

## The Gospel According to Mark, 1:9-11: The Baptism of Jesus

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11, ESV)

### I. God of the Unexpected: The Humble Roots of the King of Kings

#### A. Nazareth

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46, ESV)

“And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene” (Matt 2:23, ESV).

The word “Nazarene” is not found in the Old Testament. But Matthew’s quote is unusual. It is the only place he uses the plural, “prophets”. He seems to have in mind a theme found in the prophets, not just one particular passage. “[It] was entirely in accordance with the prophets what the prophets had foretold, that Jesus should come to be known as ‘Jesus of *Nazareth*’. That designation of Him was at first a term of scorn and derision ... Isaiah had prophesied that the servant of the Lord would be despised by men. Part of the ‘fulfillment’ therefore of this and other similar passages from the Old Testament [Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Zech. 11:4-14] lay in the contempt for Jesus shown by the religious authorities of Israel because of His association with what they regarded as a provincial backwater.” <sup>(1)</sup>

“Jesus is King Messiah, Son of God, Son of David, but he was a branch from a royal line hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn. Jesus the Messiah, Matthew is telling us, did not introduce his kingdom with outward show or present himself with the pomp of an earthly monarch. In accord with prophecy he came as the despised Servant of the Lord.” <sup>(2)</sup>

#### B. Galilee: “Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!” (John 7:52 NLT)

<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone...

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace

there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:1-2; 6-7, ESV)

Many rejected Jesus because His background did not fit their preconceptions. They did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Over and over God chose what is foolish to shame the wise, what is weak to shame the strong. Time after time God began his world-shaking wonders of redemptive grace with what appeared to the wisdom of the world to be destined to fail: a barren couple (Abram and Sarai), a diffident man, slow of speech (Moses), or a wet-behind-the-ears shepherd boy (David). But many were looking for the kind of powerful, wealthy, well-born person the carnally-minded would expect. This kind of thinking caused many to reject their savior and miss out on God’s promises. What might you or I miss because we are ignorant concerning Bible doctrine, or because we cannot accept the plain testimony of God’s word? How important it is to know the Scriptures and trust them as the Word of God!

## II. The Baptism of Jesus

“Here already [Jesus] indicates how he will become our Saviour: by standing in the river in whose waters penitent Jews had symbolically washed away their sins, and allowed that water, polluted by those sins, to be poured over his perfect being ... Jesus’ water baptism inaugurated him into a ministry which reached its fulfillment later in his baptism in blood upon the cross (see *Luke* 12:50). What we have here is Jesus’ public acknowledgement that he had come to stand where sinners should stand, receive what they should deserve, and in return give to them his gift of grace and fellowship with God.” <sup>(3)</sup>

“He had no sin of His own, but he had ours. He made confession in Jordan of your sin, my reader, and mine. For when Jesus entered our humanity, He so utterly and entirely identified Himself with us that He made our very sin His own. ‘Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses’ (*Matt.* 8:17). He who knew no sin gathered upon His head and His heart all the sin and shame of His brothers and sisters; ‘He hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows...And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all (*Isa.* 53:4, 6).” <sup>(4)</sup>

Baptism and death: <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’” (*Mark* 10:37-38, ESV). “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (*Rom.* 6:3, ESV).

Concerning the phrase, “when he came up **out of** the water”: “Perhaps 3% of the Greek manuscripts have ‘out of’ instead of ‘from’ (to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).” <sup>(5)</sup>

## III. God of New Beginnings: The New Creation

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (*Gen* 1:2, ESV)

*the Spirit of God was hovering* – “The same stem is used in *Deut.* [32:11] of eagles in relation to their young. <sup>(6)</sup> Another scholar defines the meaning of *hovering* in the original as “to fly to and fro, flutter’.” <sup>(7)</sup>

“As in the book of Genesis God created by His word and through the Spirit, so it was fitting that, at the very commencement of God’s new work of re-creation in the hearts of men, there should be the same operation of the whole Godhead. Here, on Jordan’s banks, God speaks His word again, and again the Spirit is brooding over the waters.” <sup>(8)</sup>

“For if anybody is in union with Christ, he is the work of a new creation; the old condition has passed away, a new condition has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17, 18; Williams)

#### IV. The Descent of the Spirit

##### A. Heaven Torn Opened

The KJV, RSV, LB and some others simply read “the heavens opened”. The Greek word translated “torn open” is *schizomenous*, and means to be torn asunder or ripped. It likely reflects the desire expressed in Isa. 64:1: “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down”. It was also used in the LXX of the parting of the Red Sea (Exo. 14:21), of the splitting of the rock by Moses (Isa. 48:21), and the splitting of Mount Olivet on the Day of the LORD (Zech. 14:4). The only other time this verb is used in the gospel of Mark is at the crucifixion, when “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mark 15:37). At that time Jesus was also proclaimed the Son of God, but by a Roman centurion who witnessed Jesus expire. The basic message in both cases is the same: God gave His Beloved Son for us to open the way into His presence by bearing our sins in His own body.

##### B. The Descent of the Spirit

“The NIV does not translate the word meaning *immediately* at the beginning of V. 10. Mark used this characteristic term forty-two times to heighten dramatic tension. Its omission in the NIV exemplifies a problem with ‘dynamic equivalence’ translations where producing good English style is more important than word-for-word reproduction of the original.”<sup>(9)</sup>

“This was the act of the Holy Spirit taking up His residence in the Messiah. This was the anointing with the Spirit for His three-fold ministry of Prophet, Priest, and King, the dynamic equipment which would enable the Messiah to discharge the duties connected with these offices (Luke 4:16-19).”<sup>(10)</sup>

“Have you received water baptism but not the drenching in the Holy Spirit? That is the baptism you must have. All Christians are baptized into one Body in him. Unless Christ has filled your life, unless he has permeated your heart of hearts, you are not one of his. Regardless of how you have been dipped or sprinkled or dry cleaned, or whatever has happened, you are not one of his unless you have received the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, his cleansing from sin, and his empowering to godliness. Is he real to you? If so, then bless his name. If not, seek him today.”<sup>(11)</sup>

#### V. The Witness of the Father

##### A. Beloved Son

The title “Son of God” is used in the OT of the king of Israel (Ps. 2:7; 89:27), and of the nation of Israel (Exo. 4:22; Deut. 1:31; Hos. 11:1). The title “son” certainly identifies Jesus as the promised Son of David, King of Israel. As the true Israel, who fulfilled the covenants continually broken by the people of God, Jesus is also entitled to be called God’s Son on that account. The title means both of those things, but at the same time points to something deeper:

“The Greek word *agapētos*, translated *beloved*, has also the nuance of ‘only’ Son, and was thus doubly appropriate.”<sup>(12)</sup> Many commentators recognize an allusion to Gen. 22:2, which also uses the word *agapēton*: “[God] said, ‘Take your son, **your only son** Isaac, **whom you love**, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”

“In the voice from heaven God addresses Jesus as his unique Son, the object of his elective love ... In this context ‘Son’ is not a messianic title, but is to be understood in the highest sense, transcending messiahship. It signifies the unique relationship which Jesus sustains to the Father, which exists apart from any thought of official function in history ... Jesus did not *become* the Son of God, at baptism or at the transfiguration: he *is* the Son of God, the one qualified to bestow the Holy Spirit.”<sup>(13)</sup>

“That voice was the voice of God the Father. It declared the wonderful and ineffable love which has existed between the Father and the Son from all eternity.”<sup>(14)</sup>

Reflecting the teaching of Scripture, the Nicene creed, regarded as the touchstone of orthodox Christology since the fourth century AD, declares Jesus the Son of God to be “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” The names “Father” and “Son” express eternal truths concerning the relationship.

## B. Well-pleased

The phrase “in whom I am well pleased” “alludes to Isa. 42:1, which is part of the first of the Servant Songs, the most famous of which is 52:13-53:12. Therefore Mark also recognized Jesus as the true Servant of the Lord.”<sup>(15)</sup>

“There is a rich mine of comfort in these words for all Christ’s believing members. In themselves, and their own doings, they see nothing to please God. They are daily aware of weakness, shortcomings, and imperfection in all their ways. But let them recollect that the Father sees them as members of his beloved Jesus Christ. He sees no flaw in them (Song of Songs 4:7). He sees them as ‘in Christ,’ clothed in his righteousness and invested with his merit. They are ‘accepted in the beloved’ (Eph. 1:6 KJV), and when the holy eye of God looks at them, he is ‘well pleased.’”<sup>(16)</sup>

## Notes

- 1) Tasker, R. V. G. – The Gospel According to St. Matthew [Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Vol. 1], p. 45.
- 2) Carson, D. A. – Matthew [Expositor’s Bible Commentary (NIV), Vol. 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke], p. 97.
- 3) Ferguson, Sinclair B. – Let’s Study Mark, p. 6.
- 4) Jones, J. D. – Commentary on Mark [Kregel], pp. 15, 16.
- 5) Pickering, Wilbur – The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken: New Testament Translation with Commentary, p. 65, fn. j.
- 6) Speiser, E. A. - Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [Anchor Bible], p. 5.
- 7) Cassuto, Umberto – A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah, p. 25.
- 8) Cole, R, Alan – The Gospel According to St. Mark [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, V. 2], p. 58.
- 9) Brooks, James A. – Mark [New American Commentary], p. 42.
- 10) Wuest, Kenneth S. – Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Vol. I, p. 23
- 11) Hughes, R. Kent – Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior, Vol. 1 [Preaching the Word], p. 25.
- 12) Cole, R, Alan – The Gospel According to St. Mark [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, V. 2], p. 58.
- 13) Lane, William L. – The Gospel According to Mark [New International Commentary on the New Testament], p. 57-58.
- 14) Ryle, J. C. – Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark [Crossway Classic Commentaries], p. 5
- 15) Brooks, James A. – Mark [New American Commentary], p. 43.
- 16) Ryle, J. C. – Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark [Crossway Classic Commentaries], p. 5