

# The Gospel of Mark: Peter's Story of Jesus

Written by Steve Petty

## **Bible Interpretation and Study**

Week 1: Mark 1: 1-13

Let me tell you about my friend Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God; this is how it all began: You remember that the prophet Isaiah says:

*"Look here, I am sending out a messenger to go before you.*

*He will prepare the way for you.*

*He will be like a voice crying in the wilderness:*

*"Prepare the Way of the Lord.*

*Clear a path for him, into your hearts."*

He was talking about John the Baptist, who came, just like Isaiah said, preaching in the wilderness, and telling people to turn away from sin and toward God. People came from all over Judea, even the city people in Jerusalem came and when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. He was a wild looking man, wearing a camel hair outfit with a leather belt around his waist. He lived on wild locusts and honey.

John was preparing the way for Jesus, he said: "I am just the warm up act. He, who is following me, He is the real thing; the Word of God. Compared to him I am nothing, not even fit to polish his sandals. And whereas I baptize you with this dirty water, he will baptize you with power, the very cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit."

So it was that Jesus came, just like John said. Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee. He surprised John, because he came to be baptized by John in the Jordan.

But the real surprise was not when he went into the water; it was when he came out of the water. He saw the very heart of Heaven open up and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. As the dove came down, a voice said, "You are my Son. I love you! Just seeing you pleases me."

Now, just as soon as all this happened, Jesus left and went into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted by all the evil in the world. The animals of the wilderness surrounded him and the angels of God protected him.

### **Introduction:**

The Gospel of Mark is the earliest Gospel, probably written after Rome burned and the persecution of Christians began under Nero, about 66 AD. Matthew and Luke, using Mark's basic outline, would follow within a few years and John would write his more theological book using his own formula many years later.

Who is Mark? The author of this book is probably John Mark, who was with Peter in Rome (1 Peter 5:13) and whose family were instrumental in saving Peter after his arrest (Acts 12:12). John Mark decides to go with Paul on his mission trip to Antioch, but gets cold feet in Pamphylia and returns home. When Paul begins a later mission John Mark again volunteers but is rejected by Paul, (Acts 15: 36-40) who even argues about him with Barnabas, who then takes him on his mission and drops the name John. We are unsure how he ends up in Rome years later with Peter.

Tradition tells us that Mark was merely the scribe writing the story dictated to him by Peter. A close reading of the story seems to bear this out. The other Gospel writers show considerable deference to Simon Peter, the man who became the head of the Christian community in Rome, and who had known Jesus well enough to argue with him. But Mark's work shows Peter in the least favorable light. Perhaps Peter himself is still aware of his failures in the story and conveys those failings with a sense of confession.

The interpretation that we will print for you is my own. I have tried to imagine what Peter would say; how would he tell this same story if it were written in the first person. Sometimes the illustrations used will be 21<sup>st</sup> Century instead of 1<sup>st</sup> Century. This is merely an attempt to bring a more contemporary element to the story for contemporary readers.

Try to imagine Peter, a very old man at this time, in prison, probably already under a sentence of death, telling his story of Jesus to his faithful aid and scribe Mark. Hear the urgency of Peter's narrative; Jesus is always on the move, Peter is rushing to finish his story before the Romans execute him. But Peter's energy ebbs and flows, sometimes he breaks off and starts somewhere else. He is remembering, as best he can, events that he lived through more than thirty years before. He doesn't have time to go on forever; he must relay the essentials and trust Mark to get them down on parchment.

Finally, I strongly encourage reading the text from several sources. Do not rely on this interpretation alone. Pick up a newer translation to read side by side with this version. I especially endorse the New Jerusalem Bible, The New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version.

## WEEK #1 – PREPARE THE WAY

Who is speaking? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is writing? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is Mark written for? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is Isaiah? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is John the Baptist? \_\_\_\_\_

What was John's message? \_\_\_\_\_

What were the people asked to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What did John do to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is speaking after Jesus is baptized? \_\_\_\_\_

What does Jesus do after being baptized? \_\_\_\_\_

Who looks after Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any disciples in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

Does Jesus say anything? \_\_\_\_\_

What does all this mean for me? \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion: How do you think John felt baptizing Jesus?

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