



OTT

Operation Teaching Tools

OTT Sunday School Lesson

Produced for IPHC World Missions Ministries

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Gospel of Mark

Lesson 2: Mark 1:2-13

Lesson Introduction:

Today we will study Mark's introduction of Jesus by first introducing the ministry John the Baptist. Mark, like each of the Gospels, begins with a discussion of John the Baptist's role of preparing the people to receive and accept Jesus as the Messiah. Before Jesus begins his public ministry, he goes to John in the wilderness to be baptized. He ventures further into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil in the midst of wild animals and angels. Jesus is presented as powerful but also humble and obedient.

Read: Mark 1:2-13

The Old Testament in Mark:

Mark begins with some Old Testament scripture to show that the Gospel is not only a New Testament concept. In fact, the Old Testament announced and anticipated the New Testament Gospel. Mark quotes three Old Testament scriptures in Mark 1:2-3 to show how Jesus and the Gospel fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

- "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" comes from Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1.
- "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'" comes from Isaiah 40:3.

New Covenant believers must be careful not to neglect the study of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament. The two testaments are not opposed to one another or competing with one another. They are a united message from God and supplement one another. The Old Testament helps us understand the New Testament and Mark shows how the Old Testament looked forward to the New Testament.

The Wilderness:

All the events of Mark 1:2-13 take place in the wilderness or desert. The word for wilderness or desert does not refer to the natural environment or climate of the area. Rather, this word refers to a place of desolation and solitude. In the original Greek, the word for wilderness or desert "can signify a lonely place where there are no men . . . and where there are many dangers to the body."¹ It was not a comfortable place to be. The desert was uninhabited by most humans. It was harsh and dangerous. Yet this is the place where Jesus launches his ministry. He did not begin in the palaces of Rome or the streets of Jerusalem. The Gospel arose in the wilderness.

The wilderness was a well-known concept to the Jewish people. They remembered their ancestors wandering through the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt and before their entry into the promised land. God spoke to them in the wilderness. God shaped them in the wilderness. In the wilderness, they learned to put their faith in God.

Now, with John the Baptist's ministry, Israel is returning to the wilderness. There they found Jesus and heard again from the God. Jesus went to those wandering the wilderness, seeking after repentance and forgiveness. The desolation of the wilderness was the setting for the beginning of salvation. A bad place (the wilderness) is where people found the good news (the Gospel).

¹ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 657.

Israel was also living in a spiritual wilderness or desert when Jesus came to them. They had not heard from God's prophets for 400 years. They had gone away from right worship and were failing to be the people God called them to be. Jesus came to restore Israel and, through them, bring salvation to the whole world. From the physical wilderness and spiritual desert, Jesus brought redemption and restoration.

Jesus comes to us wherever we are. Whether we are in a desolate place physically or spiritually, Jesus and his Gospel (good news) are able to find and reach us there. When we are struggling physically, we can trust in Jesus to sustain us. When we are struggling spiritually, we can repent and find mercy and grace. Faith arises in the wilderness because deserts are great places to hear and receive the Gospel.

The Work of John the Baptist:

John the Baptist's ministry was to prepare Israel to receive the Messiah by proclaiming the coming of Jesus, leading people in repentance, and baptizing people in the Jordan river. Repentance is not only feeling sorry for your sins. The word "repent" originally "has to do first of all with a change of mind."² A person who truly repents is thinking and moving in a different direction than before. They are moving towards God and away from sin. John asked people to be baptized in water as a physical representation of a spiritual reality.

John became a very popular preacher and prophet but he always sought to focus the attention of the people towards Jesus. He just wanted to show the "one more powerful than I" as he said in Mark 1:7. He wanted people to find Jesus through him. All believers should live in such a way as John. Christians should always be at work preparing people to meet Jesus and receive his Gospel.

The Baptism of Jesus

Jesus was baptized by John but not because Jesus repented of sin. Jesus was sinless. Yet Jesus participated in this process to demonstrate his humility and his willingness to totally identify with mankind (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus was both fully human and fully God. He existed before he was born. He existed from eternity past as part of the Trinity, eternally connected with God with Father and the Holy Spirit. However, he came to the earth and took on flesh so that he could redeem humanity by both living perfectly and dying sacrificially. The baptism of Jesus shows us his love, not the repentance of sin. He stands with sinners in the waters of the Jordan river and then dies for sinners on the cross of calvary.

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, a glorious event took place. The heavens ripped open as the barrier between man and God begins to fall with the ministry of Jesus. Then the voice of God speaks over Jesus to declare who Jesus is. Jesus did not become the son at his baptism. Rather, God confirms that Jesus is truly the Son with whom He is well pleased. The Spirit also descends upon Jesus and drives him further into the desert. This was not a punishment. Rather, the Spirit knows that the enemy is ready to attack and Jesus is ready to overcome. The desert becomes the setting for victory over the enemy.

The Temptation of Jesus

Mark's description of Jesus's temptation in the desert does not describe the individual temptations. You can read about these in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Mark emphasized that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. Jesus responds to the Spirit's call and direction with total obedience even though the Spirit is directing him to do something difficult and uncomfortable. Jesus did not avoid the desert or run from the Spirit's calling, he immediately obeyed. His obedience resulted in temporary trouble but ultimate victory. He was first tempted by the devil and endangered by wild animals but ultimately attended to by angels. Obeying the Holy Spirit may be difficult and painful at times but it always results in victory over the enemy.

Prepare for Next Week: Read Mark 1:14-34.

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² Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 472.