

## **Mark Intro- A time of expectation**

What I hope to do this morning is to paint a picture of the world that Christ was born into. It will help us to understand the book so much more if we understand the landscape of the time.

### **Politically-**

Judea was conquered by the Roman empire in 63 BC. At the time, captured territories were either set up as **provinces** or **client kingdoms**. Judea was set up as a **client kingdom** with its own **semi independent king**. This was Herod the Great. He ruled from 37 BC until 4 BC. Evidently the BC aging is incorrect because Herod the Great was living when Christ was born.

People living in Judea would have known and felt the power of Rome on a day to day basis. They may not have seen Roman representatives on a day to day basis, but everyone would have understood that Rome was the power behind the government in place. Technically the kingdom they were under was headed by Herod. So the soldiers were his. But everyone knew that Herod answered to Rome. Rome would be content to let things ride as long as things remained stable and the taxes were collected. But at any point if things got out of hand everyone knew that Rome would act to protect their interests.

This was the Herod that had the temple rebuilt. Herod was a major political force. He was a very ambitious man. And building this temple served to put Jerusalem back on the map as a place of interest. Even back then it was a tourist sight, as well as a center for Jewish worship. So Herod had a lot to gain, personally and politically, by getting the temple built.

Herod had the habit of building temples for any religion, which didn't settle well with the Jews. Herod tried to become accepted as a Jew but the more he tried the more he was hated by the religious zealots.

Another thing to know about this Herod is that he had his wife and two of his children executed due to his suspicion that they were plotting against him. He was extremely power sensitive. He was not about to let anyone stand in his way in his quest for power.

This King Herod is the guy that received the wise men from the East. He killed the male babies in his effort to kill Christ.

After Herod died, his kingdom was divided among his sons. Herod Antipas got the northern part of Galilee.

This second Herod has several references in scripture.

John the Baptist was ministering in the **territory** of Herod Antipas. Remember, he was ruling above Galilee. And that is where John was ministering. Herod Antipas had married his brother Herod- Phillip's wife, Herodias. This fact eventually led to John the Baptists death.

We also know that this Herod was curious about the preaching of Jesus in Luke 9:7-9, he attempts to kill Jesus Luke 13:31-33, and may have played a part in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:7-15 and Acts 4:27)

Herod Phillip took the section East of Galilee. All we know about him is that his wife was not faithful to him.

And Herod Archelaus, the third son, got Judea. But evidently Archelaus didn't do so well. Within ten years he was replaced by military governors called Procurators or Prefects. This was in 6 AD. At this point the region was demoted to being a **Roman province**. There was no longer a semi-independent king. Now they had prefects, which would be like governors who represented Rome.

Pontius Pilate was the fifth round Prefect. He was housed in Cesearea, which served as the Roman capital in that region. Pilate had built a temple in honor of the Roman Emperor, which was basically an endorsement of the Imperial Cult. Pilate was the ruler of Judea when John the Baptist began his ministry. He was responsible for a massacre of some Galileans (Luke 13:1). He conducted the trial of Jesus. And he permitted Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus. He also permits the Jewish authorities to post a guard at Jesus's tomb.

At this time Ceaser Augustus was the Roman Emperor. He was Emperor until AD 14. Tiberius Ceaser followed him up until AD 37.

So Christ would have been born at the time of Ceaser Augustus and would have died during Tiberius Ceaser's rule.

He was born at the time of King Herod the great and died during the time of Prefect Pontius Pilate.

Now, how about the spiritual climate?

The temple-

Herod began building the temple in 19 bc. The first stage was completed in 9 bc. The last was completed 70 years later. All of the work was done by Levites whom Herod hired. The temple was a very impressive piece of architecture, rivaling many of the Roman buildings throughout the empire. It was superior to any temples Herod had built for **other** pagan gods. It is interesting that Rome had the temple built and then, just a few years after it was finished, Rome tore it down.

The priesthood-

Beginning, I think, with Herod the great, Herod retained the control of who sat as the High Priest. This was done by keeping custody of the High Priest's vestments,

his uniform as it were. They kept it under seal in the Antonia fortress where the a cohort of Roman Troops was housed in Jerusalem. This control was retained by all Roman governors that followed. So nothing official could be done by the Priests without Pilate's knowledge and permission.

Naturally this created some huge problems. Who would the Roman Governors want to control the religion in Jerusalem? That question is easy to answer. The ones who would play best with the Governors. Sometimes the High Priesthood was purchased. This was a very profitable game for the Governors. Sometimes people were placed into position because they would most benefit the agenda of the Governor.

We really don't know who the High Priest was when Christ was born. But when he began his ministry Annas and Ciaphas were the High Priests.

Technically Annas had been High Priest from AD 6 to AD 15. The Romans had removed him from office. But Annas was still in the background calling the shots. 5 of his sons succeeded him in office and Ciaphas, the high priest when Christ was ministering, was Ciaphas's son in law. When Christ was captured, he was first taken to Annas for the meeting before the meeting. And then he was taken for the official meeting with Ciaphas. So we know that Ciaphas was in bed enough with Rome that Rome allowed him to remain in power. He would not have been the people's choice. Annas and Ciaphas were both from the Sadducees religious group.

The religious parties:

The Pharisees

This is from Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

**Josephus says the Pharisees maintained a simple lifestyle (Ant18.1.3 [12]), were affectionate and harmonious in their dealings with others (War 2.8.14 [166]), especially respectful to their elders (Ant18.13 [12]), and quite influential throughout the land of Israel (Ant13.10.5 [288]; 17.2.4 [41-45]; 18.1.3 [15]) although at the time of Herod they numbered only about six thousand (Ant17.2.4 [42]). Josephus mentions their belief in both fate (divine sovereignty) and the human will (War 2.8.14 [163], Ant18.1.3 [13]) and in immortality of both good and evil persons (War 2.8.14 [16]; Ant17.1.3 [14]). Some Pharisees refused to take oaths (Ant17.2.4 [42]). Of particular importance are Josephus's statements that the Pharisees adhered to "the laws of which the Deity approves" (Ant17.2.4 [41]) and that they "are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws" (War 2.8.14 [162]). Pharisees "follow the guidance of that which their doctrine has selected and transmitted as good, attaching the chief importance to the observance of those commandments which it has seen fit to dictate to them" (Ant18.1.3 [12]) and**

they "passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses" (*Ant*17.2.4 [41]; 13.10.6 [297]). Although the phrase "Oral Law" is not used, it appears Josephus understood that the Pharisees affirmed a body of traditional interpretations, applications, and expansions of the Old Testament law communicated orally.

The clearest New Testament statement of Pharisaic distinctives is Acts 23:8: "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels, nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." This would give the impression that doctrine was the basic concern of the group. However, Mark 7:3-4 says that "The Pharisees do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles." Thus, we are also told of the Pharisees' concern for washing (ceremonial cleansing) and observance of "the traditions of the elders," a description of the Oral Law. Matthew 23 calls attention to their (1) positions of religious authority in the community, (2) concern for outward recognition and honor, (3) enthusiasm for making converts, and (4) emphasis on observing the legalistic minutia of the law. In verse 23 Jesus condemns them, not for what they did, but for neglecting "the more important matters of the law justice, mercy and faithfulness."

We see from all of this that the Pharisees saw the importance of scripture. In fact, all in all, they had some pretty good doctrine. They would have leaned more toward sovereign grace than Armenian thought. They believed and valued scripture. But they never got the heart of it. They missed the important part. They ended up with an external practice of good works. And the good works tended to be misguided. They added layer upon layer of legalisms in an effort to ensure that God's laws were adhered to. And naturally, over time, the layers took on more authority than the word of God.

In the process, "self" took over, as it always does. The pride of these men took over and they began caring most about how they were viewed and how they were respected and what is in it for them. They had evangelism projects and those projects were going to proceed, no matter what. They were active. They were conservative. They had good tag lines about the law of God. But they missed the heart of the matter. They lost justice, mercy and faithfulness in the process. This would have been the conservative party. This would have been the fundamentalist party of the day.

The Sadducees

Josephus lists the Sadducees as one of the three sects/groups of Jewish "philosophy" (*Ant*18.1.2 [11]; cf. 13.5.9 [293]). His first historical reference says John Hyrcanus (135-105 b.c.) came under their influence after his break with the Pharisees. Josephus describes them as argumentative (*Ant*18.1.4 [16]), "boorish" and "rude" to both each other and aliens (*War*2.9.14 [166]), few in number but including "men of the highest standing" (*Ant*18.1.4 [17]). They have "the confidence of the wealthy" but not the populace (*Ant*13.1.4 [298]). When exercising their office the Sadducees were forced by public opinion to follow "the formulas of the Pharisees" (*Ant*18.1.4 [17]). Evidently they were more severe in administering punishments than Pharisees (*Ant*13.10.6 [294]). Like the New Testament, Josephus mentions the Sadducean rejection of the resurrection (*War*2.9.14 [165]); and twice says they rejected "Fate" (predestination) to dissociate God from evil and to assert the human free choice of good or evil (*War*2.9.14 [165]; *Ant*18.1.4 [14]).

Josephus says, "The Pharisees had passed on certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses, rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down (in Scripture)" (*Ant*13.10.6 [297]; cf. *Ant*18.1.4 [16]). This points toward a major feature of Sadduceanism: rejection of the Pharisaic Oral Law, or "the traditions of the elders." In the centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (586 b.c.), the Pharisees compiled and transmitted orally a body of traditional interpretations, adaptations, and additions to Scripture that they believed to be of divine origin. These included ways of applying the Law to various situations expansion and prescriptions regarding a wide range of levitical ceremonies and regulations. These traditions also included certain theological points, such as resurrection and angels and spirits, which, although not particularly emphasized in the Old Testament, were prominent during the intertestamental period. Although the Sadducees rejected the Pharisaic Oral Law they certainly had their own traditions, interpretations, and procedures.

Religiously, the Sadducees were literal in handling the Old Testament Law and resisted the "new" ideas and traditions of the Pharisees. Politically and socially, they were open to rapprochement with Hellenistic (Greek) culture and the Roman political system. The Sadducees were essentially secularists, a result of their exclusion of God ("Fate") from human affairs and their conviction that humans can expect nothing beyond this life. In general it seems the Sadducees supported those interpretations and procedures that

**enhanced the prestige, power, and financial benefit of the priestly temple cult and the aristocracy.**

Through this we see that the Sadducees, also, would have had good sound bites. We only believe the Bible, they would have said. They had trouble with the absolute sovereignty of God. So they leaned more toward an Armenian mindset. They believed the Pentateuch but did not believe the prophetic books held any authority. And by the time they were done with it, the Pentateuch really didn't mean much. They were left with a world view that held that this life is all there is. There is no eternity. So they were left to their own devices to improve it the best they could.

They were quick to accept a relationship with the powers that be. They could easily say that they were best serving their nation by keeping peace with Rome, no matter what compromises were required. They only gave in to the Pharisaical influence when it was necessary to do so to keep the peace. The Pharisees tended to be the choice of the people. The Sadducees were the choice of the rich and powerful. Those two parties had very little in common. In fact they had nothing in common until they had a common enemy in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, let's move on to what may be the most important thing in understanding the beginning of the book of Mark.

The spiritual expectation

We need to understand that the Jewish people were a people who had heard from God. God had singled them out to be His chosen people. That is a huge thing. They had documents that contained God's direct revelation to them. They had a history unique among all the nations. And they had remained a people, even though they had often been separated from their land. This is something that is very unusual.

To understand Mark we must first understand this.

Then think back to the last time they heard from God. It was 400 years ago that God spoke to them through Malachi. He gave them a scathing rebuke.

And what is the last thing He said?

**Malachi 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*," Says the LORD of hosts.**

**4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, *With the* statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (NKJV)**

This is the last thing God told them. I will send you Elijah before this terrible day is to come. And he will have a ministry that will change your hearts. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and children to their fathers. Those who knew their scriptures knew that God had promised this.

Along with this affirmation was a time table. It was given in the book of Daniel. **Daniel 9:20 Now while I *was* speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, 21 yes, while I *was* speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. 22 And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. 23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell *you*, for you *are* greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision: 24 "Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. 25 "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. 26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate." (NKJV)** There were 483 (49 years plus 434 years) years from the issuing of the decree by Artaxerxes to rebuild the temple in 445 BC to when Christ came. Some believe the date refers to what many refer to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

I am only using this to make the point that the Jews were given a timetable in their scriptures. They understood this very clearly. They knew that their Messiah had an appointment to keep in about AD 30. Since they would have assumed this passage is talking about an adult, they would be looking for the Messiah's birth near AD 1.

Do we have any evidence of that?

In Matt 2 we find the visit of the Magi. When Herod asked where the Messiah would be born they knew. It would be in Bethlehem. So they knew the place. But what about the time?

In Luke 2 we find Simeon. We read that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord Christ. Simeon saw Christ and knew who He was.

Then we see Anna. Anna came up to Mary and Joseph and knew that Christ was the Savior. It says she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

In Luke 1 Zechariah was told that his son would make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Zechariah never asked who that was. It was as if he did not need to.

In John 1 the priests and levites' first question was to ask John the Baptist if he was the Messiah.

Andrew called Peter and told him, We have found the Messiah, as if they were all currently looking for Him.

In Acts 5:36-37 Gamaliel deals with 2 men around that time who claimed they were the Messiah but didn't meet the qualifications.

There were also books that were written at that time that refer to a coming Messiah.

When we couple this with all the false messiahs that arose during this period of history, I think it is easy to see that the Jewish people were expecting their Messiah.

So we have set the scene. We see the political dynamics. We know who some of the main players are. We also see the spiritual climate. We know about the parties in power or influence at the time. Then we see the expectations laid out by a timetable in Daniel...a very specific timetable.

Those are all the facts. But the facts are not enough. We need to put ourselves into this story. Imagine what it would be like. Imagine you are living in a day when you do the math and you know that the Messiah, the Savior of the world sent by God Himself is to arrive. You know it within a set number of years. There are spiritual people who are very much waiting for Him. There are others who are waiting for him for political reasons.

There are many who are expecting a man to come as a leader and raise up military might against Rome. They are expecting someone to put the Jews back on the map



as a world leader. They are looking to be part of a revolution. They want to be back in power. They want to be the big powerful nation of Israel again. That is what they are expecting and they will accept nothing less. They are not interested in humbling themselves. They are not interested in repentance or true spirituality. They only want a free and sovereign nation once again.

Then there are others who are more perceptive. They understand there is a bigger problem than a greedy and evil Roman government to deal with. They realize there is a far greater evil dwelling in their souls. It is an evil that won't relent. It causes endless misery. And it cannot be overcome. It is going to require something from outside. It is going to require **someone**. It is going to require a Holy One who will somehow save us from our sins. These people don't care about the national standing. They don't care about the improved economics. They simply want to be free from sin. They want to be forgiven. They want a Savior. These are the dynamics that are in play.

And think about this.

No humans were available to anticipate creation. It was an amazing event without precedent, but it was not something we could look forward to. Then history proceeded and God chose a people for himself. But all along He made a promise. He promised a Messiah. He promised a representative chosen by Him that would represent Him perfectly. And for thousands of years the world waited for this Messiah. Then as the time approaches God gives a revelation of a time table for when this Messiah would arrive. Generations come and go, but the day keeps getting closer and closer. Finally the day has arrived. Imagine the excitement in the air. Imagine the expectation that existed. They are soon to see the revelation of the most important thing that has ever happened in all of human history. Something of cosmic importance is about to take place. This is going to be a truly supernatural event. People are curious. They all have their own opinions. But many are looking around. They are looking for the Messiah. They are looking for the one that God has sent.

That is the backdrop of the book of Mark. It is a drum roll that has increased in volume and speed over the course of 8,000 years. And it is reaching its apex. In real time and space we are going to see an amazing revelation of God. He is sending us someone. There is anticipation and wonder in the air. And then we read this.

**Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.  
(NKJV)**