

THE PROPHECY CONCERNING THE COMING KING (Mk. 1:1-8)

The beginning of our study is focussed on the Gospel, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. When the New Testament writers speak about the Gospel they are not referring to a book written by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Instead, the Gospel always refers to the message of salvation (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ‘good news’ ... the word from which we get ‘evangelism’). The Gospel is ‘good news’. It was an old word familiar to both Jews and Gentiles ... and it is important to remember that Mark is writing this account of Jesus’ ministry from Rome to the Roman Christians, to the Jews who had converted to Christianity, and to Gentiles who were not yet Christians.

As far as the Jews living in Rome were concerned, they would have been familiar with this word “Gospel” from the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the *Septuagint*. This was a version translated by the Jews of the Diaspora who were living in Alexandria in the 2nd century BC.

An example of the word for “gospel” in the Old Testament, - and how it was translated into the Greek, in the *Septuagint*, - is found in the prophecy of Isaiah where there are a number of prophecies relating to the not-too-distant future from the days in which Isaiah lived ... and then there are also prophecies relating further ahead to the promised Messiah. In Is. 40 we read, v.1 *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.* ² *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.* This was a reference to how the Jews would be sent into captivity and also how they would be returned to Jerusalem after the seventy years of exile in Babylon ... It then also looked forward to the future coming of the Messiah, v.9 *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, (the Gospel, ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος), get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος), lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! ... That is the central message of the Gospel, - the Good News ... Behold your God! ... It was the same message of good news John the Baptist preached on the banks of the River Jordan, Behold the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29,36). ... Behold, God!*

And that is how the Gospel is used, - it refers to the good news of the arrival of *God*, and, - as you read through, for example, the prophecy of Isaiah, you will meet with the blessed hope of His enthronement among His people, and how He will establish and rule His Kingdom with power and might. ... *That is the ‘good news’ to these Jewish people who were facing the hardship in captivity in a foreign land. ... The same message is found in Is. 52:7, How beautiful upon the*

mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος), that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος) of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! ...

That was the way the Jews would have understood *the Gospel*, - the ‘good news’ ... and they also saw it as having its future fulfilment in the promise of the Messiah, for example, Is. 52:13 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high ... 9:6 the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of [*his*] government and peace [*there shall be*] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. ... This Old Testament understanding of the future promise of the reign of the Messiah was behind the question the disciples asked Jesus on the Mount of Olives, Acts 1:6 Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ... They expected Him to establish His Kingdom in Israel, and for Him to rule from Jerusalem ... *and notice, Jesus did not correct them!* That’s because they had got it right that He *would* reign from Jerusalem ... but they had got their timing wrong!

From the perspective of the Gentile Christians who were saved out of paganism, they would have been familiar with the concept of another ‘gospel’ relating to a pagan ‘messiah’. It was not unknown for Roman dignitaries to be described in this way. For example, in the ancient *Priene Inscription* (c. 9 BC), there is a reference to Caesar Augustus as the ‘messiah’, “The providence which has ordered the whole of our life, showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving to it [*Caesar*]Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, and by sending in him, as it were, a deliverer for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere . . . ; the birthday of the god [*Augustus*] was the beginning for the world of the *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον) that has come to men through him.” As far as the pagans were concerned, Caesar Augustus was a ‘messiah’ who would convert the world.

So, both Jews and Gentiles would have associated the ‘Gospel’ with the arrival of a new king, - a messiah-like figure, - to establish order, peace, salvation and blessing. ... The Christians who had been saved out of paganism would have understood this term in relation to Christ. So, the Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) is the good news announcing the arrival of the King and the new Kingdom He would establish, - that’s how Mark’s readers would have perceived this term ... and it would have been the common understanding to both Jew and Gentile.

And so, Mark is beginning his account of the Lord Jesus by announcing the good news. Christ is the theme of the Gospel, The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

THE PROMISE OF THE NEW KING

The name Jesus, of course, means “Jehovah is salvation”, and it comes from the Hebrew Joshua (Yeshua), Mt. 1:21 thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. His name is Jesus, and His title is Christ, which means the Messiah. Peter, who we believe passed on to Mark the stories of Jesus, said to the Saviour on one occasion, Mk. 8:29 Thou art the Christ. It is a royal title, and it means the ‘anointed one’. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [*they be*] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:15,16). He is not an earthly ruler, but He is the Son of God. He is one in nature with God. He is co-eternal and co-equal and co-existent with God, Jn. 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² The same was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. He prayed to His Father, Jn. 17:5 glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. ... Yes, even before the world was for in the beginning *God* (Gen. 1:1). ... Nathaniel illustrates how Christ was perceived, Jn. 1:49 thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. This is the beginning of the King’s ascent to the throne. ... And that is why there was the perception among the crowds as they met Him on His triumphal entrance into the city of Jerusalem, on His way to the cross.

In the second and third verses of the Gospel Mark quotes from Old Testament prophets, - they both refer to the same person, v.2 Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ... and ... ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

The first quote is taken from Mal. 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. The second quote is from Is. 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [*it*] together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [*it*].

Incidentally, Mark does not mention the virgin birth and Bethlehem, and some of the earlier accounts in Jesus' life that Matthew and Luke refer to because he is writing to a largely Gentile readership and it is sufficient to set out that Jesus is the Son of God. However, he uses the form that would have been the custom in those days. Prior to the coming of the Messiah, a herald would announce His arrival. We see something similar to this in the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins, *Mt. 25:6 at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh*. No king arrived without a herald. He always had someone who went before him and announced he was coming ... and Mark prophesies concerning the forerunner of the Messiah.

This, of course, is John the Baptist and the prophecy is literally fulfilled as it takes place in the wilderness. Why in the wilderness? Why not in Jerusalem? ... This was done in the wilderness because, - as it were, Israel had to return into the wilderness for it was from out of Egypt God called the Hebrews into the wilderness where He established the nation. There, He gave it the laws and ceremonies and the promises ... and the people, - in John the Baptist's days, - were being called again to exercise separation in preparation for a new covenant with God.

Yes, God's plan instituted John the Baptist to carry out his responsibilities in the wilderness ... and that was what he did, literally. This was God's plan from ancient times ... culminating in the arrival of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was sent so that the people would prepare for His coming and His arrival that would ultimately, - in the future, - reach its completion when He would establish His Kingdom with salvation, blessing and peace ... **The Promise of the New King.**

THE PERSON OF THE NEW KING

In the passage Mark quotes from in Malachi chapter three, it says, *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me*. Now, the announcement from the herald was, "The King is Coming" ... but notice how Malachi words it, *he shall prepare the way before me*. That is what lies behind Mark's announcement in 1:2 ... Now remember, Mark is writing in the Greek Septuagint, from the Hebrew Scriptures ... And in Malachi the *before me* is in reference to God, and the verse is saying, "I will send my messenger before Me". In other words, when the Holy Spirit directs Mark's hand to write these words (*Behold, I send my messenger before thy face*), this verse quoted from Mal. 3:1 is saying that *he*, - the messenger (John the Baptist), - shall prepare the way for the One Who is coming ... and the One Who is coming is God for, as Malachi wrote, *he shall prepare the way before me!* ...

This was how John the apostle understood it also, Jn. 1:14 we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. John the Baptist was announcing the coming of the Son of God, God Himself! ... he shall prepare the way *before me*.

And here is something else that was fulfilled literally because the first public activity the Lord Jesus engaged in was to go to the temple ... and Malachi had already prophesied, Mal. 3:1 and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall *suddenly* come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. ... And this was fulfilled in Jn. 2:13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: ¹⁵ And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; ¹⁶ And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. ... They were not expecting Him, - He came *suddenly* to His temple (Mal. 3:1), my Father's house!

And in the second of the prophecies Mark refers to in Is. 40:3, it says so clearly, The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD. That is John, - him that crieth in the wilderness, - ... and it is emphasised in Mk. 1:8, where he, - the messenger of God, - said, I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Only God can baptize you with the Holy Ghost, v.10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: ¹¹ And there came a voice from heaven, [*saying*], Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

This is the Good News, ὁ εὐαγγέλιον! The Son of God, - *God*, - has come to the people of Israel, - to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac, - to bring salvation, for He has come to give His life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). That is His purpose! That is why He came! Jn. 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

The Promise of the New King, The Person of the New King ...

THE PROPHET OF THE NEW KING

This is John the Baptist, and it is another fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In the New Testament you have the Baptist, and the Brethren, and you even have the General Assembly (Heb. 12:23) ☺ ... but what the term John the Baptist actually means is that “the Baptist” merely identified him from all the other ‘John’s’ ... and, in fact, grammatically he was known as John *the baptizer* (Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων, i.e. the verb participle present active nominative masculine singular from βαπτίζω).

This was a common way of setting people apart. For example, there were many women called ‘Mary’, and that is why they have to be given a description ... Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the mother of John Mark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Cleopas. ... And so John was known as ‘John the baptizer’ ... and, by the way, baptisms weren’t a common feature. Yes, of course, the Jews had ceremonial cleansings ... but they didn’t have baptisms. Baptisms were for proselytes, - Gentiles who came into the Jewish religion, - ... but it wasn’t for Jews, and that was what made John’s baptizing, - and his message, - strange and even abhorrent to the Jewish authorities.

He is seen as a ‘weird’ character. He seemed to live the most of his life in the wilderness, the desert, where he carried out his ministry along the River Jordan. Matthew and Luke write about his parents and his miraculous conception, - his parents were elderly and his mother was barren. Luke tells about how he was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb (Lk. 1:41), and how he was a relative of Jesus. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said about him, Mt. 11:11 *among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.* ... But Mark doesn’t mention any of that ... He simply described him, Mk. 1:6 *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.* ... He was dressed the way that suited wilderness life. He had all he needed, and he was content knowing he was out ‘in the wilds’ to do what the Lord had for him to do.

And he was a prophet like Elijah, - II Kings 1:8 *he was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins* ... and Malachi prophesied, *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (4:5).* ... The forerunner of the Messiah was in the spirit and power of Elijah. However, there is something we must consider in relation to Mal. 4:5 ... Jesus said in Mt. 11:14, *And if ye will receive it [i.e. Me and My Gospel], this is [Elijah], which was for to come.* However, they didn’t receive John the Baptist for they killed him ... and also ... *even when John the Baptist was asked, Jn. 1:21 Art thou Elijah? He clearly replied, I am not.* ... So, Mal. 4:5 is yet to be completely fulfilled ... prior to Christ’s return, on the *great and dreadful day of the Lord* which is yet in the future.

John’s diet was locusts, in accordance with Lev. 11:22, *Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind.* If you want to know ☺ ... you remove the wings and the legs and then you roast the body, boil it, dry it, grind it up and bake it in your bread with salt and it provided protein. And honey, wild honey, was everywhere and it was sweet ...!

The Promise of the New King, The Person of the New King, The Prophet of the New King ...

THE PREPARATION FOR THE NEW KING

Mark tells us that day after day, v.4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He was preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. ... The people needed to have their sins forgiven, - they needed to repent before God in order that He would show mercy towards them. The baptism didn't wash away their sins, but it demonstrated their humble willingness to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by having their iniquities dealt with, Lk. 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.

In their fulfilling of this requirement, they were to view themselves as no better than a Gentile ... and to repent of their sins. Indeed, John didn't 'mince his words' as he preached God's judgment to them, Lk. 3:7 O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ... 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. ... And they listened, and the result was ... 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* (Mk. 1:5).

They believed the Messiah was coming and they wanted to be ready for when He ascended to the throne and established His Kingdom. ... Judgment was coming, but while God is the God of judgment He is also the God of grace and He offered forgiveness of sins to those who repented ... and so they were baptised in **preparation for the new King.**

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE NEW KING

John the Baptist made it so abundantly clear, Mk. 1:7 There cometh one [*literally, the One*] mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸ I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Literally, John was saying, after me there is coming *the One* Who is mightier than I, - that is King Jesus! I'm not even fit, - worthy, - to 'tie his laces'. Even, said John, the way I baptize you is only with water ... When He comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (v.8). ... And when the disciples of John met with Paul in Asia Minor, that was what happened, Acts 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. ³ And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. ⁴ Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is,

on Christ Jesus. ⁵ When they heard [*this*], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid [*his*] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

This isn't some so-called 'second work of grace', or some variant of the Pentecostal experience, this is the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit that Paul writes about in Titus 3:5. ... This is the new covenant, cleansing, regeneration, the new birth ... and John said he was incapable of doing that ... so He pointed the people to the Messiah Who could!

CONCLUSION

So, at the commencement of the Gospel Mark presents the "Good News" of the coming King and His Kingdom. It is for those who turn to Him and repent. It is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. It speaks of the redemption for God's people and of the future glory that awaits all those whose faith and trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ. ... John the Baptist was simply the messenger who was sent to announce the Messiah's arrival ... In his day and also in our own, God's plans to achieve His objective are well underway, *according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself* (Eph. 1:9). Keep on trusting in Him ... keep on believing in Him ... and keep on looking for Him for it is through Him alone that our redemption draweth nigh (Lk. 21:28). Amen.