

THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 2

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY

I. Introduction to the Gospel of Mark (1:1-2)

A. First verses introduce the Gospel in clear concise terms.

- The word for gospel (evangelion) meant good news, especially regarding victory in battle.

- The Gospel has a very short introduction; it gets right to the action.

B. Introduces Jesus Christ

- Christos (Messiah in Hebrew) meant the anointed one.

- In ancient Israel, kings and priests were anointed. In addition, the prophet Isaiah describes himself as anointed by God to bring good tidings of salvation, and King Cyrus of the Medes as God's anointed agent for bringing Israel back from exile.

C. The quotation at the beginning combines prophecies from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah.

1. Exodus says that God will send His angel before the Israelites to guide them into the Promised Land. Ex. 3:1. Malachi says that God will send His messenger before Him to prepare the way for the day of the Lord, when He will purify His people after much suffering. Malachi 3:1. Aggelos, the term used by the Gospel can mean messenger or angel.

2. Isaiah describes one crying out in the desert a message of comfort for God's people after much suffering because of infidelity to the covenant.

II. John the Baptist is introduced without any description.

A. Baptism was increasingly being used as a rite to represent repentance at the time of Jesus. Ritual purifications were common in

Jewish rites since ancient times. Later prophets had spoken of God cleansing His people with water. E.g., Ezekial 36:24-26; Zech 13:1.

B. The desert represented both a time of purification for God's Chosen People, as occurred when they journeyed to the Promised Land, and also a terrifying place where demons were thought to reside. See. Isaiah 13:19, 34:11-14; Tobit 8.

C. The camel's hair and leather belt worn by John may have connected him to Elijah, see 2 Kings 1:6. That and the eating of locusts also indicates that he was not relying at all on society or its goods.

D. John the Baptist may have had some involvement with the Essenes, but there is no clear evidence. Like the Essenes, he stayed in the desert, and preached about radical repentance, baptism, and a pouring forth of the Spirit. The Essenes also had messianic expectations. But unlike the Essenes, he apparently lived alone, but welcomed all people.

E. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is likely connected to prophecies regarding the spirit coming upon the whole people, e.g., Ezekiel 36:26; Isaiah 44:3-4; Joel 3.

III. The Baptism of Jesus

A. This event is described very simply.

B. The Spirit comes upon Him, as it did upon kings at the beginning of great events, and upon the prophets. Isaiah also prophesied about the spirit coming upon the Messiah. See 1 Sam. 16:13, 2 Kings 2:9ff.; Isaiah 11:2, 41:1.

- The dove may reflect a theme of the new creation.

C. The phrase "My beloved Son" can reflect both Psalm 2, which spoke of God's triumphant king, and the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:2. See also Zechariah 12:10.

D. The phrase "with whom I am well pleased" may reflect Isaiah's prophecy of a messianic savior. Isaiah 42.

IV. The Temptations of Jesus

A. They are also described very dramatically.

B. The forty days in the desert may reflect the time Moses spent on the mountain, or Elijah's forty days in the wilderness after defeating the prophets of Baal. It could also be a demonstration that Jesus was correcting the Chosen People's lapses of faith in their forty years in the desert.

C. The harmony between Jesus, the wild beasts, and the angels could reflect a restoration of the order of creation.

- Holy men were said to have control over the animals. E.g., 1 Kings 17:1-6.

- Jesus' easy familiarity with angels reflects the fact that He was greater than all the prophets.