

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The Gospel of Mark: *Author, Date, and Recipients*

The apostle Peter passed on reports of the words and deeds of Jesus to his attendant, John Mark, who wrote this Gospel for the wider church as the record of Peter's apostolic testimony. The book was likely written from Rome during the mid- to late-50s A.D. (though the mid- or late-60s is also possible). Mark's audience, largely unfamiliar with Jewish customs, needed to become familiar with such customs in order to understand the coming of Jesus as the culmination of God's work with Israel and the entire world, so Mark explains them.

*Purpose and Theme*

The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark's Gospel is to present and defend Jesus' universal call to discipleship. Mark returns often to this theme, categorizing his main audience as either followers or opponents of Jesus. Mark presents and supports this call to discipleship by narrating the identity and teaching of Jesus. For Mark, discipleship is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct. Fellowship with Jesus marks the heart of the disciple's life, and this fellowship includes trusting Jesus, confessing him, observing his conduct, following his teaching, and being shaped by a relationship with him. Discipleship also means being prepared to face the kind of rejection that Jesus faced. Taken from

<https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-mark/>

The gospels all begin with stories set at the beginning of Jesus' ministry that reveal their narrative focus. Matthew has the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5-7), Luke tells of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), and John with the wedding feast and miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11). Here Mark starts with this power encounter and clearing the earth of demons (or unclean spirits).

**Unclean** : in Greek the word is ἀκάθαρτος or akathartos. The preposition a- means not, or un-. Kathartos means that which clean, pure, or good. If God is the source of all good, then kathartos is a reflection, or the closest you can get to God's goodness. So akathartos, unclean, is a deformed, twisted, or divided reflection of what God intends or created. So that which is sacred is fused to the profane and sinful. To be unclean is to be separated from our made-in-the-image-of-God-ness.

**spirit**: in Greek the word is πνεῦμα or pneuma meaning wind, breath, or spirit. It's the direct translation of the Hebrew רוּחַ (rûach) having the same range of meaning. It points back directly to the creation story in Genesis "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, ...a wind רוּחַ (rûach) from God swept over the face of the waters." Genesis 1:1 "Then the

Mark 1:21-39  
COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE

<sup>21</sup> Jesus and his followers went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one *having authority and not as the scribes*. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an **unclean spirit**, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the **unclean spirit**, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "*What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.*" <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of *Galilee*.

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to *serve them*.

<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” <sup>38</sup> He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may *proclaim the message* there also, for that is what I came out to do.” <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all *Galilee*, *proclaiming the message* in their synagogues and casting out demons.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:**

- What engaged, enraged, or surprised you in the text?
- Mark focuses on exorcisms – the freeing of a human from an unclean spirit, that which turned away from God (our original intent). How do you respond to that?
- Peter’s mother-in-law is healed and then gets right to work ministering to others. What does that say about what it means to be fully human (made in the image of God)?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

... Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath רוח (rûach) of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7. And so *spirit* invokes that which is within humanity that makes them made-in-the-image-of-God.

*holy*: in Greek ἅγιος or *hagios* which means that which is holy, sacred, of God, set apart...it’s a synonym of *kathartos*. (so the opposite of *akathartos* (unclean)). What is holy is what is of God, or what is close to God.

*proclaiming the message* | “What is this? A new teaching—with authority!” – curiously Mark doesn’t include the contents of his teaching. All that we know about the message he had been preachign before comes from Mark 1:14-15 “Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Notice that the exorcism and healing comes after his speaking.

*to serve them.* : at first glance this might look to be sexist, or traditionalist story. The woman is returned to health and does what she’s supposed to: serve the men. But if we look closer, we see that this woman is the first deacon. She serves or ministers to Jesus and the others in response to her transformative encounter with Jesus. διακονέω or *diakoneō* meaning *to serve, minister* (to wait at table), caring for the needs of others as the Lord guides in an active, practical way.

Such service is the heart of Jesus’ gospel and life-style: “So Jesus called the disciples and said to them, “You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant *diakonos*, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave *diakonos* of all. <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served *diakoneō* but to serve *diakoneō* and to give his life a ransom for many.” - Mark 10:42-45

*Galilee*: this is the region where Jesus spends most of his time. It’s used 12 times in the gospel of Mark. 5 of these uses are in chapter 1. It harkens back to the exhortation of the angel to the women searching for Jesus in Mark 16:6-8 “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here... he is going ahead of you to *Galilee*; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

*authority*. the Greek word ἐξουσία or *exousia* means ‘the ability to perform an action to the extent that there are no hindrances in the way.; It evokes the power a king. And so is related to the word dominion (kingdom) – as Jesus preaches in Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Jesus is preaching something arriving, coming near, new; whereas the scribes the scribes are the custodians of traditional interpretation. They will become the opponents of Jesus at every turn as the story unfolds.