

Introduction to Mark – Week One

The main theme of Mark's gospel is announced through his first recorded words of Jesus, **"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"** (1:15). This announcement is one for which many Jews had been anxiously awaiting. By the beginning of the first century AD Israel's once great kingdom, founded by King David, was little more than a distant memory. For most of its one thousand year history the kingdom of Israel had suffered under foreign oppression, invasion, exile and destruction. But throughout this time God kept promising through the prophets that he would send his promised Messiah (or Christ) to re-establish David's fallen kingdom. Unlike previous kings Israel had known, God's Messiah would gently lead his people, like a shepherd leads his sheep, into eternal prosperity, peace, and fulfilment. In God's Kingdom evil would be vanquished: the deaf would hear, the blind would see, and the lame would leap for joy.

Mark's Introduction of Jesus

With this as its historical background, Mark's Gospel begins in the Judean desert where a prophet named John the Baptist appears looking like one of Israel's ancient prophets. Wearing clothing made of camel skin, John exhorted all who came to him to be cleansed of their sins in preparation for the coming of God's Messiah. (1: 1-6). But John's baptism of Jesus is like the coronation of God's messiah. Shortly after his baptism, Jesus began to exhort all would who listen to repent and believe the good news that God's Kingdom had finally come (1:15). Like wild fire, news about Jesus quickly spread as he healed the sick and drove demons from the possessed. Jesus also began preaching God's judgement on the ungodly but his grace and forgiveness for all who would humbly repent and believe (1:28, 32-34). Ironically, as Jesus popularity grew, so did the religious leaders' opposition against him. However, Jesus continued his work, comparing himself to a thief who came to dispossess Satan of that which rightfully belonged to God (3:27).

Mark's introduces Jesus to us as a powerful man who is surrounded by mystery. Jesus is declared to be 'the Holy One of God' by the demons he casts out (1:24) while Israel's own religious rulers accuse him of being possessed by Satan (3:22). Jesus eats with despised 'tax collectors and sinners' while he argues with the most pious religious sect in Israel about the true meaning of righteousness (2:15 – 17). Even Jesus' own family don't understand him (3:21). And while the crowds follow him in awe, Jesus seems determined to keep his identity a secret (1:44).