

FOLLOW ME

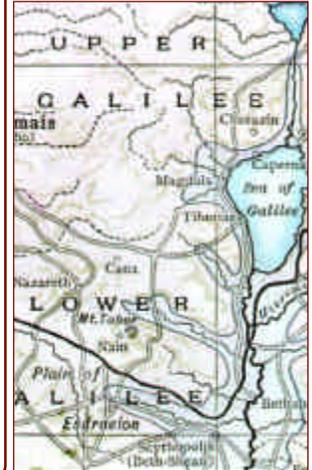
LESSON TWO: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 1:1-20



FAST FACTS

- The Gospel begins with the statement, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
- St. Mark tells us that prophecies in Isaiah and Malachi refer to St. John the Baptist (although St. Mark only mentions Isaiah).
- There are many reasons why Jesus was baptized, including renewing creation, fulfilling the Law, revealing Himself as God and Savior, and offering grace.
- Jesus experienced forty days of temptation by Satan; this is described in greater detail in Matthew and Luke.
- St. Mark describes the disciples as immediately leaving everything to follow Jesus.

MAP



MARK 1:1-8

St. Mark begins his Gospel with a statement that announces the message of the entire book: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). The words in this sentence are particularly important: “gospel,” from the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “good news;” “Jesus,” which is based on the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, meaning “Jehovah is salvation;” and “Christ,” from the Greek word *christos*, referring to the Jewish belief in an anointed Messiah Who would come to save God’s people. St. Mark tells us that his entire book is the Good News that Jesus is the Savior and God.

The prophets Malachi (Malachi 3:1) and Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3) prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth that a messenger would bring the Good News of the coming Savior. This messenger (or, as he’s also called in Orthodox Christianity, “Forerunner”) of the savior is St. John the Baptist — Jesus’ cousin (Luke 1:36) — who began preaching in 26-27 AD (see Luke 3:1-3). The *Orthodox Study Bible* lists the four things about which John preached: repenting of one’s sins, being baptized, living a righteous life, and engaging in spiritual disciplines (like his life of prayer and fasting).

TIME TRAVEL

St. John the Baptist’s role in Mark 1:2 describes what the messengers for ancient kings did: they announced the king’s coming, and they physically “prepared the way” by making sure that the roads were ready for the king to travel. St. John filled this role by teaching the people to prepare their hearts for Jesus through repentance.



OUR FAITH TEACHES...

Orthodox Christians engage in prayer and fasting to deepen our relationship with God - this includes gaining control over what we call *passions*. St. Maximos the Confessor defines passion as “an impulse of the soul contrary to nature, as in the case of mindless love or mindless hatred for someone or for some sensible thing.” The passions are the lusts and emotions that turn our attention away from God and onto ourselves. Christ listed some of the

passions: “From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:22). St. Peter of Damascus created a list of 298 passions, summarizing them as “a falling away from God in all things, utter destruction.” Archbishop Paul of Finland notes that passions arise from three sources: *First of all they are aroused by the outer world with its human relationships. A second source of passions is man’s own corrupted nature...It creates the lusts of the flesh, gluttony, drinking, laziness, etc. The third producer of passions is the soul’s enemy, the tempter, the ‘spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12). That is where unbelief, despondency, pride, and especially blasphemy, come from.*

MARK 1:9-15

If St. John baptized for the forgiveness of sins, then why did Jesus undergo baptism? Because He is perfect, He didn't need to repent of His sins, or be forgiven. The Church Fathers give a number of reasons for Jesus' baptism. Such saints as Gregory the Theologian and Ephrem the Syrian tell us that Jesus was baptized to sanctify water: Christ renews creation (this is the reason for the Great Blessing of Water at Theophany/Epiphany). Blessed Theophylact tells us that Jesus was baptized to fulfill all the commandments of the Mosaic Law, as well as to be revealed as the Savior. St. Cyril of Jerusalem gives another reason:



He was baptized that He might give to them that are baptized a divine and excellent grace. For 'since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same' (Hebrews 2:14), that having been made partakers of His presence in the flesh, we might be made partakers also of His Divine grace: thus Jesus was baptized, that thereby we again by our participation might receive both salvation and honor.

The icon of Jesus' baptism vividly shows what St. Mark describes in verses 10-11. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove (doves symbolize purity, peace, and wisdom). The Father's voice from heaven tells everyone at the baptism — and us as well — that Jesus is God the Son, and God the Father ordains His mission.

St. Mark tells us far less about Satan's temptation of Jesus than do Ss. Matthew and Luke (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). We nonetheless learn several important things. First, we learn that for almost six weeks Jesus underwent severe temptations from Satan and his demons (the Greek word for "beasts" in verse thirteen usually refers in the New Testament to demons). Second, we learn that Jesus, Who came into this world to renew creation and break the power of Satan, first defeated Satan in His own life before He began this ministry. Third, the fact that the angels ministered to Jesus shows us that God will never desert us in difficult times.

MARK 1:16-20

We should notice two things in these verses. First, Jesus did not call great or powerful people to be His disciples: He called mere fishermen, some of the "simple" people of first-century Palestine. We can learn from this that, even if we are successful or popular, the only thing that really matters is our relationship with God, because some of the greatest Christians in the history of the Church were not successful by worldly standards. We also learn that nothing is more important than following Jesus: the disciples *immediately* left everything — their jobs, their homes, *everything* — to follow Him.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Everyone must deal with temptations — St. Gregory Palamas says that overcoming temptations is what perfects us. To overcome temptations, we need to understand *how* we give in to them. St. Gregory the Great explains, "Temptation is brought to fulfillment by three stages: suggestion, delight, consent." This means that first a temptation is *suggested* to us: someone presents us with a temptation, or a tempting thought comes to our mind. We then think about the temptation until we believe that we must give in to the temptation: we believe that giving in to the temptation will *delight* us and make us happy. Finally, we *consent* to the temptation and give in to it.

It is good for us to remember that Jesus overcame temptation in His life. He proves that it is possible to deal with temptation without sinning, and because He has experienced temptation, we know that He will give us exactly what we need to overcome temptation.

St. Moses the Ethiopian tells us how we should deal with the temptations we face: "(A person who is tempted) should weep and implore the goodness of God to come to his aid, and he will obtain peace if he prays with discernment. For it is written, 'With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me' (Psalm 118:6)?"



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- What does verse one tell me about Jesus? Why is this important to remember as I read the Bible?
- How can verses 12-13 encourage me when I am struggling with temptations in my own life?
- Should I respond to Jesus like the disciples did? Do I love God more than everything else, or do I love other things in my life more?

