

The New Exodus and the Kingdom of God

Author: Rev. David W. Senters

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15, ESV).

What was the gospel Jesus proclaimed? And what did it have to do with a kingdom? The lexical range of *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), the Greek term from which we get our word for “gospel,” is brief.¹ To depend upon it alone would miss the connections to the Israelite exodus event that Mark was attempting to make. For Mark, the gospel pertained to the deliverance from an old kingdom and the inauguration of a new kingdom. Specifically, it was the fulfillment of God’s promises for a new exodus, Jesus’ completion of the new exodus in Israel’s place, and (as a result) Jesus’ proclamation of the good news/gospel.

The Promise of a New Exodus

Mark introduced his Gospel account as, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).” It was *good news* because the ministry of John the Baptist fulfilled the hope of Israelite exiles in Isaiah 40:3, and provided the judgment to post-exilic Israelites in Malachi 3:1. Isaiah 40–55 provided hope that the Babylonian exile would end.² God gave the exiles “comfort” and promised that her “warfare was ended” and “iniquity was pardoned” (Isaiah 40:1); he was going to use Cyrus to judge the Babylonians (Isaiah 45–47); and a covenant

¹ God’s good news to humans, *good news* proclaimed; details relating to the life and ministry of Jesus, *good news of Jesus*; or a book dealing with the life and ministry of Jesus, a *gospel account*. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 403.

² Rikk E. Watts, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 114.

would be re-established (Isaiah 54–55). To accomplish this great work, God would lead his people in a similar manner as he did in the exodus from their bondage under Pharaoh. Rikk Watts has summarized,

“The original exodus pattern—deliverance from Egypt, journey through the desert, and arrival in the promised land—is transformed into the hope of a grander new exodus: deliverance of the exiles from the power of Babylon and its idols, Yahweh’s leading of and provision for his blind people along the “way,” and his arrival and enthronement in a gloriously restored Zion.”³

Just as God delivered the Israelites from the kingdom of Egypt and established them in the kingdom of the Promised Land, he would deliver them from the kingdom of Babylon and establish them in the kingdom of Zion. And just as his presence was with them in the first exodus, his presence would be with them in the new exodus (Isaiah 40:3).

Malachi provided a stern word of judgment for the returned exiles. Despite having expressed his great love for them after they received the covenant discipline of exile, those who returned from Babylon were still not walking in covenant obedience with God (Malachi 2:10–16): the priesthood had been polluted (1:6–14); there was divorce (2:13–16); and they were withholding tithes (3:6–15). What they needed was a messenger of the covenant to prepare the way for God’s presence and bring judgment (3:1). This was not a new idea; God’s people had had a messenger before. After giving them his covenant law (Exodus 20:1–23:19), God sent a messenger⁴ to lead them through the wilderness and remind them of the covenant law (23:20). The concepts in Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 closely parallel: God was sending a messenger of the covenant, he was preparing a path for God’s people, and would bring judgment for covenant disobedience. The major difference from the former to the latter was the development of the role of the messenger as an eschatological figure: one who prepared the

³ Watts, “Mark,” 114.

⁴ Many translations of Exodus 23:20 translate מַלְאָכִי (*mal’āk*) as “angel” (ESV, NIV, NRSV), but it can also be translated as “messenger.”

way for God's presence to return and bring restoration to the kingdom of Zion.⁵ The exiles may have returned from Babylon, but their lives still needed restoration from the destruction of sin.

For Mark, borrowing Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 formed a theological understanding for John the Baptist's ministry. God was beginning the work of delivering his people from the old kingdom of sin (Isaiah 40:3), and was sending a covenant messenger to make straight and righteous paths for them into God's presence (Malachi 3:1)—just as he had done before in the exodus event. This new exodus was precisely the *good news* of the gospel. God was at work again, fulfilling his promises to destroy the kingdom of sin and evil, and establish his kingdom of righteousness. John the Baptist functioned as the messenger calling to repentance the offspring of the exiles who returned from Babylon, inviting them to begin the journey of the new exodus through baptism, and proclaiming there would soon be a Messiah to right the wrongs the Israelites made in the first exodus.

Jesus Completes the Exodus in Israel's Place

As God's messenger of the covenant leading a new theological exodus, Mark introduced John the Baptist conducting his ministry in the wilderness (Mark 1:4) and that people from both Judea and Jerusalem were going to him (1:5). How were they joining John the Baptist in the new exodus? By symbolically walking the same path: out of the old kingdom, going out into the wilderness, and passing through the waters. Again, Mark pointed his readers to the history of the exodus to understand the significance of the events.

For the Israelites in the exodus, one major event marked the end of their time in the wilderness. After forty years in the wilderness, Moses had died and God commissioned a new

⁵ Watts, "Mark," 114.

leader. Joshua was to lead them into the Promised the Land (Joshua 1:6). In a similar manner to the miracle at the Red Sea, which marked the beginning of their time in the wilderness, the Israelites would again pass through the waters. This time, instead of the Red Sea it was the Jordan River. This would be the beginning of their conquests to take possession of the Promised Land (1:11). Once again, God provided miraculous passage for his people through the waters. He stopped the flow of the Jordan River, and the Israelites crossed over on dry ground (3:14–17). The event was so significant, they took the time to build a stone memorial to commemorate the event for future generations (Joshua 4).

Mark's record of events from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry have several striking similarities to the Old Testament exodus event. People were coming out to be led by the messenger of God (i.e., John the Baptist), leaving the bondage of an old kingdom (i.e., their sins), passing through the waters of the Jordan River, and entering into the inaugurated kingdom of God's rule and reign.

The importance of what occurred next in the narrative cannot be understated. Mark showed Jesus taking the place of God's distinguished, yet disobedient son, Israel. Like the Israelites' journey of the exodus, Jesus went out to the wilderness to meet John the Baptist and pass through the waters by baptism in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9). The heavens were opened and Jesus was declared to be God's distinguished son "with whom he was well pleased."⁶ Instead of God's presence descending among the Israelites in the Tabernacle, the Holy Spirit descended upon the person of Jesus. Taking the place of Israel as God's son, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed: he spent forty days being tempted in the wilderness and did not sin, while

⁶Through the Abrahamic Covenant, God considered Israel to be his first-born son (Exodus 4:22–23).

Israel's sin led to forty years of wandering in the wilderness (1:12–13). Israel's hope of a restored kingdom had arrived in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah.

Time to Proclaim the Good News

Since he completed the new exodus in Israel's place, Jesus could say, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15a). Wandering in the wilderness was over, the exile was over, and now people needed to pass through the waters (figuratively speaking), repent of their sins and believe the good news (1:15b). It was time to renounce the old kingdom of sin, and set their eyes on the kingdom of God being inaugurated by Jesus. It was good news and everyone needed to hear about it. It was time to proclaim the gospel.

What was the gospel Jesus proclaimed? The word used for "proclaim" in Mark 1:14 was *kēryssō* (κηρύσσω). Every usage of *kēryssō* in Mark's Gospel was a public declaration about the gospel. John the Baptist began the work of declaration (*kēryssō*) regarding God's salvific activity of the exodus (1:4). Jesus declared (*kēryssō*) the gospel, identifying the end of the new exodus and the call for repentance and belief in the gospel (1:14–15). Jesus stated one of the reasons for his ministry was to preach (*kēryssō*) (1:38–39). Some who were healed by Jesus proclaimed (*kēryssō*) the good news of what occurred to them: the leper freely talked (*kēryssō*) about his healing (Mark 1:45); the man whom Jesus casted out a demon proclaimed (*kēryssō*) what Jesus had done for him, while everyone marveled (5:20); and the crowd who witnessed Jesus heal a deaf and mute man zealously proclaimed (*kēryssō*) to others about the healing. Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach (*kēryssō*), gave them authority over demons, and power to heal people (3:14–15; 6:7–13). The act of the woman that anointed Jesus for his burial, was to be told wherever the gospel was proclaimed (*kēryssō*) in the world (14:3–9). And the gospel must be proclaimed (*kēryssō*) to all nations (13:10) and to the whole creation (16:15).

The Gospel of Mark ended with Jesus' disciples carrying on the work he had begun. Jesus had journeyed through the wilderness in the new exodus, made right the wrongs of Israel, provided deliverance from the kingdom of sin and evil, and inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth. As the ruler of the kingdom, he ascended into heaven, took his rightful place of authority at the right hand of God, and worked with and confirmed by signs the gospel his disciples proclaimed (*kēryssō*) everywhere (16:19–20).

The IPHC's core value focus for 2017 is, "We Prayerfully Value Christ's Kingdom." Each of us who abide in Christ, and Christ in us, have received restoration by God's grace. We have been delivered from the bondage of the kingdom of evil and sin, our Messiah has led us with his presence through the wilderness in a new exodus, and has brought us into the kingdom he has inaugurated. Like the leper Jesus healed from his condition, the man set free from a demon, the deaf and mute man that received his hearing and speech, or the crowds who witnessed the miracles, we have all received good news (*euangelion*) too marvelous to keep to ourselves. We must proclaim it. And like the disciples Jesus commissioned, we have a responsibility to proclaim it. We must continue the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples, because the consummation of the kingdom is at hand. In 2017, may the Lord work with us and confirm the message by accompanying signs as we proclaim the gospel everywhere!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Watts, Rikk E. "Mark." In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.