

Week 2: Mark 1:1-13: Preparation for Ministry

Hook



Main Point: Jesus is the perfect king of a kingdom that is upside down from the world.

Starting a new job is both exciting and overwhelming, and how we begin often shapes our long-term success. And Americans get plenty of practice at beginning new jobs – Baby Boomers held 12.4 jobs on average from ages 18 to 54¹, Millennials are expected to work between 12 and 15 jobs in their lifetimes², and Gen Z is predicted to work 18 jobs across six careers.³

Q: What tips for success would you give to someone who is about to start a new job?

Financial advisor Dave Ramsey's company, Ramsey Solutions, suggests these tips to set you up for success as you prepare for your first day at work:

- *Don't try to prove yourself on your first day.* Be present and soak everything up.
- *Choose your first-day outfit wisely.* Choose something comfortable, professional and appropriate.
- *Plan a foolproof commute.* Showing up late on the first day is a bad look.
- *Learn the company culture.* Get to know the beliefs and values of the company.⁴

Preparation is important. In Mark 1:1–13, we will see that even Jesus began His public ministry with a time of preparation – He was baptized, affirmed by the Father, and then led into the wilderness to be tested.

Q: Why do you think preparation matters so much when stepping into something new—like a job or a ministry?

Recap: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark, as well as its message to us:

- Author: John Mark, a coworker of both Peter and Paul. Though he deserted Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary journey, he returned to the ministry and became a useful fellow apostle to Paul and spiritual son to Peter.
- Audience: Roman Christians who were enduring persecution for their faith under Nero.
- Genre: Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are more like sermons. They are *kerygma*, which means “proclamation” or “preaching of the Gospel.”
- Occasion: Many of the original disciples who knew Jesus personally during His ministry were dying off. Mark wrote about Jesus’ power and authority but also about suffering and struggle so as to encourage Christians who were enduring persecution.
- Message to Us: Mark’s focus on Jesus’ action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response. Will we share the message of the Gospel? Will we live as Jesus lived and love as He loved?

In this lesson, we will begin our verse-by-verse study of the book of Mark, a fast-paced, power-filled journey from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee to the Cross.

In this first section, we see Jesus being prepared for ministry in three ways, all of which point to His kingship as the Messiah-king the Jews had been waiting for but of a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus is the perfect king of a kingdom that is upside down from the world.

Mark 1:1–8; Isaiah 40:1–9; Malachi 3:1–7 [Read]

Talking Point 1: John the Baptist prepared the way for the message and ministry of Jesus.

Q: Which parts of Isaiah 40:1–9 and Malachi 3:1–7 point to Jesus as Messiah?

Q: What was the message of John the Baptist?

Mark opened his Gospel with the preaching of John the Baptist. He didn't tell us anything about Jesus' birth or childhood because he wanted to get straight into the action of His ministry. But he did connect the message of John the Baptist with two messianic prophecies in Isaiah and Malachi, emphasizing that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.⁵

Isaiah preached before the Exile, covering a very long period (739–681 BC). He preached to both kingdoms: Israel (North) before, during, and after they were taken into exile by Assyria (722 BC) and Judah (South) during some of their most significant kings – Ahab, whose wife was Jezebel and who did more evil than any king before him; Hezekiah, who reformed Judah; and Manasseh who went right back to doing evil and shed so much innocent blood that God cursed them to exile (2 Kings 21:12–16). Isaiah prophesied punishment to God's people, but he also prophesied about the hope of the future Messiah in great detail in many passages.⁶

Many of these prophecies have both a near-future fulfillment in Israel's history and a far-future fulfillment in the Messiah. In this quote, the near-future fulfillment was God bringing Judah back from exile. Just like God brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness to the promised land in Exodus, He would make a path for them through the wilderness back from exile. But not a wandering path, a path *straight* back to their land. The "good news" was that their sins had been paid for (Isaiah 40: 2) and God was with them (Isaiah 40:9). Mark showed us the long-term fulfillment in Jesus; our sins have been paid for (this is the Gospel or "good news"), Jesus is "God with us," and following Jesus makes our paths straight (Proverbs 3:5–6). Mark explained that John the Baptist was the "voice" crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way for Jesus to come (Mark 1:3).

Malachi (“my messenger”) was the last prophet of the Old Testament, after the people had come back from Exile. His book ends by saying God would send “the prophet Elijah” before the day of the Lord comes (Malachi 4:5). Scholars agree this referred to John the Baptist, not literally Elijah reincarnated but a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17; cf. Matthew 11:7–14). In the verse Mark quoted, God said He would send “my messenger” to prepare the way before His arrival. When He came, He would refine His people (Malachi 3:3) and judge the wicked (Malachi 3:5), but to those who returned to Him, He would restore their relationship (Malachi 3:6–7). This is the message John the Baptist preached – repent, which means “to return to God,” a consistent message of the prophets.

John the Baptist wore the same clothing as Elijah, a garment of hair and a leather belt (2 King 1:8). He came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17) and ate locusts and wild honey, which could be found rather than grown, raised, or bought, reflecting the way Elijah relied on God to provide his food in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:4). Eating these two particular things symbolized God’s redemption. Both the law and prophets said if the people disobeyed, locusts would eat their crops (Exodus 10:14–15; Deuteronomy 28:38; Joel 1–2), but John flipped that and ate the locusts instead. Also, in the Old Testament, the Promised Land is described as flowing with milk and honey, which represent the blessing of God’s kingdom.

In the ancient world, when a king planned to visit a city, the custom was to build or prepare a road for him and his entourage, to make the path as straight and level as possible so it was easier for them to travel. John’s message prepared the way for Jesus. Water baptism wasn’t new; it was one of the three requirements of conversion to Judaism.⁷ It symbolized being washed from sin and a new birth into the family of God.⁸ But John the Baptist wasn’t baptizing proselytes (Gentiles who had converted to Judaism); he was baptizing Jews (Mark 1:4). To prepare the way for the Gospel, John helped the Jews understand that they weren’t saved based on their heritage; they also needed to repent, be forgiven, and be born again to a new life in Christ. Understanding their need for forgiveness was foundational to understanding the Gospel.

The messages and ministries of John and Jesus weren’t exactly the same; John made that clear. He baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, which was also prophesied in the prophets (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28–29). John’s baptism was a symbolic washing of sin, but Jesus would bring them new life by His Spirit. It is in Christ that we can be born again from above (John 3:1–8) and made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). John the Baptist set up the awareness of the need for Jesus to atone for sin, but Jesus actually accomplished the atonement.

Q: Why is understanding your need for forgiveness important to understanding the Gospel?

Q: How would you describe the meaning and purpose of baptism to an unbeliever or child?

Q: Why is it important that forgiveness come through Jesus?

Mark 1:9–11; Psalm 2:6–7; Isaiah 42:1–4 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus' baptism was His coronation ceremony as Messiah-king.

Q: What does the interaction of all three persons of the Trinity tell us about their relationship?

Q: What do Psalm 2:6–7 and Isaiah 42:1–4 tell us about Jesus?

Mark's telling of Jesus' baptism is much shorter than Matthew or Luke's version, but his is the Gospel of fast-paced action. Though it's short, there is a ton of theological thinking packed into these verses. It is fascinating that Jesus came to be baptized by John, especially because in the previous verse, John said he wasn't fit to untie the thong of His sandals! Yet he was fit to *baptize* Him? The text doesn't tell us, but imagine how John felt when Jesus came to be baptized. Matthew says he initially protested, saying it should be the other way around. Not only was John not worthy of baptizing Jesus, but Jesus also didn't need to be washed from sin; He is the only sinless man who has ever lived. He did it to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Theologically, this is an incredible moment in this story. We see all three persons of the Trinity converging in one place and time. The visual of the heavens being *torn open*, the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus, and the audible voice of God the Father all show us that this truly was the Messiah. Not only a human king come to save them from an earthly enemy, but the Son of God – God the Son made flesh. This moment was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It was a heavenly coronation – God the Father officially crowning Jesus as Messiah-king of His kingdom.

In ancient Israel, kings and priests were anointed with oil, which symbolized the anointing of the Holy Spirit on them as they took office.⁹ In Jesus' baptism, He was *actually* anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descending "like a dove" points both to the sacrifice Jesus would become and the peace He would bring, as doves are sacrificial animals and symbols of peace. The second time He was "crowned" would be with a crown of thorns at His Crucifixion, as the atoning sacrifice for sin. The Roman symbol of strength and courage was an eagle. The dove tells us a different type of kingdom is

coming, which is upside down from the world. One of purity, gentleness and peace, not war and domination.¹⁰

God's statement blends two Old Testament passages, Psalm 2:7 about God's installing His King in Zion and Isaiah 42:1 about the servant of the Lord who would have God's Spirit upon Him and bring justice to the nations. The connection of these two titles reminds us that in God's kingdom, the role of king was the role of a servant. Israel's kings were commanded to serve their people instead of lording their authority over them as the kings of the world do (Deuteronomy 17:20; Mark 10:42–45).

God the Father's proclamation at His baptism was more than just identifying Jesus as His Son. It was Jesus being anointed for His role as Messiah-king, beginning His ministry of ushering in the kingdom of God. In Mark, this happened right away, because Mark wanted to get straight to the action of Jesus' ministry as the mighty Son of God and servant-king who came to bring a new kingdom that is totally different from the world.

Q: Imagine you were in the crowd at Jesus' baptism. How would you have responded?

Q: How do you relate to Jesus as king in your daily life? How has He shown Himself to you?

Q: Is there an opportunity for you to lead that you feel unprepared or inadequate to do?

Mark 1:12–13 and 2 Corinthians 10:1–13 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus was tempted in the wilderness as Israel was, except He didn't fail.

Q: What detail in the text shows us that Jesus' wilderness period is parallel to Israel's?

Q: Why did Paul say the stories of Israel's failings were written down for us?

Q: Who is it that drives Jesus into the wilderness? For what reason?

Again, Mark's telling of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is very short compared to the other Gospels, but sometimes keeping it short makes you notice things more. This is the second use of the word *immediately*, which is a consistent adverb in Mark, used 42 times in this short book and 11 times in this first chapter alone. From the very beginning, Mark sets a fast pace, but he emphasizes the sovereignty and power of Christ. When Jesus spoke, things happened instantly. It also conveys a sense of urgency, that time is of the essence. When Jesus called His disciples, they left immediately and followed. The message is that we should not postpone following Jesus in discipleship.

with all we are and all we have. The kingdom of God is near (1:15). The call is present and significant and demands immediate response.

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens immediately tore open, and the Spirit descended on Him. When it was over, the Spirit immediately drove Him into the wilderness. Not only is the word *immediately* repeated to show urgency and fast-paced action, but the Spirit was the driving force in both stories. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and led by the Spirit in everything He did. In Acts, we see the disciples being led by the Spirit, as well. When the Spirit said to go, they went; when the Spirit said to stop, they stopped.

Just as Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years before they entered God's Old Testament physical kingdom, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days before preaching that the kingdom of God had come. But unlike Israel, Jesus passed His test of temptation. Israel failed from the very first moment; they worshipped the golden calf while Moses was still on Mount Sinai receiving the Law (Exodus 32). When they spied out the land, they didn't trust God, so He condemned them to wander for 40 years (Numbers 13–14). They failed to trust God and grumbled and complained throughout those 40 years. Jesus' enduring temptation for 40 days in the wilderness showed us He was the true Son of God who could follow His ways and be a light to the nations as Israel was supposed to be (Exodus 19:1–6; Isaiah 49:6).

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark wasn't specific about the temptations Jesus endured, but he did specify that it was Satan who tempted Him. Between recounting the supernatural coronation and the supernatural battle with Satan, Mark established from the beginning that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. The enemy wasn't Rome; it was Satan and evil itself. And he established from the beginning that Jesus would be victorious. Jesus defeated Satan's temptations before He even began His ministry. From the very beginning, he established that Satan was no match for Jesus. He would endure suffering, but He would be victorious in the end. This should also encourage us, that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living inside us and can help us endure any temptation. God will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear with His help. He will always provide a way out for us. We just have to follow it.

Q: Give specific examples of ways you have been tempted by Satan in the past. How did Satan try to deceive and manipulate you? How did God provide a way out?

Q: When you are facing temptation, how can you lean on the Holy Spirit to help you?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus is the perfect king of a kingdom that is upside down from the world.

James Hudson Taylor, a British missionary who served in China beginning in the year 1853, was quoted as saying

“Christ is either Lord of all, or he is not Lord at all.”¹¹

If Jesus is King, He must reign over every area of our lives. Through our study in the book of Mark, examine your heart and ask if you have submitted every area over to the kingship of Christ. Are there areas in your life that you hold back from His governance? Consider the wonderful blessings that you miss out on when you insist on control.

Q: Why is it crucial that Jesus be Lord of every area of your life?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the imagery of Jesus as King throughout all three of the events that prepared Him for ministry – John the Baptist preparing the way, His baptism/coronation, His temptation/victory over Satan. What do these events teach us about the kingship of Christ? His character? His mission? His kingdom?

PRAY for your relationship with Jesus to reflect His kingship over your life as well as the whole universe. Take time to acknowledge His authority as King and submit your life to Him. Then pray for the spiritual kingdom of God to grow on this earth.

ACT: Prepare the way. Choose someone in your life who doesn't know Jesus and think of a way you can prepare the way for Jesus in his or her life, just as John did with the Jews of his day. Maybe it means having a conversation with him or her that lays the foundation of a need for Jesus. Maybe it's doing something kind and generous for that person. Maybe it's removing obstacles to his or her belief and clearing the path for Jesus. Whatever God leads you to do, think of it as preparing the way for Jesus to come into that life, like planting a seed.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2021/baby-boomers-born-from-1957-to-1964-held-an-average-of-12-4-jobs-from-ages-18-to-54.htm>

² <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236477/millennials-work-live.aspx>

³ <https://www.moneydigest.com/1640035/how-many-more-jobs-millennials-gen-z-generations-will-work-in-lifetime/>

⁴ <https://www.ramseysolutions.com/career-advice/starting-a-new-job?srsId=AfmBOooEsv0B9bGbbLAPDfreFolCMDZORQcv-b1O1q7SZc2J72m9I8aZ>

⁵ There were always prophets throughout Israel's history who received dreams and visions from the Lord and preached God's Word to His people. But typically, when we talk about the prophets, we're referring to the written books of the "latter prophets"⁵ – prophets specifically called by God to preach to His people during the time of the monarchy, the exile, and afterward.

In the Jewish faith (and when Jesus talks about it), the Old Testament is generally referred to in three categories – the Law or Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Hebrew abbreviations for each of these sections – *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), *Ketuvim* (Writings) – forms the word *Tanakh*, which is how many Jews refer to the Old Testament. They may also call the whole Old Testament the *Torah*.

- The Law – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- The Prophets – Former Prophets – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
The Latter Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve" (the minor prophets – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
- The Writings – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

The Prophets are further separated into two categories:

- The Former Prophets are what Christians typically think of as history books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), but the Jews didn't consider anything "just history."
- The "Latter Prophets" are the books written by what Christians typically think of when we think of the Old Testament prophets, those specifically called by God to preach to His people during the time of the monarchy and afterward, all focused on the Exile and covenant.

The Latter Prophets are further separated into Major and Minor prophets (simply by the length of their books) and pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic depending on their timing:

- *The pre-exilic prophets* preached to God's people before the Exile, warning that if they didn't turn back to God's covenant law, they would be sent into exile.
- *The exilic prophets* preached during the Exile, telling God's people how to be faithful to His covenant even while in exile.
- *The post-exilic prophets* preached after the Exile about going back to Israel, rebuilding their community, and turning back to the covenant.

⁶ Just a few of Isaiah's prophecies about Messiah: He would be born of a virgin, son of David, Immanuel (7:14), be from Nazareth (11:1–3), come as a light in the darkness (9:1–6), speak in parables (6:9–10), have the Spirit upon him (11:2–3), have compassion for the poor (42:3–4), preach the good news (61:1–2), heal the sick (61:1–2), be rejected by His people (49:4; 53:3), and die as a sacrifice for all mankind (53:1–12).

⁷ The other two requirements were circumcision and sacrifice.

⁸ T. M. Taylor, "The Beginnings of Jewish Proselyte Baptism," *New Testament Studies* (Cambridge University Press, Feb 5, 2009).

⁹ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, ed., *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Alexander McLaren, "The Coronation of the King," *Mark, The Biblical Illustrator Commentary, Vol 41*, electronic version, 2002.

¹¹ <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/t-u-v/taylor-j-hudson-1832-1905/>