in Greek *huiou theou*) is missing in many ancient manuscripts. Normally shorter readings are to be preferred over longer ones. It is more likely that copyists would add to a text rather than to delete. However, the omission of these words might be explained by an oversight in copying. The first six words in Greek all end with “*ou*,” so a copyist may have jumped to the last “*ou*” before he should have.

It’s also noted that the Greek does not have a definite article (“the”). The same is true when the centurion could be confessing: “Truly, this man was **a** son of God” (15:39). The demons, however, declare: “You are **the** Son of **the** God” (3:11) and “Jesus, (a) Son of **the** Most High God” (5:7). In contrast, definite articles are always found in the phrase: “**the** Son of **the** human”. A grammatical

argument can be made for supplying “the” in the phrase “Son of God.” I present this bit of grammar so that we might understand how Mark’s first readers/hearers might have understood the phrase.

If it were Greeks hearing this for the first time, I would think that their reference would be to their mythological children of gods. For example, Hercules was a son of the god Zeus and the human mother Alcmena. A Jewish audience, based on Psalm 2, might think that “a son of God” (v. 7) was a king. These words do something to the hearers. They create a picture in their minds from their own experiences of someone called “Son of God.” It is likely that this picture at the beginning is a wrong one – and Mark will seek to change it through his story.

All that from one verse!

John or Jesus?

² *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.”* ³ *A voice of one crying out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”*

We often interpret vv. 2-3 in light of Matthew and Luke where they clearly refer to John the Baptist. John is presented before the OT quotes are given. Scholars put a lot of effort into the linguistics and the grammar about this question. Rather than rehearse their arguments, I would offer two points: (a) Mark’s Greek is not very refined and (b) grammar is not the only interpretive dynamic.

Verse 2 indicates that the proper context for understanding the gospel is the promise of future salvation found in the latter half of Isaiah. The citation [a composite quotation from Ex. 23:20; Mal. 3:1 and Isa. 40:3] evokes the image of the forerunner Elijah. In the exegetical tradition of the rabbis these texts had already been combined, in the conviction that the “messenger of the covenant” (Ex. 23:20) is Elijah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). The second statement introduces a word from the Prophets, and agrees with Isa. 40:3 LXX with the single alteration of “the paths of God” to “his paths.” By this change the text becomes applicable to Jesus, who was known in the early church as “the Lord.”

It is important to note that all three OT passages, blended in this fashion, are all related to the wilderness tradition and have a significant function in the prologue itself. Ex. 23:20 contains God’s promise to send his messenger before the people on a first exodus through the wilderness to Canaan. In Isa. 40:3 the messenger announces the second exodus through the wilderness to the final deliverance prepared for God’s people. In both the citation from the Law and from the Prophets the theme of an exodus through the wilderness is dominant and appropriate to Mark’s purpose. The blended citation functions to draw attention to three factors which are significant to the evangelist in the prologue: the herald, the Lord and the wilderness. In the verses which immediately follow, the significance of each of these elements is emphasized by Mark who sees in the coming of John and Jesus to the wilderness the fulfillment of the promised salvation of which the prophet Isaiah had spoken. In stressing the element of fulfillment at the beginning of his account Mark conforms the narrative to the apostolic preaching, in which the theme of fulfillment was of strategic importance.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is a crucial figure in the history of revelation and redemption. In retrospect, his appearance in the wilderness was the most important event in the life of Israel for more than three hundred years. The absence of a prophet throughout this period had been interpreted to signify that the prophetic task was accomplished. Yet all clung to the hope that the “faithful prophet” would appear, the Prophet like Moses, whose coming would signal the events of the “last days” (Deut. 18:15–19; 1 Macc. 4:42–46; 14:44). The very fact of John’s appearance was an eschatological event of the first magnitude, and signified that the decisive turning point in the history of salvation was at hand. It was

John, the preacher of radical repentance, who initiated the messianic crisis. To speak of the gospel of Jesus is to speak of the good news which began with John.

From Mark's perspective, John is important not for his own sake but as the beginning of the unfolding drama of redemption which centers on Jesus of Nazareth. The brevity of his presentation of John serves to project into sharp relief two features of the Baptist's ministry which were of special significance to him: (1) John's career was the result of divine appointment in fulfillment of prophecy; (2) John bore witness to the supreme dignity and power of the Messiah, whose coming was near.

The citation of Isa. 40:3 in v. 3 explains John's advent: the herald of the Lord will cry in the wilderness. From the point of view of transition v.4 is tied to v.3 by means of the identical phrase "in the wilderness" in both verses. Mark's interest in the wilderness is not primarily geographical; the reference to the lower Jordan River valley fails to provide any specific information about the locale in which the Baptist ministered. But the evangelist has preserved the emphasis upon the wilderness which he found in his sources and has allowed it to shape his own theological understanding of the gospel. The historical tradition that John appeared in the wilderness establishes the relevance of the citation from Isaiah and provides the key to Mark's concentration upon wilderness motifs throughout the prologue.

Briefly and concisely vv. 4–8 describe the Baptist's ministry. Mark focuses attention on three elements in John's ministry, each of which is related to the OT prophecies with which he has prefaced his Gospel: (1) John was a man of the wilderness; (2) he performed his ministry of baptism in the wilderness, and so prepared the way of the Lord; (3) he announced one greater than himself who was to come after him. Each detail of the five verses is related to one or more of these three emphases.

Those who heard John would not have failed to recognize the familiar prophetic call to repentance. But in response to his preaching John called for an action which was wholly novel—baptism in the Jordan River. It has been conjectured that John's baptism was derived from the Jewish practice of baptizing proselytes, or from the rites of initiation practiced at Qumran. No clear line of dependence can be shown in support of these theories. Baptism appears rather as a unique activity of this prophet, a prophetic sign so striking that John became known simply as "the Baptizer."

The absence of qualifying clauses makes it difficult to ascertain the exact nuance in the phrase, "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*." The biblical concept of repentance, however, is deeply rooted in the wilderness tradition. In the earliest stratum of OT prophecy, the summons to "turn" basically connotes a return to the original relationship with the Lord. This means a return to the beginning of God's history with his people, a return to the wilderness. Essential to the prophetic concern with repentance in Hosea, Amos and Isaiah is the concept of Israel's time in the wilderness as the period of true sonship to God, a status into which the Lord is going to lead his people once again in a future time. The correlation between the wilderness and repentance was not John's innovation and must have been understood by his contemporaries. John's call to repentance and his call to come out to him in the wilderness to be baptized are two aspects of the same reality. It is a call to renew sonship in the wilderness. The peculiar urgency in the call lies in the fact that the crisis of God's final act is close at hand.

The same correlation should be seen between baptism and the wilderness. The summons to be baptized in the Jordan meant that Israel must come once more to the wilderness. As Israel long ago had been separated from Egypt by a pilgrimage through the waters of the Red Sea, the nation is exhorted again to experience separation; the people are called to a second exodus in preparation for a new covenant with God. Both John's call to repentance and his baptism are intelligible as aspects of the prophetic tradition which expected the final salvation of God to be unveiled in the wilderness.

Repentance in John's proclamation is conditioned by the action of God, who is about to enter history in a definitive fashion. The opportunity and urgency for repentance lie in the fact that the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit is close at hand. As the people heed John's call and go out to him in the desert far more is involved than contrition and confession. They return to a place of judgment, the wilderness, where the status of Israel as God's beloved son must be re-established in the exchange of pride for humility. 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. John's proclamation of the forgiveness of sins provides the assurance that God extends grace as well as judgment. It is in the context of judgment and grace that the people of Jerusalem and Judea go out to the wilderness to be baptized by John.

John's Message

"One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John's message is telescoped to focus upon a single theme, the proclamation of a person still to come who will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit. As seen in the Notes, it is not clear what Mark means by this expression, nor is it clear that John understands the very messianic terms he uses – at least in their fullness. In referring to this new Baptizer, whose dignity overshadowed his own, John avoided traditional messianic terms. The precise identity of the Coming One remained hidden, apparently, even from John.

"To come after someone" is technical terminology for discipleship among the scribes and rabbis of the first century, and this usage is reflected in Jesus' summons to men to come, or follow after him (cf. Ch. 1:17). It is possible, therefore, that John is saying, "He who is coming is a follower of mine." Yet he affirms that he is not worthy of performing the most menial task, from which even the Hebrew slave was released, the removal of the master's sandals. In no stronger manner could the mystery and the dignity of the Coming One be emphasized.

The reference to the bestowal of the Spirit is appropriate to the wilderness context of John's proclamation. Isaiah describes Israel's trek in the wilderness as a march under the guidance of the Spirit of God (Isa. 63:11); it was the Spirit who gave the people rest in the wilderness (Isa. 63:14). As the first exodus had been going forth into the wilderness under the leadership of God's Spirit, the prophet announces the second exodus as a time when there will be a fresh outpouring of the Spirit (Isa. 32:15; 44:3). With this concept in mind John calls the people to the wilderness in anticipation of the fulfillment of the prophetic promise. It is this note of anticipation which Mark emphasizes by reducing John's message to two statements, both of which point forward to something to come. They affirm that John is the forerunner of the Messiah (Ch. 1:7) and that his baptism is a preparation for the messianic baptism to come (Ch. 1:8).

By introducing his Gospel with an account of the ministry of John, the evangelist re-creates for his own contemporaries the crisis of decision with which John had confronted all Israel. It is not enough to know who John was, historically. What is required is an encounter, through the medium of history, with that summons to judgment and repentance which John issued. Because the church recognized John's role in redemptive history as the pioneer of the kingdom of God, it accorded him a prominent place in the Gospel tradition. It refused to allow his memory to slip uninterpreted into the past, but made his witness a part of the continuing Christian proclamation. John was the first preacher of the good news concerning Jesus.

Notes

Mark 1:1 *Son of God*. There is debate as to whether or not this phrase is in the original text of Mark's gospel. The phrase is missing in some important early witnesses such as ¹Ⲡ. It is likely that in these cases the phrase was accidentally omitted due to similar endings in the abbreviated forms of the sacred names: EYATTEAIOY IY XY YY ΘY. The last four words look similar because each is written as a *nomen sacrum* (divine title). The first corrector of Codex Sinaiticus (a) added YY ΘY before it left the scriptorium. However, not all ancient manuscripts wrote the word "Son" as the *nomen sacrum* YY, so this is not a conclusive argument. It is more likely that "Son of God" was accidentally dropped than that a copyist expanded the introductory title, especially since the major MSS of ²B, ³D, and ⁴W support the reading. The title appears at a few key points in Mark (1:11; 15:39), pointing to the unique, intimate relationship the messianic Jesus had with the Father. Some scholars compares this beginning of Mark to the Priene inscription about Caesar Octavian from 9 BC, which also uses the term "good news" and speaks of his birth as "the birthday of the god [that] was for the world the beginning of his good news." This is "the epiphany or advent of a deity" (Witherington 2001:70). Mark's gospel is about a person who makes a similar yet distinct claim to deity, a divine figure different from those Mark's Gentile audience may have been accustomed to hearing about.

Mark 1:2 *the prophet Isaiah*. The passage names Isaiah in the introductory formula and cites wording from Exod 23:20, Mal 3:1, and Isa 40:3. Malachi 3 speaks of a prophet to come like Elijah (also 4:5–6), while Exod 23 points to a messenger (lit., "angel") who leads the way. After the citation, Mark comments only on the portion from Isaiah that describes activity "in the wilderness," which explains his introductory formula. This is the only OT citation made by the narrator in this Gospel (the other OT citations in this Gospel are made by Jesus).

Mark 1:6 *clothed*... The reference to John's clothing and diet serves to emphasize that he is a man of the wilderness. Both his garb and his food are those familiar to the wilderness nomad, and characterize life in the desert. The reference to the leather girdle about the Baptist's waist recalls a characteristic feature of another man of the wilderness, the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). The explicit identification of John with Elijah, however, is not made until Ch. 9:9–13.

Mark 1:7 *untie the straps of his sandals*. An important cultural detail; in later Judaism, untying the thong of someone's sandal was considered too menial a task for a Jewish slave to perform (*Mekilta Exodus* 21.2; *b. Ketubbot* 96a). If such an understanding goes back to John's time, then John was saying that the One to come is so great that John is not worthy even to perform the most menial of tasks for him. Thus, by comparison he is less than a slave. This kind of humility appears in John's Gospel (John 3:27–30).

Mark 1:8 *he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit*. This allusion to baptism is associated with the arrival of the eschaton in the OT (Isa 35:15; 44:3; Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29 [3:1–2]). God's decisive act on behalf of humanity was announced as approaching in the baptizing ministry of the Messiah. This is why cleansing (water baptism) and repentance (what that cleansing represents) were part of John's ministry of preparation (1:4). Participation in John's baptism showed a readiness to receive the greater baptism that the coming One would bring. Preparation for forgiveness of sins leads to forgiveness when the greater One to whom John pointed is embraced. In OT thinking, when

¹Ⲡ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th

²B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th

³D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th

⁴W (Washingtonianus or the Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th

someone is cleansed and forgiven, God can indwell that person with the presence of his Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27). This summarizes Mark’s gospel: cleansing, forgiveness, and the intimate divine presence all come through the Messiah to those who, in faith, embrace repentance and reorientation in their lives.

We should be a bit cautious here and not impose a range of meanings upon Mark’s use of the Greek word *baptizo* which means “to wash” -- usually by dipping or immersing in water. Note its use in Mark 7:4. Symbolically, it can mean: “ritual purification,” “immersion”. What meaning(s) are implied by the phrase “He will baptize in the Holy Spirit”? How is that similar or different from John’s baptism in water? I can’t find that Jesus ever baptized with the Holy Spirit in the gospel of Mark. The word *pneuma* (“spirit”) occurs 23 times.

Only 4 of those include the word *hagios* (“Holy”):

- Jesus will baptize in the Holy Spirit (1:8)
- Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable (3:29)
- David spoke by the Holy Spirit (12:36)
- The Holy Spirit will speak for those who are brought to trial (13:11)

Two others refer to Spirit (capital “S”)

- Jesus’ baptism (1:10)
- Jesus’ being driven into the wilderness to be tempted (1:12).

Eleven times it is used with “unclean”. Three more times, “unclean” or “evil” is implied. The “spiritual” theme in Mark centers more on the unclean ones – who often recognize Jesus and whom Jesus is able to cast out.

Perhaps the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to the tempting persecution and suffering that the disciples would go through (13:9-13). Jesus uses “baptism” in reference to his suffering and death and indicates that at least James and John will undergo the same type of baptism (10:38-39).

There is no evidence in Mark that he understands “baptism in the Holy Spirit” in the manner assumed by Charismatics and Pentecostals.

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