**Mark’s Gospel:**

**Witness to the Son of God - #2**

**Jesus the Anointed One Brings the Holy Spirit**

**Mark 1:1-8**

**The Messenger before the Messiah**

*1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” — 3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” 4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.  6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

*7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*

*8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

**Notes and Studies**

1. The Good News begins with the coming of the Messiah, “God’s anointed one,” so there is a direct good news report of the One who baptizes by the “Holy Spirit.”
2. In ancient Israel there was a well-known washing called the *mikvah*. The word is employed in its broader sense but generally means a collection of water.



Pool of a medieval *mikveh*

in [Speyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speyer) (Germany),

dating back to 1128

1. A *mikvah* was immersion in a bath that had been part of Jewish life for generations and was the seeking of a spiritual cleansing. It was part of the preparation for undertaking a new beginning. Jewish men took a *mikvah* each Sabbath in preparation for the new week. Women took a *mikvah* after each monthly period as a spiritual cleansing. On Yom Kippur the High Priest took seven *mikvot* (plural of *mikvah*) during the ceremonies in preparation for entering the Holy of Holies. Jesus came to John for a *mikvah* at the beginning of His ministry.
2. John had people take a *mikvah* to show that they had changed their minds (repented) about their need for a Savior and were taking a new direction regarding their salvation. No longer would they focus on keeping the Law but would look instead to the coming redeemer whose arrival John was announcing.

The coming of the Holy Spirit through Jesus

Mark records the activities of the Holy Spirit in a similar manner to the way of the other Gospels. Thus in Mark, as in Matthew, John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). This begins by the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus after John baptized him (Mark 1:10) and leading (driving) Jesus into the wilderness for a time of fasting and temptation (Mark 1:12).

So the baptism of Jesus is the new work of the Holy Spirit.

**The Baptism of Jesus**

In the early church, Jesus came to bring the Spirit. A new and intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit was needed so that the Holy Spirit could not withdraw his indwelling from humanity. The security of grace forever after now depends on Jesus, the faithful new Adam.

**Athanasius of Alexandria*,***

“The Savior being God, and ever ruling in the Father’s Kingdom, and being himself, He who supplies the Holy Spirit to all, nevertheless is here said to be anointed, that, as we have said before, because he became human, he was anointed with the Spirit, He might provide for us the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit. “I, being the Father’s Logos, I give to myself, when becoming man, the Spirit; and thus in my humanity, I sanctify in my being all humans and henceforth in me, who am Truth, all may be sanctified.” For when the Lord, as man, was washed in the Jordan, it was we who were washed in him, and by him. And when He received the Spirit, we it was, who by him were made recipients of the Spirit.” (*Against the Arians 2:37)*

**When Humanity lost the Holy Spirit**

**Cyril of Alexandria**

“The divine Scripture testifies that man is made in the image and likeness of God who is over all. … He was, through the Spirit, sealed unto the divine image (Gen 2:7) ... the Spirit at once began both to put life into His formation and in a divine manner to impress His own image thereon. ... he was in Paradise. ... eminent in the divine image of Him that made him, through the Holy Spirit that resided in him. ... but when perverted by the wiles of the devil ... God recalled the grace given to him, and he that was made unto life then first heard “*To dust ... you shall return...*” (Gen 3:19). Now the likeness to God was through the inroad of sin defaced, and no longer was the impress bright, but fainter and darkened because of the transgression. ... the Spirit departed altogether ... how God implanted in us the inviolate grace, or how the Spirit again took root in humanity, in what manner was human nature reformed to its old condition, it is right to say.

The first man, being earthly and of earth was caught by bitter guile, and having inclined to disobedience, falls to the earth, the mother from whence he sprang, and since he was overcome at that time by corruption and death, transmits the penalty to his whole race. When evil increased and multiplied in us, and our understanding gradually descended to the worse, sin reigned, and thus at length the nature of man was shown to be denuded of the Holy Spirit who dwelt in him. Therefore, since the first Adam preserved not the grace given to him by God, God the Father was minded to send us his own Son who is by nature without alteration or change and not knowing sin in any way, that as by the disobedience of the first we became subject to divine wrath, so through the obedience of the second, we might both escape the curse and the evils from it might come to naught.

The Son became as one from us, one who did not know sin that the Spirit might become accustomed to abide in us, not having an occasion of departure or withdrawal in him. Therefore through Himself He receives the Spirit for us, and renews to our nature the ancient good. For thus is He also said for our sake to become poor. (2 Cor 8:9)... So He receives the Spirit for our sakes, that He may sanctify our whole nature. For He came not to profit Himself, but to be to all of us, the Door and Beginning and Way of heavenly goods”. *(Commentary on John 1:18)*

**Humanity lost the Spirit as a result of Adam’s disobedience**

**Cyril of Alexandria**

“The Spirit had fled from humanity because it could not bear to dwell amidst such corruption; now another man appears among men and makes possible the return of the Spirit, for this man is without sin.” *(Commentary of John 1:18)*

“In Christ, God began to give again the Spirit, and Christ first received the Spirit as a first fruit of the renewed nature.” *(Commentary on Jn 7:39)*

“God wished to recapitulate all things in Christ and to restore human nature again to its ancient state; God promises to give it the Holy Spirit again, for in no way could it return to the unshaken state of good things.” *(Ibid)*

“The Logos lowered himself, in order to lift to his own height that which was lowly by nature; and he bore the form of the salve, though by nature he was Lord and Son, in order to transport what was salve by nature to the glory of adoptive sonship, after his own likeness, and in himself. Therefore, just as he became like us, that is, man, in order that we might become like him, I mean gods and sons, he takes to himself what is properly ours and gives us in return what is his ... We mount to a dignity, which is superior to our nature through our likeness to him; for we have been called sons of God, even though we are not sons by nature. ... By nature and in reality the Father of Christ is the God of the universe; but that does not make him our Father by nature; rather is he God, as Creator and Lord. But the Son, as it were mingling himself with us, bestows on our nature the dignity that is properly and peculiarly his own, giving us to call his Father our Father and to use the name of the Father as the name of the common for God.” *(Commentary on Jn 12, 1, 3:122-123)*

“All of us are called in the Son, and through the Son, to an equal form” with him; made sons of God by grace. Christ is the origin of the grace given to us; He made us like himself those who were made through him. It is through him that all things have been made and rational creatures are called to adoptive sonship.’ *(Cyril of Alexandria, Thesaurus, 25, PG 75:412-13)*

**What is new? Exchange and Solidarity**

The Holy Spirit gives us adoption, because the incarnation established a twin relationship between the incarnate Logos and humanity: Exchange and Solidarity.

The exchange happened when the Son became man in order to make us the sons of the Father. The common saying ‘He took what is ours, to give us what is his’ *(In Jn 12,1, 3:122-23, In Luke Homily. 71, PG 72:688)*

The origin of solidarity lies in the incarnation itself where our human nature is in eternal communion with the Trinity through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is consubstantial with us and consubstantial with the Father. This twofold consubstantiality means that if humans were to participate in the Sonship of the Son, the Son must be the true Son of God, and must be also human. Thus the incarnation is not spurious, but the truth and the very foundation for which this exchange between God and humanity took place.

**The Spirit is the co-worker with Jesus**

1. So when some denied the work of the Spirit, Jesus warned against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29)

2. Jesus witnesses to the work of the Holy Spirit who inspired David to sing one of the Psalms (Mark 12:36)

3. Jesus tells his followers not to be concerned about what they should say when the are arrested because the Holy Spirit will speak for them (Mark 13:11)

4. So what then did Mark intend his readers to understand in these passages about Jesus’ spirit? We know from Mark 1:10, 12 that the Holy Spirit “*descended*” upon Jesus after his baptism and “*thrust him out into the wilderness.*” John prophesied that Jesus would be able to “*baptize in the Holy Spirit* (literally)” (1:8), which again indicates that God’s Spirit is present with Jesus in a new and special way. In Mark 3:29 Jesus warned the Jewish religious leaders about the dangerous consequences of attributing the works he was doing by the Spirit’s power to demonic forces. Those who persisted in this perspective “profaned the Holy Spirit” and “will not have forgiveness forever but were guilty of an eternal sin.”

**Unclean Spirits**

Mark frequently describes demons as “unclean spirits” (*akatharta pneumata* in 1:23,26,27; 3:11,30; 5:2,8,13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:17,20,25). They are driven away by the Spirit.

**The Gift of Discernment is now the new gift of the Holy Spirit**

According to Mark 2:8, Jesus is able to discern what the Jewish religious leaders around him are “disputing in their hearts/themselves (*en tais kardiais autōn/en heautois*)” (2:6,8). Mark says that “*Jesus, knowing in/by his spirit* (*tōi pneumati autou*)” what they are thinking, why do they interrogate him? What does Mark mean by this phrase and reference to “spirit?” Should we translate this as “his spirit” or “the Spirit that belongs to him,” i.e. the Holy Spirit? In other words Jesus himself being anointed by the Holy Spirit is discerning their thoughts by the Holy Spirit within him that empowers or aids him to do this. The same verb occurs with Jesus as subject in verse 5:30 and there the expression is “knowing in himself (*en hautōi*)” and if we add as the Anointed we will be close to truth, with the preposition present.

We discover a similar situation in Mark 8:12. Again Jesus is challenged in controversy with Jewish religious leaders. They have approached him to demand some extraordinary sign, “*testing him*” (8:11). In response Jesus is “*dismayed in/by his spirit* (*tōi pneumati autou*).” This is exactly the same phrase Mark used in verse 2:8. So this is the Holy Spirit in Jesus who is dismayed at the religious leaders’ continued refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah, because He knows that this stubbornness is leading to terrible judgment. We should not drive a spanner (wedge) between Jesus’ spirit, i.e. himself, and the Holy Spirit who anointed him.

If these are to be taken as references to the Holy Spirit, then how are we to understand the meaning of dative case in which these phrases are written? A frequent use of the dative case is to define means or instrument. If this is the intended sense, then in Mark 2:8 Jesus “*knows by means of the Spirit which he has*” what the religious leaders are thinking. And in the case of Mark 8:12 the dismay that Jesus experiences arises “*by means of the Spirit which he has*.” Another usage, just as common, is the dative of manner, i.e. defining how something occurs. If this were the sense that Mark intended, then we would translate verse 2:8 as “*recognizing in his S/spirit*” and verse 8:12 “*dismayed in his S/spiri*.” which can be a reference to the Holy Spirit or his own spirit (i.e. as we would refer to a human being’s spirit) but can’t be separated. The Spirit co-works with the anointed Jesus.

**The Humanity of Jesus**

The entire Gospel of Mark demonstrates without doubt the real humanity of Jesus — he eats, sleeps, weeps, gets angry, and is compassionate, but also there is the involvement of the Holy Spirit with Jesus in his incarnational work. In these gospel contexts I would sense that Mark conveys the harmonious working of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Incarnation.

Mark’s Gospel contains twenty-two references to spirit, *πνεῦμα*  (pneuma) in eleven of sixteen chapters.  Chapter one alone contains the most (six) references to pneuma.  Of these twenty-two references, we may generally divide them into three categories.

1. First, there are six references to the “Holy Spirit,” or more generally “the Spirit,” each of which seems to be an obvious references to God’s Spirit ([Mark 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.8),[10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.10),[12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.12); [3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%203.29); [12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2012.26); [13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2013.11)).

2. Second are the ten references to “unclean spirits,” which are unambiguously presented as the source of either spiritual, psychological, or physical maladies and infirmities, and in some cases combinations of problems affecting their human victims on one or more of these levels simultaneously ([Mk. 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.23),[26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.26),[27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.27); [3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%203.11),[30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%203.30); [5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%205.2),[8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%205.8), [13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%205.13); [6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%206.7); [7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%207.25)).

The unclean spirits (**πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα, *pneumata akatharta***) are actually demons (***δαιμόνια*, *damonia***) which are also referenced ten times in Mark’s Gospel (verses [1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.32),[34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.34),[39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.39); [3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%203.15),[22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%203.22); [5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%205.18); [6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%206.13); [9:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%209.38); [16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2016.9),[17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2016.17))  and which can be seen to affect their human victims in the same or similar ways as the unclean spirits.  Therefore, I believe that the two terms may be used synonymously though they are never used side-by-side in a single verse in Mark. However, for the purposes of this section of the lesson I primarily call attention to the texts that call them “unclean spirits.”

3. Third, there are three references to what we might term the “human spirit,” or the spirit of a person in Mark’s gospel. In two cases, the person whose spirit is referenced is Jesus himself ([Mark 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%202.8); [8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%208.12)).  In the third and final case, Jesus seems to be making a general reference to the disciples’ spirits, or perhaps more generally to the spirits of people, as he contrasts their spirits with their flesh as a way of drawing attention to the source of human weakness in times of prayer, testing, and temptation ([Mark 14:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2014.38)). This particular reference suggests that there are material and immaterial components within the human identity which affect human behavior in different ways, and which may, depending on a variety of variables, lend themselves to either willingness or weakness when faced with certain difficulties, and which may at times be out of sync with one another.

**Summarizing the Spirit, the *pneuma***

To summarize these three categories of “pneuma” into a cohesive statement about all of them together, it seems that Mark’s references to “pneuma” indicate that…

There is first a divine Holy Spirit – who is God Himself. Second, there are also evil or unclean spirits (which are demons) that exist as conscious, personal, and volitional entities. Third, and finally, each human possesses his or her own spirit as well, which is unique to that person, and which is an integral part of their individual human identity.

It also seems from each of these references that the *pneuma* of God, or an unclean *pneuma*, or a human *pneuma* can be seen as the source or the receptor (or both, as the case may be) of a variety of phenomenon.  In the case of God, His *pneuma* is presented by Mark as the divine source of power ([Mark 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.8),[10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%201.10)), influence ([Mark 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.12)), messianic anointing ([Mark. 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%203.29)), inspiration ([Mark 12:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2012.36)), and help ([Mark 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2013.11)).  In the case of an unclean *pneuma*, Mark features them as a source or root cause of disquiet ([Mark 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.23)), suffering ([Mark 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%201.26); [7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%207.25)), depravity ([Mark 5:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%205.2-8)), and infirmity ([Mark 9:17-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%209.17-25)).

Finally, in the case of people, of which there are the fewest number of references in Mark, the human *pneuma* may be seen as a seat of supernatural perceptiveness ([Mark 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%202.8)), a source of great emotion ([Mark 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%208.12)), and as a repository of strength, which enables humans to overcome weakness in times of testing and difficulty ([Mark 14:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%2014.38)).

“Spirit,” within the New Testament, is frequently used as a reference to God Himself, especially when dynamic supernatural expressions of power, miracles, abilities, and influence are said to originate with Him ([Acts 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%201.8); [4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%204.31); [13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.2),[4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.4); [19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2019.6), [Heb 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202.4); [2 Pet 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet.%201.21), etc.).

**The Personality of the *pneuma***

The Holy Spirit, the *pneuma* of God, is not, however, presented in the New Testament as an impersonal force of power (such as the Star Wars idea of “The Force”). The pneuma of God is instead presented as a “He,” which is not a reference to gender, but rather an indication of personhood in contrast with non-personhood ([John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John.%2014.26)).

These insights into New Testament understandings of the Holy Spirit as God Himself help the reader of Mark’s gospel to understand that the way in which Mark features God working through Jesus was by the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, *pneuma* is used in other New Testament texts to refer to demons, and even Satan himself ([Eph. 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%202.2); [Acts 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.16)).

There are also references to *pneuma* that, as is the case in Mark’s gospel, have reference to human identity and even internal dispositions, attitudes, emotional responses, or motivations ([1 Cor. 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%204.21); [Eph. 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%204.23); [2 Tim. 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Tim.%201.7), [4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Tim%204.22)).

**Jesus the Anointed as the New Adam gives us discernment**

The New Testament understandings of work of the Holy Spirit featured in Mark’s gospel may help us to shed light on Paul’s reference to διακρίσεις πνευμάτων (*diakriseis pneumaton),* “*…the ability to distinguish between spirits*” in [1 Cor. 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%2012.10).  This provides a better understanding of two events in Mark’s gospel where the source of Jesus’ power was questioned ([Mark 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%203.22), [11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2011.27)).

In his description of various gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul presents one of them as the capacity to discern between spirits (*pneuma*) as a divine enablement that comes from God’s own Spirit.  Why would there be a need for such a divine enablement? It is not difficult to imagine a circumstance among early believers (and present-day Christians as well) where there is a pressing need to know:

“Does this phenomenon that we are witnessing originate from God’s Spirit, an evil spirit, or simply the human spirit, disposition, or attitude of this person we see before us?”

Rather than seeing this spiritual gift as the capacity to recognize, and then cast out a particular spirit (i.e., a “spirit of this” or a “spirit of that”), it might be more helpful to see this gift as the Spirit-birthed capacity to know the original source (*πνεῦμα, pneuma*) of a spiritual phenomenon when it might not be so obvious. By way of correlation, it seems likely from Mark’s Gospel that a lack of Spirit-enabled discernment (or spiritual blindness as the case may be) was possible even among those who witnessed the supernatural deliverance ministry of Jesus first-hand ([Mark 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark.%203.22), [11:27-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mk%2011.27-33)).

In these texts Mark is careful to include this lack of discernment on the part of Jesus’ accusers in his narrative. In these examples, Mark wants the reader to understand that Jesus was operating under the power of the *pneuma* of God (in contrast to an evil spirit, or even Satan himself), which also excludes any notion that he was functioning out of the charisma of his own human spirit – especially as it pertains to miracles, healings, casting out demons, and other supernatural manifestations in the life and ministry of Jesus.

**Verses on Discernment – A Glance**

Here is a quick glance at some of the NT verses that put forward basic sources for learning discernment:

[1 John 4:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+4%3A1&version=ESV) (brief)

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

[1 John 4:1-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+4%3A1-21&version=ESV) (extended)

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ...*

[1 Corinthians 14:1-40](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+14%3A1-40&version=ESV)

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up building and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. ...*

### [1 Corinthians 12:1-31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A1-31&version=ESV)

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ...*

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