

Mark 1

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 15 February 2010 10:46

As with any book of the Bible we have only two choices. The first is to accept it exactly as it is. The other is to weave into it the traditions and theories of men. I always go with the first choice, because the alternative is confusion and faithlessness.

The author appears to be the disciple, Mark (who is possibly 'John Mark', cousin of Barnabas. Note: Though not one of the original 12 apostles, Mark could possibly be called an apostle in the general Biblical sense, i.e. as a great preacher; an example being Paul). At one time he disappointed Paul when he was on his journeys. But, eventually, they got back together again. That is how friendships go! There are times when even the best of friends, and even families, become fractured.

When was the book written? Some say 50 AD to 60 AD; others just before 70 AD. In reality, no-one can say when the book was written, and I see no problem in assuming Mark wrote the book either straight away, when incidents occurred (rather like a diary: after all, Luke did the same thing when he accompanied Paul on his journeys), or immediately after Christ was resurrected, so that there was documentation to help the early churches. Without solid evidence either way, it is a reasonable assumption. Some think Mark wrote his book in Rome, but the reasons given are suspect (e.g. that Peter was in Rome and Mark was with him. There is no actual proof that Peter was ever in Rome).

The book was written mainly to Gentile Christians, and this may be why it does not begin with a genealogy of Jesus... genealogies were meticulously kept by Jews. The purpose seems to be to show that Jesus was/is the Messiah. Some say the books of Matthew and Luke are based on Mark's Gospel, but that is conjecture. The 'two-source' theory arose within the higher criticism school in the 19th century... and that is why I tend to dismiss it. The critical school said the two sources were Mark, and a now lost 'sayings' document called 'Q'. This kind of muddied-water is often found throughout the unbelieving work of higher critics, some of whom even suggest a 'four-source' root for Matthew and Luke.

I heard one pastor tell his listeners that certain parts of Mark were not written by Mark but were 'added later'. This is another feature of higher criticism and it should be ignored. Higher criticism is not based on belief but on lack of it.

As far as we are concerned, the Book of Mark was prompted by God, and was included in the

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final Book we now call the Bible. This being so, it is complete and totally accurate. That other Gospel writers give different details at places does not detract from this. It just means we do not have all the answers!

The time all the Gospels were written was a time of turmoil. False Messiahs (prophesied by Jesus) arose and multiplied. These were not preachers but fighters, men who urged other Jews to join them in their armed struggle against Rome. It was these very fighters or false Messiahs that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. The religious scene was mainly controlled by the High Priests and Sanhedrin, which meant opposition to Christians and continuation of Judaism, now removed by Christ. Thus, the Book was written during a time of social, religious and political upheaval.

Verses 1-4

1.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

2.

As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

3.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4.

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

The first verse starts with "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ..." By this Mark means the Book speaks of the origin of the Gospel, which belongs to Jesus Christ, or Messiah Jesus, Who is the Son of God. Thus, he indicates at the outset that Christ is the source and facilitator of the Gospel.

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Indeed, the text means Christ IS the Gospel, and that Mark will proceed to describe what He said and did, proving He was and is the Messiah. For us, this means our sole source is Christ, and everything we think, say or do, must originate with Him. This can sometimes be indirect... things like health and exercises, music, writing, jobs, and so on. Everything we experience ought to find its beginning in Christ. Many Christians are perplexed by this and cannot see the relevance of anything other than Bible text! This is just ignorance. We are not just meant to be robotic utterers of scripture. We are to live life to the full, in an holy way. If we relate everything to God's will, then all is well.

Mark refers to the prophets (Isaiah and Malachi; who spoke three hundred years apart). The first quote is from Malachi, who plainly refers to John the Baptist, who "shall prepare thy way before thee". Isaiah spoke about "crying in the wilderness" and gave the words of John: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord..." Mark gives us these references because he begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. Thus, he tells us what John's role was – to prepare the people for Christ's coming on this earth, because Christ was the "Lord". The text calls John the Baptist God's "messenger" and it specifically says he would call from the desert.

The word "messenger" is *aggelos*, meaning someone who is sent by God with a message. It also means 'angel': this is a word for 'messenger', and also applies to the apostles, faithful preachers, etc. Any man who is a genuine preacher or teacher has been sent by God, *aggelos*. For this reason he must be heeded and those hearing must obey God.

John the Baptist had to "prepare thy way"; in this text, the 'way', *hodos*, means a manner of thinking. In other words, John was to accustomise the people to hearing words of repentance and obedience, which Christ would highlight in His own ministry.

The way, or 'paths' must be "made straight"... upright, true; the 'right' way. In this manner the people were to be told of what was to come, so that they were ready to hear Christ's Gospel. The word 'straight' also implies straightforwardness, something rarely found in today's preaching.

As part of his task, John "did baptize in the wilderness", outside the cities and towns, and in the deserts and rough land. He preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." This was not the same as Christian baptism, but was the Jewish form of baptism; repentance. The

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word “baptize”, baptizō, refers to the act of baptism; the word “baptism”, baptisma, describes what it is.

Repentance in this text means a change of mind: in this case, away from sin and towards God. It causes a man to reconsider his past ways and to alter them to be holy (metanoia). For the Jews this action led to their change of heart. Later, when the Gospel was preached, it concentrated on turning from sin, because it was required as part of salvation and the ‘working out of’ salvation in one’s life. So, John’s main task was to cause Jews to alter their perception of their own attitude towards God, and to change their hearts towards Him. It was not the repentance of salvation, but a necessary action that made them listen to the Gospel. The call to the Jews was universal to them, but the call to repent by the Gospel is always aimed at individuals.

Next we should consider baptism in this context.

There is much contention over the act of baptism. Some say it is sprinkling, or can mean that. Others say it is full immersion. Who is right?

The baptism in this text is the ‘baptism of John’. That is, a Jewish rite for Jews. It is not the same as the Roman baptism that was forced by popes on all lands occupied by Catholicism. (Jews still speak of the forced baptisms in Minorca, 418 AD).

Though most of us today say baptism is full immersion, it was not always the case – some in the early churches were partially immersed. Water was poured in large amounts on the heads of those too sick or if they were dying. This was sometimes called ‘sprinkling’, but is not the same as the light spatter of water used in cult churches. Even Catholic sources admit full immersion was the usual mode of baptism, and was what John the Baptist did, which was more of a ritual washing (from sin). Where water was scarce, pouring was used. The fact that the river Jordan was deep, strongly implies something more than ‘pouring’ or sprinkling... it tells us full immersion was the mode, as Matthew records – Jesus “coming out of the water”.

Also, baptism is likened to dying in Christ and rising from the dead. The full body dies, not just part of it. And the full body resurrects again. This strengthens the idea that baptism was full immersion, at least initially. One of the meanings of baptizō (baptism) is to plunge or to dip.

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Verse 4 tells us that John “did baptize”, baptizō; he “preached... baptism”, baptisma. ‘Baptize’ means to immerse, with reference to sunken vessels. It can also mean to ‘overwhelm’, which also implies full immersion.

The text has no affiliation with baptism in/of the Holy Spirit. Nor is the word to be confused for baptô. To put it graphically, John the Baptists call for repentance resulted in Jews walking into the river. John (or perhaps he had assistants for the purpose) then covered them with water, either by laying them down backwards, or by ducking them forward so that their heads and bodies were covered. It is also possible they claimed to have repented beforehand.

The ‘baptism’ found in Mark speaks of the Jewish purification rite, mikvah. It was an act to restore a person to God’s blessing by ritual cleansing. The Jews who attended John’s activity knew this purification rite very well, as it was also used to cleanse converts to Judaism. As a Jewish rite, the mikvah could be re-applied many times. John the Baptist, then, did not baptise to remit sins, but only to show repentance, thus preparing the person’s mind and heart for the Gospel to be preached by Christ. (Christian baptism also shows repentance, but this is not the final purpose of it). Many today think a person can be saved by baptism, or that baptism is the ‘rite of passage’ into the Church. Both suppositions are wrong.

The first idea is wrong because we are saved in eternity and when we are ‘saved’ in our lifetime at one specific moment, it is only the acknowledgement of what has already been decided by God (predestination). Christian baptism is an acknowledgement that we have already been saved. The second idea is wrong because nothing gives us ‘membership’ into the Church; because of the first point – we are saved in eternity. As no-one is ever lost or forgotten in salvation, we can rightly say that the ‘membership’ of the Church is fixed and final. It is fixed in eternity and therefore cannot be altered and no person can ‘join’ merely by being baptised.

There is no warrant to view baptism as a membership rite. In terms of being saved and part of the true Church, baptism holds no relevance. Rather, its relevance is in obedience to God’s command, that we should be baptised after repentance and salvation on this earth. This is because baptism is symbolic for something we already have, salvation. It also symbolises dying and being raised again in Christ. But, it does NOT symbolise ‘joining the Church’.

For John the Baptist, then, baptism was what every Jew knew about – purification and turning back to God. It was a temporary activity, to be replaced by Christian baptism. And it prepared the people for something greater than ritual cleansing. This was John’s task and he spent

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several years preaching repentance and baptising faithful Jews.

The “remission of sins” was a strictly Jewish function that did not transfer into Christian life. John’s baptism only remitted sins because that was how Judaism operated; it was part of Jewish religious observance, that was dismantled when Christ gave us salvation by faith alone. ‘Remission’, apheresis, is the pardon of sins, so that the penalty for sin is not applied. It was Judaistic, but not Christian, and this is important to understand. Just being baptised is meaningless for an unbeliever; it conveys no virtue and no salvation.

Verses 5-8

1.

And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

2.

And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;

3.

And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

4.

I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Today, big-name ‘evangelists’ have to spend millions on advertising their wares. They contact churches and spread the word in print. John the Baptists simply went about preaching, without advertising! When word got out that he was calling the nation to repentance, the Jews were prompted by God to respond. Perhaps some only did it out of duty, but most would have been led by the Spirit – and were probably the same Jews to be saved. “All the land of Judaea, and of Jerusalem” went out to him. Judaea (‘he shall be praised’) has two possible meanings – the whole of Palestine or just the lower part. It could easily apply to all of Palestine, because John

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travelled extensively. Importantly, many came to him from the capital, Jerusalem, where the religious leaders and Sanhedrin were.

They made their way to the river Jordan ('the descender'), to wherever John was at the time. This was good strategy, because it ran the length of the country for 200 miles. Those who came openly and freely "confessed their sins"; this involved publicly telling others of your sins, but promising to follow God, joyfully. Of course, the Jews made a promise based on Judaistic ritual and rites, which were still extant and workable, if only for a maximum of about three years (when the Gospel given by Christ replaced the Old Testament of sacrifices).

John was an hardy individual, caring nothing for riches or clothing. This is because he had a task to accomplish and knew he had little time. The man from God comes humbly and without fanfare. He does not wear wealthy clothing and watches, or drive around in expensive cars. He just preaches truth. There is nothing wrong with wealth – only with preaching in order to acquire it!

John wore camel's hair clothing. Though camel was forbidden as food, it could be used for weaving and making of clothing. Clothing of camel's hair was rough; it was warm in the cold nights but irritating to the skin. He wore a 'girdle', which *could* have been a wide leather ('skin') belt that kept the outer clothing to the body. Normally, it would have two sides so it could carry money, but John did not care for that. It is my view, though, that the girdle was more like a leather Roman toga, because of the words "about his loins".

He ate locusts and wild honey. Jews were allowed to eat locusts, and many of them in rural areas did, so it is not so odd as it may seem to Western minds. The dead insects were usually roasted, or eaten raw, sprinkled with salt. He also ate wild honey found in rocks and trees. In other words, he did not rely on man-made foods but ate whatever he could find. What mattered to him was the message given to him by the Holy Spirit. You may remember that God said John was filled with the Spirit from babyhood. That made him unique and very much God's man. He was the bridge between Old and New Testaments, Jewish rites and Christian faith alone.

When he spoke, John told his hearers that he was only the spokesman for someone far greater, who was soon to come to them. John was so humble he told people openly that he was not worthy enough to even tie up that man's shoes. He told his hearers that his baptism was only the same as they knew about, a ritual to declare repentance. But, the one who was to follow would baptize with the Holy Ghost.

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This was extremely significant. Repentance merely expressed an apology to God. But, the only ones able to have the Holy Ghost were those elected by God to salvation. What is meant by that? Does it mean baptism gives a man the Holy Ghost? No, not quite. “With” in “with the Holy ghost” is a preposition, in this text referring to instrumentality; that is, the holy Ghost would baptize them, not a mere man. “with” may also be substituted by “by”.

Thus, baptism did not give a man the Holy Spirit. Rather, the man was baptized “*by* the Holy Ghost”, which is very different. It was not so much a reference to baptism, then, as to the act of salvation, which is conferred by God – the Holy Spirit.

It is notable that Jesus baptised almost no-one, so the real import is that those who came to Christ were those chosen by God in eternity, and the Holy Ghost made that person spiritually alive by regenerating his spirit. Only then could that man be prompted to salvation in his lifetime.

As soon as man is saved (in his lifetime), he is filled with the Holy Spirit, hence he has been “baptized by the Holy Ghost”. There is no second baptism or a special giving of the Spirit, as claimed by charismatics, Pentecostals and others. The physical baptism experienced by Christians *after* salvation is only an acknowledgment that a man has been saved and now wishes to identify with the Church. The time period between salvation and baptism can be minutes, hours, days, weeks or even months. Needless to say, there are many false explanations for baptism, and they should be ignored.

Verses 9-13

1.

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

2.

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

3.

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And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

4.

And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

5.

And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

“In those days” signifies a short time span. Or, at the same time John was preaching repentance, Jesus began on His ministry. But first, he came to John to be baptized. Some query why Jesus needed to be baptised, if He was born sinless and never committed sin, and so did not need to repent.

Jesus “came from Nazareth”. Nazareth (‘the guarded one’), or Nazara. He had lived there from childhood, and was now working at his late father’s trade, which was either carpentry or, more likely, general building work including stonework. His mother was now cared for financially by his brothers and sisters. He was now aged thirty and the time for His work had come.

Matthew Henry makes a worthy point, that Jesus lived obscurely in a small poor village, unheard of. How many godly men so live without publicity and being known, yet are much loved by God? Today, most preachers and ministers are counted worthy only if they have the same circle of friends and peers! If they believe exactly the same things they are accepted. God, however, does not work that way. He chooses whom He will, from wherever He wishes, even if peers think nothing of the one chosen.

John obediently baptized Jesus. It is my conclusion that Jesus was baptized not for His own sake, but for ours, so that we may know what to do. He was also baptized because, as a man, He wanted to identify with what men should go through in His name, and that included baptism after salvation. Thus, it was an act of both humility and supreme power, for He lay aside His deity to show His humility. He did not become free of deity – He just opened a curtain briefly, as

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it were, to show Himself obedient to the Father. This is our pattern to follow on earth.

As Jesus was climbing out of the river onto the riverbank, Jesus looked up and saw the “heavens opened”. In this text ‘heavens’ means the sky. They were ‘opened’, or divided, split apart. This was a physical phenomenon. We do not know if anyone else saw it, but Jesus did. As He looked up, the Spirit came down “like a dove”. Note he did not come AS a dove, but LIKE a dove. The adverb “as” means “as it were”, or “like as”. That is, the Holy Spirit chose to appear as a dove and flew down to meet Jesus. The dove, of course, symbolises peace and love, innocence and purity.

The dove also represents the offering made to God by the poor, so this, too, is a significant reason why the Spirit should come like a dove. Also, Jewish teachers used to say that no bird was more persecuted than the dove and so was acceptable as a sacrifice. A dove was also used by Noah, and brought the good news that the Flood was receding. There are, then, a number of reasons why the dove was used as a symbol by the Holy Spirit. The wording does not actually say the Spirit became a dove, but that he looked like a dove. This is very similar to the time when the Spirit descended on the apostles ‘like tongues of fire’. They had the general appearance of tongues but were not actual tongues. Did John see and hear these things? I do not know. No-one does.

When the dove-like symbol came down, God the Father spoke from heaven and said ‘You are my much-loved Son, and I am very pleased with you.’ The word ‘beloved’, *agapētos*, means more than just ‘loved’, it means *worthy* of love. No ordinary man can ever be worthy of the love of the Father. The only way we can be counted worthy is through the merits of the Son. In ourselves, we are nothing!

When Jesus came out of the water and was spoken to by the Father, “the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness”, immediately. The word ‘driveth’ can sometimes be used in a violent way, as in being forced. But, Jesus did not need to be forced – His sojourn on earth was undertaken willingly. The meaning, rather, is that the Spirit drew Jesus out to the desert because he was now moving towards His intended goal – His ministry. Nothing in Jesus’ life was random; everything was planned and had a purpose. So, everything He did and said was aimed at the same goal, which He knew to include His own violent death at the hands of men.

Jesus remained in the desert for forty days (39 nights), and when He was there, Satan came personally to tempt Him. Demons were not trusted with Jesus! Only the master of lies was

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allowed to speak to the Son of God. No more is said of this, but we can be assured that Satan came and spoke many times to Jesus, in an attempt to dissuade Him from His ministry, and to act sinfully. All it would take was a very small deviance from truth and purity, and all would be lost! But, Jesus did not deviate from truth and His entire short life was pure and holy from start to finish.

In the desert Jesus was alone, with only the wild beasts around Him. But, he was kept safe from harm, and the “angels ministered to Him”. In this text ‘angels’ refers to the ‘good’ angels that lived around God in Heaven. Just as God provided manna in the desert for the Hebrews to live on during the exodus, so God provided Jesus with food and drink whilst in the desert, brought to Him by angels. The angels no doubt also spent time with Him, discussing His coming ministry and His own needs. Christians should take heart from that, for they are never alone when in need. Angels are around us every day, helping us to live obediently and in His will. They help and nourish our souls, and even guide others to provide our needs.

Verses 14&15

1.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

2.

And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Some time after baptizing Jesus, John was put into prison because he spoke boldly about Herod and the wife he married adulterously. John spoke as any Christian should. Those who call themselves religious leaders today are weak-spined and afraid to speak out. Many do not have the knowledge to do so, and others want to retain their status and position in life. Government leaders live immorally as these religious leaders refuse to speak out. Not so with John... and what he said he said in public! Genuine Christians will always be hated by some. They are bound to ‘get into trouble’ because what they believe and say is opposite to how most people live and think. The majority of people who call themselves ‘Christian’ will readily attack or shun the genuine Christian, because he or she throws a spotlight on their own meagre beliefs and practices.

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A short while after John was imprisoned, prior to having his head cut off, “Jesus came into Galilee”. This either meant He was outside Galilee, or that it was now the time He spoke there. It would be His most difficult place, because a prophet is always ignored in his own country. (Galilee=‘circuit’; it is in northern Palestine just under Syria).

Jesus began preaching “the gospel of the kingdom of God”. What does this mean? The ‘gospel’, or euaggelion, was ‘good tidings’. The good tidings were that men could be saved through Jesus Christ. The ‘kingdom of God’ was the kingdom to be initiated by Jesus Christ. So, the gospel at this time was that Jesus had come to save men from their sin, if they believed in Him. They would then enter Heaven after the last day. When Jesus died and rose again, the Gospel included the facts of His life, death and resurrection, because the resurrection proved we would all be resurrected in the same way, which is the end result of being saved.

The ‘kingdom’ in this text is basileia. It means the rule and power of God. It does not refer to a physical kingdom but to a spiritual kingdom – and the right of God to rule over it. It also refers to the power and authority given to Christ as Messiah, and which is passed on to every genuine Christian on this earth. We can say, then, that whilst no country on this earth is now a theocracy (to their detriment), every Christian lives under a theocracy in his spirit and mind.

Basically, everything in the New Testament comprises the ‘good tidings’ or Gospel of Jesus Christ; everything He said, did, thought; His miracles. Many who call themselves Christians insist they are “simple believers” who do not delve too deeply into theology. In reality, they only wish to learn what they think is their ‘favourite’ parts of scripture, and only want to hear what aligns with their prejudices. There is no such thing as a ‘simple believer’ who only has a superficial understanding of scripture! it is just another term for laxity and superficiality. As believers we all need to grasp not just the essentials of salvation, but also every other aspect of God’s word, without which we cannot function fully nor can we stand firm against error and intimidation.

When He preached the good tidings, Jesus also warned that “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” The time He referred to was the fulfilment of prophecies concerning His coming as an human being, with the Gospel. Christ is the Gospel, in His person. He said the kingdom of God was “at hand” meaning it would be fully operational when He died and rose again. Therefore, He told everyone to repent and believe what He told them.

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In this text 'repentance' is the same word as used by John, but with an amended meaning. The people already knew what it meant in terms of their old religion. But, Jesus gave it an added dimension, because it was now linked to the Gospel. Thus, repentance, *metanoēō*, means to be sorry for one's sins and to hate them, but also to change, away from sinful ways and towards godliness, which includes caring in faith, honour and holiness, as required of those saved by grace. Only this real turning from sin will attract forgiveness from God. The act of repentance is not a mere outward emotional response, it is an act of the mind as well as the heart, as the root *noēō* tells us. There is almost a paranoia amongst some Christians, about the place of the mind and intellect in Christian living! We are to think deeply on the things of God and come to rational conclusions. Only then can we understand what we claim to believe.

To 'believe', means to accept the Gospel (every part of scripture) as true; to be totally convinced that whatever God says is beneficial and useful. Without this inner confidence we cannot function as believers.

Verses 16-20

1.

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

2.

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

3.

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

4.

And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

5.

And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

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As Christ walked on the shore of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two fishermen, Simon (the famed Peter) and Andrew. His brother. They lived at Bethsaida. Peter followed John the Baptist. The brothers were casting nets from their boat.

Jesus called out to them, saying "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." this is the highest earthly calling for any man, and it overrides all other considerations. They may not have understood what "fishers of men" really were, but they obeyed Jesus immediately! This was an incredible act of faith. it also shows that we cannot have faith unless God first gives it to us. To the fishermen Jesus was a complete stranger. Even so, they were prompted by the Holy Spirit to obey.

They walked together along the shore, and then Jesus saw James (son of Zebedee) and his brother John. James later became known as 'the elder' or 'greater', and he was killed by Herod. Zebedee was also a fisherman, married to Salome. John, James' brother, was later much loved by Christ for his simple trust in the Saviour, and he is believed to be the John who wrote The Revelation.

The two men were sitting with their father, Zebedee, in their boat, mending their nets. We can see that their boat was large, because it held father and two sons, plus servants. These were fishermen paid a wage, hired for the day. This implies that the family were relatively well-off. Yet, the brothers joined Jesus without hesitation, obeying the call of the Holy Spirit in their souls. It is the obedience we all ought to have, every moment of every day. Do we?

Verses 21&22

1.

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

2.

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

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The first four disciples went with Jesus to Capernaum ('village of comfort'). When it was the Jewish Sabbath day (Saturday), Jesus entered the local synagogue. This was a city of substance, quite well-off, sited on the Sea of Galilee, near the spot where the river Jordan meets the Sea or Lake.

Jesus went in on the 'sabbath day'. That is, the sabbaton, or seventh-day rest from work. Note that it is as the 'seventh-day sabbath' – there is no particular reason why it was on a Saturday, and those Christians who insist on Saturday as the 'sabbath' are making much of nothing... the emphasis is on the seventh-day, not on a particular day... which is why Christians used Sunday as their Sabbath, after Christ was resurrected. It is Judaistic, and an error, to *insist* on Saturday over other days, as a proof of orthodoxy. It is never treated as that in scripture. In essence, we may hold any seventh-day we wish as a seventh-day sabbath, so long as it is in sincerity....
Though why
we should diversify from the usually-held Sunday has no real meaning for me.

Once inside the synagogue, Jesus preached the Gospel. His listeners were amazed by what Jesus said, because He spoke "as one that had authority" and not like the scribes, who were legalistic and spoke in muted and traditional fashion. This is how every Christian teacher ought to speak, because if he has no power from God, he cannot have the desired authority. Jesus preached the Gospel. The Jews were not unfamiliar with this concept, because the Gospel, to them, referred to the coming of the Messiah, and John the Baptist had already prepared them for this. What was different, was Jesus' emphasis not on armed force or a physical kingdom, but on spiritual truth and a spiritual kingdom.

Sabbath: The actual day (Saturday) used by Jews as their seventh-day Sabbath or Shabbat, was determined in the desert when they received manna. They were to desist from collecting manna on the seventh day, and it was that historic day they have kept ever since. However, the very meaning of 'sabbath', related to the verb shavat, means to cease, desist, rest. Therefore, the true meaning is not based on a particular day, but on a seventh-day, when people rested from work. For Jews the actual day related to the day the collecting of manna was proscribed. For Christians there is an equally good reason for choosing Sunday – Jesus' resurrection. Those who persist in reverting back to a Judaistic choice are arguing a point that has no force. It is not binding and has no Biblical support.

Verses 23-28

Mark 1

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 15 February 2010 10:46

1.

And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

2.

Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

3.

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

4.

And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

5.

And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

6.

And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

As Jesus was speaking, a man with an unclean spirit shouted out: 'Leave us alone – we've got nothing to do with you, have we, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you are the Holy One of God!'

The man who shouted had an unclean spirit or demon (or several); he was immoral and thought and spoke blasphemously. He "cried out"; the word refers to a guttural cry from the throat, a phenomenon often associated with demonic sounds coming from people. As one of the root words, *krazō* indicates, it can be a rough croaking sound. This also agrees with demonic

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presence, when the voice is unlike that of the person inhabited.

It is very likely that the man had been possessed for some time, but evidence of it may not have been shown until now. Or, his immorality may have been known but no-one could alter his ways. It was not the man who shouted out, but the demon, because it was afraid of what Jesus was going to do. Demons are afraid of Jesus, and also of His name. That is why they are bound to leave a man or woman once confronted in Jesus' name and in His power. The "us" and "we" in the narrative refer to the demons, not to the Jewish congregation. Very often, 'us' (as in "destroy us" indicate an antithesis, which would be correct in this case, because God is antithetical to demons and Satan. That is, they are opposites, and this fact is found in the word 'us'.

Notice that the demon (possibly more than one) called Jesus the "Holy One of God". He knew Who Jesus was... the hagios, or, most holy thing ('thing' being applied to either objects or people, including Christians). It is a statement of reverence, even though the demon was afraid and hated God. In everyday Christian life, those who hate us the most may also have a deep respect for us, not because of who we are but because of the God we serve. That is why we must *always* be different from those around us. People must see God in our lives, not just hear it in our claimed beliefs. Hagios is rooted in hagos – purity from sin, immaculate, without fault. Do people recognise who we are simply by looking at us, or watching our behaviour?

Jesus did not wait, but immediately dealt with the demon. He "rebuked" it or told it off sharply: 'Shut up and come out of him!' As we see, when a person is possessed, the demon (or sometimes several demons) live inside him or her. Hence, "Come out". This can occur swiftly and 'cleanly', but may alternatively cause shaking or thrashing of limbs, perhaps followed by other manifestations of physical trauma. This is what happened in this case – the demon had "torn him", sparassō... as he came out, the demon caused the man to convulse. From a root meaning to draw a sword, it suggests the demon left violently, but could only be threatening, because God was present and was greater.

Would the man have been immoral or would he have lived an unclean life without the demon? Possibly not. It begs the question in our modern day... are all who live immorally also possessed of demons? I have no doubt whatever that those who boast of their immorality (such as serial fornicators, frank homosexuals, etc.) and cause others to do the same, are possessed. People who 'sleep together' are just plain sinful. But, those who make a public boast about it, or who think only of sex, use sexual terms all the time, and generally live wickedly, are probably possessed. A key mark is that they hate God and Christians.

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Those who are not possessed are definitely *influenced* or oppressed by demons – we see this every day in every place, as more and more are sexualised, often from a very early age. When one sees what happens in foreign places such as Ibiza, there is no question about it... we are seeing demons in action amongst many people at the same time; everything they say and do and think is demonic.

When Jesus cast the demon out of the man, everyone in the synagogue was astonished. They talked amongst themselves, asking who this man was, and was he teaching a new doctrine? Jesus was simply like no-one else they knew, and He acted with authority, so that even the demons obeyed (as they must). The Jewish religion had its own 'official' exorcists (as do Roman Catholics), but they were merely legalistic; they knew nothing of genuine spiritual activity. Jesus, on the other hand, just commanded the demon to leave and it did! Every Christian can do the same thing, because Christ is their Lord and they act on His behalf.

As soon as the people left the synagogue, they chatted openly and Jesus' fame spread like wildfire to all of Galilee. Today, what spreads like wildfire is organised marketing campaigns pretending to be Christian events! The events have no link whatever to Christ, and what is seen is demonic or just charlatanism.

Verses 29-34

1.

And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

2.

But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.

3.

And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

4.

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And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

5.

And all the city was gathered together at the door.

6.

And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Jesus and the four disciples immediately went to Simon Peter's home, where his mother-in-law lay in bed ill with a fever. The Greek word, *pyressō* (from *pyra*, meaning a fire), indicates she had a high temperature. They immediately (anon) told Jesus about her condition. Jesus went to her and held her hand, and helped her out of bed. Straight away, she was healed of her fever and was able to 'minister' to them – make them a meal.

Note that Jesus did nothing except touch her hand. Yet, she was healed. At other times He spoke, or did something extra. But, in this case He simply touched her hand. With God, there is no need to do anything, because whatever He thinks is made actual. In modern times, though some claim there are no miracles or gifts, the same thing happens. If God is to use someone, He does so without 'props', incantations, or even prayers. This is because everything comes from God, and nothing else but His power is needed. Thus, the Christian need only ask God, and it is done. Every time? No – only when whatever is done is firstly prompted by the Holy Spirit. We have looked at this matter of prompting before... it is ad hoc, not a permanent gift. Only the genuine, faithful Christian will be used in this manner.

Later, in the night, people from the surrounding area and Capernaum brought the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. Note that 'possessed' has its own word in Greek – *daimonizomai*. Automatically, it has a secondary meaning of an inferior god (demon) or *daimōn*. For reasons that cannot be fathomed, some parents name their sons Daimon! Those who are possessed can live what appear to be normal lives – they do not always look and act in a bizarre way until the right 'button' is pressed. On the other hand, possession should always be suspected where the wickedness is paramount, obvious and continuing.

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Look around at what happens in society today, especially in newspapers, videos, music, films, TV, etc., and you will see clear evidence of demonic activity. Certain illnesses can also be attributed to demons, when there are very stubborn refusals to acknowledge God, or activities that degrade the name of God. They live without God, not realizing their souls are in eternal danger. But, worse than that, they do not care at all and live as if they will go on forever in this life, all their ambitions being earthly and without God. To live without God is just another step towards hell.

Jesus healed a large number of people, who had a wide range of illnesses and conditions, and He cast out many devils. When He cast them out, He commanded them to say nothing to Him – they knew He was God, and they had to obey. Christians should remember that demons *must* leave in Jesus' Name. Christians should never allow demonic activity into their homes or lives... it is enough that we have to mix with the unsaved. But we should never, ever, mix with those whose lives are abominable and sinful. This applies today more than at any other time.

Verses 35-39

1.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

2.

And Simon and they that were with him followed after him.

3.

And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee.

4.

And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

5.

And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

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Next day, well before dawn, probably after having no sleep, Jesus got up and went to a lonely place in which to pray. In the middle of busy lives, and families, it can often be hard to pray sensibly. Sometimes we really need to be alone with God. For Jesus, it was vital, for His task was from God the Father, affecting all of humanity.

Later, Simon Peter and the three other disciples went to find Him. They told Him that everyone was looking for Him, because His fame had by now spread even more. Jesus, though, wanted to go to other towns, so that he could preach the Gospel to others who had not yet heard Him. He knew His time was very short – less than three years. He told them that this is why He came.

So, Jesus kept on travelling around Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons. There is no real difference today; in His day, Jesus came across many demon possessions. How many modern Christians can recognise a possessed person? How many really care enough? How many know what to do? All around us we see the effects of demonization, in political parties and the laws they make; in immense violence; in people's private lives; in the total sexualization of the nations; in the way even Christians are spiritual beings of such low activity and belief, they cannot be separated from everyone else around them. And more.

It is also impossible for a genuine Christian preacher to get this message across to the churches. When I preached what others wanted to hear, and what my peers preached, everything was fine. I was invited to speak everywhere. Then, one day, I realised my error and spoke the absolute truth, pulling no punches. From that day, my preaching in the churches ended! They did not want to hear and were even offended that I should mention sin and poor behaviour in our churches. The only way, today, is in print. This is a very sad reflection on the state of our churches. Will YOU listen to truth, even if it hurts?

Verses 40-45

1.

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

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2.

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

3.

And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

4.

And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;

5.

And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

6.

But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

At some time during His journeys, a leper came to see Jesus. Normally, lepers were cast out of society and lived in their own small colonies, waiting to die. The leper was desperate and begged Jesus to heal him... if Jesus wanted to. We are told that "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him". Not only did Jesus not shrink away, but He also touched him! This was unheard of.

Many Christians do good works, but few have compassion. Compassion is to be moved inwardly, so much that one has to help another, whether through pity or love. Jesus had both. The leper came to him knowing he could be stoned back to his colony, but knew that Jesus could heal him if He wished to. Jesus chose to heal.

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As soon as Jesus spoke to the man, saying “Be thou clean”, the leprosy disappeared and his skin became pure again. This is one sign of real healing – it is immediate and it is total. There are so many false prophets and false healers around us! Psychological treatments are only palliatives, for someone who is unsaved will never be rid of the anxieties and emotional problems they accrue – they do not have Christ and have no reason to be ‘cured’. All they do is move their symptoms onto something else... I have seen it happen so many times. It is rather like moving the furniture around on the Titanic whilst it is sinking! It is a useless task. Why help to give temporary relief to the unsaved, when they are bound for hell? Far better to preach the Gospel to them!

There was a time when I gave pastoral help to anyone who asked, but then God stopped me. I had to cease using psychotherapeutic techniques and counselling (see articles) because, frankly, they were not what I should have been doing. Yes, they worked, but only temporarily, and it did not make any difference to their unsaved state! So, I was only putting a band-aid on a soul before it entered hell!

Jesus told the man to go away but not to mention his healing to anyone. Rather, he had to just show himself to the priest, and make an offering for cleansing, as commanded by Moses, to prove he was healed. Only after the priest confirmed his healing could the man return to his family and society. But – and who amongst us would act differently – he went everywhere telling everyone of Jesus’ healing! As a result, Jesus could not go back into the city, because of the thronging crowds. Instead, He had to go into the desert, but, even there, crowds followed!

This reminds me of the pathos of Poppy Day in the UK. How many people would give to the forces’ charity without first being given a poppy to stick in their jacket? The poppy is only a bit of paper – but people want something in return! It is very sad. Jesus did what He did out of compassion. Christians should do the same. But do we?

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