

# **The Unique Status of Jesus as the Divine Messiah:**

## **An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Mark 1:1, 9-13**

by

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### **Abstract**

*The intent of this essay is to analyze Mark 1:1, 9-13 in order to elucidate the unique status of Jesus as the divine Messiah. An exegetical and theological examination of these verses indicates that with the advent of the Redeemer, God has initiated a new spiritual beginning for humanity. As the Son of God, Jesus enjoys a special and intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus is also fully and absolutely equal to the Father and the Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus, as the ideal Israelite and representative of the human race, completely devoted Himself to do the Father's will, despite the fact that it would eventually cost the Messiah His own life. Even repeated attacks from Satan and the humiliation of the divine Saviour on the cross did not deter Him from fulfilling His preordained mission. In every episode, the Son, who enjoyed the Father's approval and the Spirit's abiding presence, proved Himself to be "God's Chosen One" (John 1:33).<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *Today's New International Version* (hereafter abbreviated, TNIV).

## **1. The Beginning of the Good News (Mark 1:1)**

The motivation for this essay stems from the chorus of protest among those within academia who reject the teaching of Scripture that Jesus alone is the true Redeemer and the only way to God. For instance, Killinger (2002:39, 52-53) dismisses John 14:6—in which Jesus declares Himself to be “the way and the truth and the life”—by maintaining that the fourth Gospel, along with the other Gospel accounts, is historically “semi-fictional”, “contrived”, and “unreliable”. Likewise, Killinger brushes aside Acts 4:12—wherein Peter announces that “salvation is found in no one else” but Jesus—by asserting that the entire book sets forth a “dubious ‘history’ of the early church”. Killinger represents a “cafeteria-style” approach to Christianity in which people choose those aspects of the religion they like and disregard those they find objectionable. In light of this situation, Jude 3 is correct in urging believers to “contend for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us”.

With that exhortation in mind, this journal article affirms the unique status of Jesus as the divine Messiah, a truth likewise emphasized in Mark 1:1. The verse opens the second Synoptic Gospel with the statement, “the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God”. Then, verses 4 through 8 narrate the efforts of John the Baptizer to prepare the way for the Messiah’s arrival. This material is followed by an account of Jesus’ baptism and testing, events that are recorded in verses 9 through 13. The other three Gospels make some reference to John’s baptism of Jesus (cf. Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:31-34), while only the other two Synoptic Gospels devote considerably more space to Jesus’ encounter with Satan (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Pertinent information found in these other portions of Scripture are taken into account as this essay unfolds, especially as it sheds light on Jesus’ unique status as the divine Messiah.

According to Danker (2000:137), the Greek term *arche*, which is translated “beginning”, denotes “the commencement of something”, including (but not limited to) “an action, process, or state of being” (cf. Louw and Nida 1989:1:655). In the original, the word appears without the article. Also, as Wallace (1996:50) notes, the entire opening phrase is a nominative absolute participle. In all likelihood, then, the word and phrase were meant to function as a title (cf. Rogers and Rogers 1998:67; Zerwick and Grosvenor 1981:100),

whether for Mark's entire Gospel or the ministry of John the Baptizer (cf. Bock 2002:78; Cranfield 1959:34-35; Croy 2001:110-114; Marshall 2004:57; Perkins 1995:8:527). Another possibility is that, like John 1:1, Mark 1:1 uses *arche* as an allusion to Genesis 1:1 (Edwards 1978:84-85; Edwards 2002:23; cf. the Septuagint rendering of this verse). The idea would be that, with the advent of the Messiah, God has initiated a new spiritual beginning for humanity (Wessel 1984:8:618; cf. Liroy 2005b:66).

"Jesus" (Mark 1:1) is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "Yahweh saves" (Danker 2000:471; Louw and Nida 1989:1:824). As well, "Messiah" (from the Hebrew) and "Christ" (from the Greek) both mean "the Anointed One" (Danker 2000:1091; Louw and Nida 1989:1:543, 832). When taken together, they indicate that the Father chose, appointed, and empowered His Son to save people from their sins (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:30-33; cf. Grundmann 1974:9:528-529; Guthrie 1981:241-242; Rengstorf 1986:2:339-340). It is commonly understood that the genitive in the opening phrase of Mark 1:1 functions in an objective sense (cf. Rogers and Rogers 1998:67; Zerwick and Grosvenor 1981:100). However, as Wallace (1996:121) points out, this might be an example of a plenary genitive, in other words, that "Jesus the Messiah" (or "Jesus Christ") can be subjective and objective in the way in which it functions. Accordingly, the "good news" is both proclaimed by Jesus and about Him (cf. Bock 2002:79; Cranfield 1959:36; France 2002:53). The Greek noun *euangélion* is derived from the verb *euangelézo*, which means "to tell good news" or "to proclaim the gospel" (Liroy 2004:88). In turn, the noun refers to the message of salvation proclaimed first by Jesus and then by His disciples (Edwards 2002:25).

The concept of the "gospel" has Roman and Jewish roots. Among Romans, the word was used to describe good news about events in the emperor's life, such as his enthronement. These events were thought to affect the whole world. Thus, Mark's use of *euangélion* shows that Jesus' ministry marked the beginning of a new era for the world. Jewish roots of the term are found in the Old Testament prophecy books, especially Isaiah (e.g. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1). There the announcement of the future time of salvation is called "good tidings" and is set against a backdrop of joy. Consequently, a Jewish audience knew that the era Jesus ushered in was the prophesied time of salvation (Liroy 2004:89).

An examination of Mark 1:14-15 indicates that the “kingdom of God” is the principal focus of the gospel, especially that it has “come near” or is “at hand”. The Greek verb *engiken*, which is in the perfect tense, denotes a completed past action whose effect continues into the present. With respect to the Greek noun rendered “kingdom”, it is *basileía* and refers to “the royal reign of God”. In Jesus’ day, the concept of the kingdom was rooted in the Old Testament (Lioy 2003:87). For instance, God’s rule was eternal (Ps 145:13) and universal (103:19), but it was only partially recognized on earth. In fact, all nations would not serve the Lord until the last days (Zech 14:9). Jewish people prayed daily for the coming of God’s reign. Also, when they prayed for His kingdom, they did not doubt that God presently reigned over His creation; yet they longed for the day when God would rule unchallenged and all people would acknowledge Him.

Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom show it was both present with Him on earth (Matt 4:17) and also something that would be completely fulfilled at the end of the ages (13:24-30; 16:28). Jesus revealed that entrance into His kingdom is something that God gives to those who believe (25:34), but (paradoxically) it can cost a person everything he or she has (19:16-24). Other portions of the New Testament describe God’s kingdom as being heavenly (2 Tim 4:18) and unshakable (Heb 12:28). It is also inseparably linked to righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom 14:17). Moreover, the divine kingdom is associated with suffering and patient endurance (Rev 1:9), supernatural power (1 Cor 4:20), promise (Jas 2:5), glory (1 Thess 2:12), and “the renewal of all things” (Matt 19:28).

God’s kingdom is not the product of human striving or invention (John 18:36). It is given as a gift (Luke 12:32) and humbly received (Mark 10:15). The Lord brings His people into His kingdom (Col 1:13), makes them worthy of it (2 Thess 1:5), and preserves them for it (2 Tim 4:18). Perhaps more than anything else in the Saviour’s mind, the divine kingdom was a dynamic, eschatological concept. The Lord declared what the kingdom would be like and that He also sovereignly established it. The justice and righteousness of His kingdom is evident by His concern for the weak and oppressed (Matt 5:3). He reached out to the poor, hungry, and distressed with His unfailing, covenantal love.

Mark's Gospel conveys an air of anticipation as the sovereign Creator inaugurated a new phase in His plan of redemption, and the arrival of the Messiah made this possible. He is none other than the "Son of God" (1:1), a title that scholars recognize as having immense christological importance (Bauer 1992:769; Garlington 1994:287). Admittedly, while some Greek manuscripts omit *huiou theou* (literally, "son of god"), the majority contain the phrase. This lends strong support for its authenticity and rightful inclusion in the opening verse to Mark's account (Cranfield 1959:38; Edwards 1978:86; France 2002:49; Lane 1974:41; Wessel 1984:8:619). In fact, an emphasis on Jesus as the unique Son of God is consistently found throughout the second Synoptic Gospel (Marshall 2004:57-58; Thielman 2005:62-53; cf. 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:1-11, 35-37; 13:32; 14:36; 15:39).

As I have noted elsewhere (Lioy 2003:115-116), "Son of God" is a messianic title that the New Testament writers applied to the Lord Jesus (e.g. Rom 1:4; Rev 2:18). The phrase emphasizes the "special and intimate relationship that exists between the first and second persons of the Trinity" (cf. Matt 16:16; Luke 1:35). Jesus, as the divine Son, reveals the Father to humankind by "carrying out perfectly God's purposes as Messiah, Servant, and eternal sovereign" (Brindle 1989:315). Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 quote Psalm 2:7 in connection with the Messiah being the Son of God. Most likely, the Israelites applied this verse to the descendants of David, whom they crowned king. However, Psalm 2:7 ultimately refers to the Saviour. This is made clear in Acts 13:33. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He conferred great dignity on Him by declaring Him to be His Son (something that had been true of Jesus for all eternity; Lioy 2007b:323-324; cf. Edwards 1978:106; Geldenhuys 1983:147; Wright 2002:51).

Jesus' divinity is a second emphasis implicit in the phrase "Son of God". It "indicates that the Son is to be identified with the Father and considered fully and absolutely equal to Him" (Lioy 2003:116; cf. John 5:18; 10:30, 36). In a previous study (Lioy 2005:82), I noted that the appearance of *monogenes* (literally, "only begotten") draws attention to Jesus' "unique, special, [and] one-of-a-kind" relationship with the Father; in other words, the Lord Jesus is the "one and only Son of the Father" (cf. John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). As such, Jesus is the extraordinary object of the Father's love, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit, and the "enfleshment of the divine". This is not a peripheral

doctrine, for as O'Collins (2002:3; italics in the original) notes, the divinity of the Son “stands or falls with accepting his *personal* pre-existence within the eternal life of the Trinity”.

## **2. The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11)**

The unique status of Jesus as the divine Messiah is again emphasized at His baptism. “At that time” (Mark 1:9) serves as a chronological marker for the start of Jesus’ public ministry, which by some estimates was around A.D. 27 or 28 (Culpepper 1995:9:93; Wessel 1984:8:621). Jesus traveled south from His hometown of Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan River. Undoubtedly, this was the highpoint of John’s ministry, especially in light of the fact that God had called John to prepare his fellow Jews for the advent of the Messiah.

It is not possible to determine with certainty when the practice of baptism began. Baptizing Gentile converts to Judaism (called “proselytes”) occurred even before John’s time. Also, many Old Testament passages refer to ceremonial washings (Exod 29:4; Lev 14:8). Several prophets used the washing image to speak of inner cleansings (Isa. 1:16; Jer 4:14; Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:1). What makes John’s baptism unique was that he called candidates who desired to undergo the procedure to repent and be cleansed spiritually. Thus, his baptism was not just for the ceremonially unclean or for Gentiles; instead, his rite was for everyone—whether Jew or Gentile—who repented. John’s baptism was intended to prepare people for the coming of God’s anointed one (Lioy 2007a:169).

John proclaimed to the people that the Messiah was far greater than the Baptizer in power and authority. In fact, Jesus was so superior in rank that John felt he was unworthy to stoop down like a servant and untie Jesus’ sandals (Mark 1:7; cf. John 1:27; 3:27-30). John’s humble attitude explains why he did all he could to prevent Jesus from undergoing the rite of baptism (Matt 3:14). John only consented in doing so because Jesus explained that performing the ritual would “fulfill all righteousness” (vs. 15). Three reasons for this incident are worth mentioning (Lioy 1995:18; cf. Blomberg 1992:81; Bock 1994:337; Carson 1984:8:107-108; Geldenhuys 1983:146; Gibbs

2002:521-522, 526; Keener 1999:132; Nolland 2005:152-154). First, Jesus wished to identify with sinners. He especially wanted to associate with those who hungered for righteousness. Second, Jesus sought to intercede as an advocate on behalf sinners. Expressed differently, He was baptized as the representative of all people. In this way, He demonstrated that everyone needed to repent, for all people need cleansing from sin. Third, Jesus' baptism foreshadowed His own death, burial, and resurrection for sinners (Rom 6:3-4).

The Greek of Mark 1:10, which the TNIV renders as “just as”, is more literally translated “and immediately”. This phrase helps to emphasize the continuity between the ministries of John and Jesus (Rogers and Rogers 1998:68; cf. Sefa-Dapaah 1995:219, 247-248). While the Son was emerging from the waters of the Jordan, He saw the heavens being “torn apart”. Contemporary Jewish writings subdivided the heavens into three or more layers (cf. 2 Cor 12:2). If it is assumed that the first heaven is the sky and the second heaven the more distant stars and planets, the third heaven refers to the place where God dwells. Paradise is the abode of blessedness for the righteous dead. For believers, it also signifies dwelling in fellowship with the exalted Redeemer in unending glory (Lioy 2005a:370).

The cosmic event recorded in Mark 1:10 signified that the Father was revealing Himself in a unique way to humanity through the Son, perhaps in fulfillment of Isaiah 64:1 (cf. Ezek 1:1). A parallel reference can be found in the *Testament of Levi* 18:6-7, which refers to “the heavens” being “opened”, along with the presence of “a fatherly voice”, “the glory of the Most High”, and “the spirit of understanding and sanctification” resting on an end-time regal and priestly figure (Charlesworth 1983:1:794-795). Also, the *Testament of Judah* 24:1-3 speaks of a royal, messianic figure called the “Star from Jacob” for whom “the heavens” are “opened” and on whom “the spirit” is poured out, the latter signifying a “blessing of the Holy Father” (Charlesworth 1983:1:801; cf. Edwards 1978:88-89; Edwards 2002:35; Lane 1974:55; Marshall 1978:155). Splitting open the heavens also drew attention to the Son's role as the only Mediator between God and humankind (Perkins 1995:8:535; cf. John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 1 Tim 2:5).

At the outset of Jesus' public ministry, His status as the anointed, divine Son was affirmed in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the

bodily form of a dove (Mark 1:10; cf. Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22; John 1:33). This fulfilled the “prophetic expectation of a messianic figure endowed with God’s Spirit” (France 2002:77; cf. Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). *Tractate Hagigah* 15a of the Babylonian Talmud refers to the dove as brooding or hovering “over her young without touching them”. Most likely, this is an allusion to Genesis 1:2, which says that at the dawn of creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the earth. Support for this view comes from *Tractate Hagigah* 2.6 of the Tosefta, which likens the Spirit of creation with the mother eagle described in Deuteronomy 32:11, who hovers over its young. Similarly, *Genesis Rabbah* 2:4, by making reference to Isaiah 11:2, connects the Spirit mentioned in Genesis 1:2 with the Messiah. Also, Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4Q521 (sometimes referred to as the “Messianic Apocalypse”) says that in the end times, the Lord’s Spirit will hover over the poor and renew the faithful with His power. When all these ancient Jewish writings are considered, it is possible that the presence of the Spirit in the form of a dove at the baptism of Jesus implies that He “brings a new creation” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 1998:217; cf. Bock 2002:86; Boring 1995:8:160; Cole 1983:58; Evans 2003:78; Lane 1974:56-57).

Keener (1999:132-133; 2003:460; cf. Marshall 1978:153) thinks a more likely background for Jesus’ anointing is the episode recorded in Genesis 8:8-12 (cf. 4 Baraita 7:8). In this case, the dove is not only a “harbinger of the new world after the flood”, but also a “prototype of the coming age” of grace (Keener 1999:133; cf. Matt 24:38; 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 3:6-7). Genesis 8:11 specifically notes that the dove Noah had sent out from the ark returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in its beak. Based on this image, the dove has “appropriately become a sign of peace” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 1998:216). It was also prized for its “softness, beauty of feathers and eyes, and affection for and faithfulness to its mate” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 1998:217; cf. Song of Songs 1:15; 2:14; 4:1; 5:2, 12; 6:9). In the Old Testament times, this bird was used in sacrificial rites (cf. Gen 15:9; Lev 1:14-17; 5:7; 14:21-22). In the New Testament period, doves were seen as harmless, innocent creatures (cf. Matt 10:16). All of these are appropriate symbols of the Holy Spirit (cf. Blomberg 1992:82; Edwards 1978:92-93; Geldenhuys 1983:146), whose visible anointing of Jesus certified that He was



the divinely-empowered Messiah (Bock 1994:335; Culpepper 1995:9:91; Ridderbos 1997:76).

The second affirmation of Jesus as the anointed, divine Son came when the Father audibly identified and endorsed Jesus. During the historical period between the Old and New Testaments, when divine revelation through the prophets had stopped, rabbinic sources maintained that the heavenly voice was one way, along with the exposition of Scripture, that God communicated with His people (Betz 1974:9:288; Culpepper 1995:9:91). In Hebrew, the sound from heaven was called the *bath qol*, which literally means “daughter of the voice”, that is, an “echo of a heavenly voice” (Cranfield 1959:54; cf. Liefeld 1984:8:860; Wessel 1984:8:622). Allegedly, the sound people heard was comparable to “whispering or chirping” (Helmbold 1976:1:492) and “unaccompanied by a visible divine manifestation” (Van Pelt 1979:1:438-439; cf. Dan 4:31; Acts 9:4; 10:13, 15; 22:7-9; 26:14). It is possible “the Jewish tradition of the heavenly voice” (Keener 1999:133) would have formed a familiar conceptual backdrop, at least to Jewish readers of the account of the episode recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (cf. Keener 2003:458). The idea, then, is that the *bath qol*, along with the testimony of John the Baptizer and the witness of Scripture, helped confirm the divine, messianic identity of Jesus (Keener 1999:134; Keener 2003:458). Another possibility is that the *bath qol* signaled the “dawning of the Messianic Age” (Carson 1984:8:109; cf. Boring 1995:8:160; Edwards 1978:97) and the resumption of “divine communication with Israel” (Blomberg 1992:82; cf. Bock 1994:337; Marshall 1978:152).

The voice from heaven literally declared, “You are my Son, the beloved [one]” (Mark 1:11), in which the Greek term *agapetos* denotes Jesus as being uniquely “loved and cherished” (Louw and Nida 1989:1:591) by the Father (cf. Danker 2000:7). The Father also announced that He was well pleased with, or took great delight in, His Son. These remarks directly allude to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, and possibly echo Genesis 22:2, 12, 16; Exodus 4:22-23; and Isaiah 41:8 (cf. Cureton 1993:74-82; Fossum 1992:134; France 2002:80; Keener 2003:464-465; Lane 1974:57). The Gospels record two other occasions in which the Father affirmed the Messiah’s unique, divine sonship, namely, at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt 17:6; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35) and on the

day when He entered triumphantly into Jerusalem (John 12:28; cf. Morris 1990:100). The imagery is possibly that of the Redeemer entering into “Messianic kingship analogous to that of the enthronement of the Israelite king” (Edwards 1978:99).

The reference to Isaiah 42:1 is particularly relevant, for it is part of a group of passages called the “Servant Songs” (Ladd 1993:164; Perkins 1995:8:535; cf. Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13—53:12). Some consider the Servant to represent Israel as a collective, namely, an ideal Israel that is fully submissive to the will of God. Others say the Servant represents a corporate personality of sorts, where an individual (like a king or father figure) represents Israel as a nation. Despite the possible attractiveness of these views, the one with the most merit is that the Servant represents a historical individual who acts as a representative of God’s people. This person is more than just an obedient follower of God. The Lord called and empowered Him to carry out a unique mission, one that fulfilled God’s eternal purposes in a significant way. Thus, the Servant of God is the Messiah. He would deliver the people of God—not only from their enemies but also from their sinful condition (Lioy 2007a:113).

In the previous section of this essay, it was noted that Jesus’ intimate relationship with the Father and co-equal status with Him as God are two emphases connected with the phrase “Son of God” (cf. Guthrie 1981:305-306). A third emphasis is Jesus’ unswerving obedience to His Father’s will, even to the point of being crucified (Bauer 1992:773; Keener 2003:458; cf. Mark 10:45). Indeed, the Gospels make a strong connection between the divine, royal status of Jesus as the eternal Son of God and His suffering, atoning sacrifice at Calvary, and resurrection from the dead (Edwards 1978:84; Edwards 2002:483; Michel 1986:3:641; Schweizer 1972:8:379).

For instance, during Jesus’ transfiguration, the Father referred to Him as “my Son, whom I love” (Mark 9:7). Just before that, Moses and Elijah spoke with the Messiah about “his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31; cf. Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4). The Greek is more literally translated “his exodus” and refers to Jesus’ eventual return in glory to heaven (cf. Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11; Phil 2:2:6-11). Then, immediately following the episode, as Jesus, Peter, James, and John made their way down from the

“high mountain” (Mark 9:2; cf. 2 Pet 1:17), the Saviour ordered the three not to say a word to anyone until He had been raised from the dead (Mark 9:9).

A similar emphasis is found in the testimony John gave concerning Jesus, perhaps not long after His baptism (John 1:29-34). John declared Jesus to be the eternally preexistent, divine Messiah (cf. Keener 2003:457). The Baptizer also referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. The Greek noun *amnós*, which is rendered “Lamb”, generally refers to a “sheep of one year old” (Danker 2000:54; cf. Louw and Nida 1989:1:41). In Apocalyptic literature (e.g. 1 Enoch 89:45; 90:6, 9-19, 37-38; Testament of Benjamin 3:8; Testament of Joseph 19:8-11), the lamb is depicted as a ruling figure who “conquers its foes and leads its flock” (Lioy 2003:119). There is a more direct conceptual allusion between John 1:29 and Isaiah 53:7. The latter verse says that the Suffering Servant was like a lamb led to a slaughtering block. The Son as the Passover lamb is a related notion emphasized in the New Testament. For instance, Paul referred to the Messiah as “our Passover lamb” (1 Cor 5:7). Peter equated the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19) to that of a “lamb without blemish or defect” (cf. Exod 12:5; Lev 22:17-25). The apostle also noted that believers have been healed by the Messiah’s “wounds” (1 Pet 2:24).

Unique to Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism (3:21-22) is the note that when He began His ministry, He was about 30 years old (vs. 23). What follows is an extensive genealogy that traces Jesus’ ancestry back from Joseph to Adam and ends with the phrase “son of God” (vs. 37; cf. Garlington 1994:288). The list of names indicates that the person whom John baptized in the waters of the Jordan River was none other than a descendant of Adam, the patriarchs, and David; the representative of all humanity; and the divine Messiah (Culpepper 1995:9:95). In the incarnate Son of God, the “entire hope” of the Old Testament is “inseparably and eternally bound”; likewise, the destiny of “all divinely created humans is bound together” (Bock 1994:360; cf. Bock 2002:88, 90; Geldenhuys 1983:152-153; Marshall 1978:161). When the first Adam transgressed the command of God, he was banished from the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3); but Adam’s more pernicious legacy was the introduction of sin and death to the human race (Rom 5:12) as well as the entire creation (8:20). It would take the advent of the second Adam, the true divine Son, to bring eternal life to redeemed humanity as well as future glory for them along

with all creation (Geldenhuys 1983:158; Jeremias 1964:1:141; Liefeld 1984:8:861; cf. Rom 5:13-20; 8:18-23).

### **3. The Temptation of Jesus (Mark 1:12-13)**

The temptation of Jesus draws further attention to His unique status as the divine Messiah. He was now anointed with God's Spirit, which signified the Son's inauguration into His public ministry (Acts 10:37-38; cf. Cureton 1993:85-86; Dockery 1992:57; Lyon 2001:136). When Mark 1:12 says that the Spirit "immediately . . . thrust [Jesus] into the wilderness" (personal translation), one is left with the impression that this event occurred by divine necessity (Garlington 1994:285; cf. similar wording in Deut 8:2) and in private (Bock 2002:89). "Wilderness" (Mark 1:12) renders the Greek term *éremos*, which denotes an "uninhabited region or locality" (Danker 2000:392), though not necessarily a parched or arid locale (such as a desert; cf. Allison 1992:565). The identity of the specific area near the Jordan River to which this verse refers remains unknown (France 2002:85).

At various times in Jesus' earthly life, He experienced events that paralleled important episodes in Israel's history. For instance, the nation, as God's "son" (Exod 4:23), was led by Moses into the desert (15:22). Then, for the next four decades (cf. Deut 1:3), the Lord tested His people as they wandered in the wilderness (Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2-5). Tragically, as Scripture reveals, that generation of Israelites failed the divine test, even though they enjoyed the provision of the Father (Deut 2:7; Neh 9:21; Ps 78:17-22) and the presence of the Spirit (cf. Neh 9:20; Isa 63:7-10). Their unbelief led them to transgress the Lord repeatedly (cf. Num 14:33; 32:13; Ps 95:10-11; Heb 3:7-19). In contrast, Jesus, as the ideal Israelite and representative of the human race, not only endured real testing, but also triumphed over it in the power of the Spirit (cf. Carson 1984:8:111; Cureton 1993:245; Liefeld 1984:8:862).

Mark 1:13 notes that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, a number to which some scholars assign sacred significance (cf. Liroy 2003:42). During this time, the Saviour ate nothing and by the end of it was famished (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2). Various Old Testament luminaries also had life-shaping experiences that lasted 40 days, including Moses (Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18),

David (1 Sam 17:16), and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). The temptation episode is a reminder that the Son, as the “pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2), inaugurated a new exodus (of sorts) for the people of God (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-5). Jesus, of course, is not simply a new Moses. More importantly, the Son, as the divine Messiah, utterly transcends Israel’s lawgiver as well as all other prominent individuals in the Old Testament (Lioy 2003:91; cf. Heb 3:1-7). Indeed, the Son alone is “God’s ultimate revelation” (Keener 1999:135; cf. Garlington 1994:306-308).

This truth is confirmed by Jesus’ encounter with Satan, who “tempted” (Mark 1:13) the Son throughout and (especially) toward the end of His sojourn in the wilderness (Bock 1994:370). *Peirázo* is the Greek verb behind this translation and means “to entice to improper behavior” (Danker 2000:793; cf. Louw and Nida 1989:1:775). Furthermore, the Greek noun *satán* literally means “adversary” and refers to a preeminent and powerful rogue angel who is also known as the devil. Sometime before God created human beings, Satan “rebelled against the Creator” (Unger 2001:1054) and became the arch-enemy of God and humanity (Gibson 1994:13-14). Scripture reveals that the devil is a murderer, liar, and the “father of lies” (John 8:44); the one who “leads the whole world astray” (Rev 12:9); and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2) at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God (cf. Boring 1995:8:162). The prince of demons wanted to draw away the Son from obeying the Father’s will; but despite the devil’s repeated efforts, he failed to entice Jesus to sin. As a result of this encounter, the Messiah proved that He is a “loyal and beloved Son” (Bock 1994:383; cf. Marshall 1978:166).

Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 offer collaborating biblical witness to this fact (cf. Lioy 1995:19-20). The account of Jesus’ “visionary experience” is a “three-part conversation” that resembles the “debates of the scribes”, who made use of “proof-texts from Scripture” (Twelftree 1992:822). The three particular temptations mentioned by Matthew’s Gospel apparently occurred at the end of Jesus’ 40-day fast (Matt 4:2). Therefore, when the devil launched his final attacks, Jesus was at a disadvantage. First, Satan said to Jesus that if He was truly the Son of God, He should turn some of the stones that were lying about into bread (vs. 3). Certainly, Jesus could have used some bread after a 40-day fast, just as the Israelites needed manna to sustain them in the wilderness (Exod 16:13-36); but it would have been wrong for the divine

Messiah to utilize His power for a purely selfish purpose. His power was meant for His redemptive ministry. Rather than yield to the tempter's suggestion, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. This verse teaches that people live not only by consuming food; they also need to take in God's Word for spiritual nourishment (Matt 4:4). Jesus could do without bread, but He could not do without obedience to God (cf. Luke 4:3-4).

The devil next supernaturally escorted Jesus to Jerusalem and stood Him on the highest point of the temple (Matt 4:5). The tempter invited Jesus to prove in a spectacular way that He was God the Son. Supposedly, He could throw Himself down from the apex of the temple and trust the Father to protect Him (vs. 6). A common interpretation of Malachi 3:1 held that the Messiah would appear in the sky, descend to the temple, and proclaim deliverance (cf. the rabbinical saying in *Pesiqta Rabbari* 36). Apparently, Satan wanted Jesus to combine such an appearance with a sensational descent, complete with angels, to win popular approval for His kingdom. The tempter cleverly misquoted Psalm 91:11-12 by leaving out the phrase "to guard you in all your ways". This passage teaches that God provides His angels to watch over His people when they live in accordance with His will (cf. Exod 19:4-5; Deut 32:10-11). Satan claimed that the Father would protect the Son as He plummeted to the ground; but since such a stunt would not be within the will of God, the promise of divine protection would not apply. Rather than yield to the devil's suggestion, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16, saying, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt 4:7; cf. Luke 4:9-12).

In the third and final temptation, Satan supernaturally transported Jesus to a very high mountain. In a moment of time, the devil paraded before the Son all the nations of the world and their glory, promising them to Him if He would fall before the tempter in worship (Matt 4:8-9). Through the Messiah's death and resurrection, the Father intended to free the world from the oppressive control of Satan (cf. Heb 2:14-15) and give the Son the nations throughout the earth as His rightful inheritance (Ps 2:8). Therefore, rather than oblige His tempter, Jesus commanded, "Away from me, Satan!" (Matt 4:10). There was good reason for this command. It stands written in Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 that worship and service are to be given only to God. In the midst of temptation, Jesus showed an unwavering commitment to do the will of the Father (cf. Luke 4:5-8).

When the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from the Lord (Matt 4:11); even so, when the next opportunity came, Satan would tempt Jesus again (Luke 4:13). Mark 1:13 notes that angels came and attended to Jesus' needs (possibly throughout His 40-day sojourn; cf. Edwards 2002:42), just as they had offered care and support to the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness (cf. Exod 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2) and food to Elijah when he fled to Horeb for safety from Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 19:3-8). It is also revealed that the Messiah was out among the wild animals (cf. Lioy 2005a:289). In Saviour's day, far more wild animals roamed the countryside than today, including lions that prowled the wooded areas along the Jordan River (Jer 5:6; 49:19). The mention of wild beasts thus adds drama to Jesus' confronting evil.

One reason for the mention of the presence of angels and wild animals may be that Mark wanted to emphasize the divine protection Jesus received in the midst of the danger He faced (Heil 2006:66, 74, 77). Gibson (1994:21) notes that similar ideas can be found in ancient Jewish literature penned during the intertestamental period. For instance, the *Testament of Issachar* 7:7 states that when the people of God are known for their piety and faith, "every spirit of Beliar will flee" from them and they will be able to subdue "every wild creature" (Charlesworth 1983:1:804). Similarly, the *Testament of Naphtali* 8:4 says that when those in the covenant community "achieve the good", the "devil will flee" from them, "wild animals will be afraid" of them, and God's "angels will stand by" them (Charlesworth 1983:1:813). Likewise, the *Testament of Benjamin* 5:2 declares that those who "continue to do good" will find "unclean spirits" departing from them and "wild animals" dreading their presence (Charlesworth 1983:1:826).

A second reason for mentioning wild animals may be that untamed beasts were associated with evil powers. The historical episode, in a sense, became a symbol of the cosmic struggle of good and evil in which the Son was engaged. Likewise, the wild beasts might be connected to the hope of the messianic era, when animal enemies such as the wolf and the lamb will live in peace (Isa 11:6-9; 32:14-20; 65:25; Hos 2:18). A third reason may come from Mark's audience. If Mark was writing his Gospel for Gentile Christians about A.D 64–67, particularly those in Rome (cf. 1 Pet 5:13), they would be facing

persecutions from Nero that often included being thrown to the lions for refusing to worship the emperor. The early Christians could take comfort in the fact that Jesus too had confronted wild animals.

The biblical record of Jesus' temptations serves as a reminder that our great High Priest is not austere, aloof, or fear-inducing, but one who can empathize with our weaknesses because He became one of us and experienced life—with its joys and sorrows, highs and lows—just as we do. In fact, He even faced enticements to sin as we do (Heb 4:15); but unlike us, our High Priest remained sinless, despite being tempted in all sorts of ways (Blomberg 1992:86; Geldenhuys 1983:156-157; cf. John 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Some have objected that, if Jesus did not sin, He was not truly human, for all humans sin; but those making that objection fail to realize that human beings are in an abnormal state. God did not create Adam and Eve as sinful, but as holy and righteous (Gen 1:26-27). It was their willful disobedience that introduced sin into the human race (Gen 3:1-24; Rom 5:12).

The question is sometimes raised, “Was it possible for the Messiah to have sinned?” Some people argue for the impeccability of the Lord Jesus, in which the word *impeccable* means “not able to sin”. Others object that, if the Redeemer were not able to sin, His temptations could not have been real, for how can a temptation be real if the person being tempted is not able to sin at all? In thinking our way through the divine mystery associated with the sinlessness of the Messiah, it is prudent to affirm what Scripture teaches: 1) that Jesus never actually sinned; and 2) that Jesus was tempted with real enticements to sin.

The core of the issue centers around the way in which Jesus' human nature and divine nature worked together. If Jesus' human nature had existed by itself, independent of His divine nature, it would have been a human nature just like that which God gave Adam and Eve. It would be free from sin but nonetheless able to sin. Of course, Jesus' human nature never existed apart from union with His divine nature. From the moment of His conception, He existed as truly God and truly man in one person. An act of sin would have been a moral one involving the whole person of Christ, namely, both His human and divine natures. James 1:13 says that God is never tempted to do wrong. Also, it is impossible for the infinite holiness of God to compromise



morally. For these reasons, it is best to conclude that it was not possible for Jesus to have sinned; in other words, the union of His human and divine natures in one person prevented it (cf. Liroy 2007b:332).

### **3. Conclusion**

Within academia there is a persistent trend to reject the biblical teaching that Jesus alone is the true Redeemer and the only way to God. This observation provides motivation for exegetically and theologically analyzing Mark 1:1, 9-13. Each section of this passage—the beginning of the good news (vs. 1), the baptism of Jesus (vss. 9-11), and the temptation of Jesus (vss. 12-13)—staunchly affirms Jesus’ unique status as the divine Messiah. These verses also reveal that with Jesus’ first advent, God initiated a new spiritual beginning for humanity. Indeed, the Father chose, appointed, and empowered the Son to save people from their sins.

Furthermore, these verses disclose that Jesus is the Son of God. The latter phrase underscores Jesus’ special and intimate relationship with the Father, Jesus’ full and absolute equality as God with the other two members of the Trinity, and Jesus’ unswerving obedience to the carrying out the will of the Father, even to the point of being crucified. Even repeated attacks from Satan and the humiliation of the divine Saviour on the cross did not deter Him from fulfilling His preordained mission. In every episode, the Son, who enjoyed the Father’s approval and the Spirit’s abiding presence, proved Himself to be “God’s Chosen One” (John 1:33).

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