

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”

by Witness Lee

In the Gospel of Mark Christ is presented as the Slave-Savior. In this Gospel the Slave-Savior bears the characteristics of His humanity mingled with His deity. The Lord’s humanity is lovely in its virtue and perfection, and His deity is magnificent in its glory and honor. As we go through the Gospel of Mark, we can see these aspects of Christ. The Lord’s humanity is revealed in its virtue and perfection, and His deity is revealed in its glory and honor. We need to be impressed with these aspects of the Lord. He is God Himself becoming a Slave to serve us by giving His life a ransom for us.

We need to consider the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior (1:1-13). Mark 1:1 says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The word *gospel* means glad tidings, good news (Rom. 10:15). The gospel is the service, the ministry, of the Slave-Savior as a Slave of God to serve His people. Matthew begins with the kingly generations of the King, Christ (1:1-17), Luke with a human genealogy of the Man, Jesus (3:23-38), and John with the eternal origin of the Son of God (1:1-2). Mark begins with the beginning of the gospel, the service of Jesus as a lowly Slave of God (Phil. 2:7; Matt. 20:27-28), not with the origin of His person. As a rule, the service, not the person, of a slave is notable.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

According to Mark 1:1, the gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This Gospel is a biography of the Slave-Savior, who was God incarnated as a Slave to save sinners. The compound title *Jesus Christ, the Son of God* denotes the Lord’s humanity as Jesus Christ and His deity as the Son of God. Both the Lord’s humanity and His deity were adequately expressed by His human virtues and divine attributes in His ministry and His move

for His gospel service, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

Although we realize that the word *gospel* means “glad tidings,” we need to consider more fully what the gospel actually is. Some of us who have been Christians for years may not yet realize what the gospel is. The gospel is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. Therefore, in order to know what the gospel is, we need to read the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and be enlightened concerning the revelation that is given there.

The Dispensations in the Scriptures

Bible teachers have pointed out that in the Scriptures there are seven dispensations. (Some teachers reduce this number to four.) These seven dispensations cover the Scriptures from Genesis 1 through Revelation 20. The first of these dispensations is the dispensation of innocence. This dispensation, in which there was no sin, covers only the first two chapters of Genesis.

Following the dispensation of innocence, we have the dispensation of conscience. This covers the time of man’s fall in Genesis 3 until the time of the flood.

After the fall, man was required to live according to his conscience. However, because man failed to do this, the third dispensation—human government—came as the replacement of the second dispensation. After the flood, God required that man would come under the control of human government because he failed to live according to his conscience. During this dispensation, different nations were raised up and governments were formed. This dispensation also ended in failure.

The fourth dispensation began with God’s calling of Abraham out of the fallen, corrupted, and rebellious

human race. In His calling of Abraham, God gave him a promise. Hence, the fourth dispensation is known as the dispensation of promise.

The first four dispensations were innocence, conscience, human government, and promise. It was not God's intention immediately to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham. Because of the intervening period of time, God decreed the law through Moses with the intention that the law would be used as a fold to keep His people in custody so that they would be preserved. The law may be compared to a fold in which sheep are kept during the night. The law given through Moses was such a fold for the keeping of God's chosen people. Therefore, the fifth dispensation is the dispensation of the law.

Following this dispensation, Christ came. Concerning the coming of Christ, John 1:17 says, "The law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." Because grace came through Jesus Christ, the sixth dispensation is called the dispensation of grace.

The dispensation of grace will last until the Lord's second coming, at which time He will set up the kingdom on earth. The kingdom will last a thousand years, and this period of time is called the millennium. The seventh dispensation, therefore, is the dispensation of the kingdom.

Through these seven dispensations God will fully accomplish His purpose. After the end of the millennium, everything will be renewed. Then there will be a new universe with a new heaven and a new earth and with the New Jerusalem as its center for eternity. In the New Jerusalem God and His redeemed people will enjoy eternal life.

As we have indicated, some Bible teachers prefer to say that in the Scriptures there are four major dispensations. Romans 5 says that from Adam to Moses there was no law. This long period of time, which includes the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, and promise, may be regarded as a single dispensation, the prelaw dispensation, or the dispensation before the law. Then, according to this understanding, the second dispensation, covering the time from Moses to Christ, is the dispensation of the law. The third dispensation is the dispensation of grace, lasting from Christ's first coming until His second coming. Finally, there is the fourth dispensation, the dispensation of the kingdom, lasting from the time of the Lord's second coming until the end of the thousand years. This understanding of the dispensations is easy to remember. In this view there are four dispensations: the dispensation before the law, the dispensation of the law, the dispensation of grace, and the dispensation of the kingdom.

The Contents of the Old Testament

The gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Now we need to ask what the contents of the Old Testament are. We may use three words to express the contents of the Old Testament: promise, law, and prophecy.

The Promises

The promise certainly covers the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, and promise. This includes the Old Testament from Adam until the giving of the law to Moses. The book of Genesis, in particular, is a book of God's promise.

The first promise given by God is recorded in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity / Between you and the woman / And between your seed and her seed; / He will bruise you on the head, / But you will bruise him on the heel." This promise was given immediately after the fall of man. Probably Adam and Eve were in fear and trembling because of their disobedience. But God gave them a marvelous promise. This promise was that a seed of the woman would come to bruise the head of the serpent. Although his heel would be bruised, the seed of woman would nevertheless crush the serpent's head. What a great promise this is!

The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. We know that Christ, the seed of woman, did come. He was born of a virgin as the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15. This One, the woman's seed, is the Slave-Savior presented in the Gospel of Mark.

Another promise, also concerning the seed, was given to Abraham. According to Genesis 22:17 and 18, the Lord promised Abraham,

I will surely bless you and will greatly multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

Here we have the promise that Abraham's seed would be a great blessing to all mankind, for all nations would be blessed through his seed.

Once again, this seed refers to the Lord Jesus. Concerning this Paul says in Galatians 3:16, "But to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one: 'And to your seed,' who is Christ." Christ was born as a descendant of Abraham, born of the chosen race. Therefore, He was the seed of Abraham.

As the seed of woman, Christ destroyed Satan and thereby solved the problem of the universe. The universe has been troubled by one thing—the serpent. In the Bible we can see the line of the serpent, or the development of the serpent. The serpent first appeared in Genesis 3. By the time of Revelation 12:9 this serpent, called the ancient serpent, has become a great dragon. According to the book of Revelation, this serpent, the devil, Satan, will be bound and cast into the abyss during the millennium (20:2-3). After the millennium, he will be released and will rebel once again. Then he will be cast into the lake of fire (v. 10).

The crucial point here is that the seed of woman promised in Genesis 3:15 is for dealing with this serpent. We need to proclaim this in our preaching of the gospel. However, rarely do today's gospel preachers point out that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is for the destruction of the serpent.

Concerning the Lord as the seed of woman destroying the serpent, Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since therefore the children have shared in blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the devil." In John 3:14 the Lord said that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man would be lifted up. The brass serpent lifted up by Moses signified the judgment of the old serpent. When the Lord was lifted up on the cross, He destroyed this serpent. Hence, as the seed of woman the Lord accomplished the destruction of the poisonous serpent by which mankind has been bitten and poisoned. Because we were poisoned by the serpent, his serpentine nature was injected into us. But the seed of woman became blood and flesh in order to destroy this serpent through His death on the cross. This is a great part of the gospel.

Whereas the seed of woman is for the destruction of the serpent, the seed of Abraham is for the blessing of God to be brought to us. The seed of woman terminates the serpent, and the seed of Abraham brings in the blessing of the Triune God. In Galatians 3:14 Paul speaks regarding this blessing: "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." According to this verse, the blessing is the Spirit. What is this Spirit? The Spirit is the consummation of the Triune God. When we receive the Spirit, we receive the Triune God and have Him as our blessing. Furthermore, this blessing is our eternal life. The Spirit equals the Triune God, the Triune God is eternal life, and eternal life is the blessing we receive.

Now we can see more fully what the gospel is. The gospel is the fulfillment of two great promises: the

promise concerning the seed of woman for the destruction of the serpent and the promise concerning the seed of Abraham for bringing in the blessing of the Spirit, who is the consummation of the Triune God as eternal life to be our blessing.

The Law and the Prophecies

Before these promises were fulfilled, God gave the law in order to keep His chosen people in custody. During the time God's people were kept in the fold of the law, God raised up prophets. This means that after the promises, we have the custody of the law, and during the period of this custody God gave prophecies to confirm the promises.

We have emphasized the fact that in Genesis 3:15 we have the promise concerning the seed of the woman. In Isaiah 7:14 we have a prophecy that confirms this promise: "Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel." Other prophecies also are confirmations of the promises given by God during the dispensation of promise.

The Fulfillment of the Promises and Prophecies and the Removal of the Law

We have seen that first God gave promises. Next He decreed the law for the preservation of His chosen people, and then He sent prophets to utter prophecies to confirm the promises. Eventually, the promised One, the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham, came. Not only did He come, but He was also initiated.

Here we use the word *initiated* not in the sense of originating something, but in the sense of ushering someone into a new sphere. Hence, in our particular usage *initiation* equals inauguration. We may use the inauguration of a president as an illustration. After the election, the president is known as the president-elect. Later, on inauguration day, he is inaugurated into the office of the presidency. This inauguration is his initiation into the presidency. This illustrates the Lord's being initiated into His ministry.

The Lord Jesus was born as the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham to be our Slave-Savior to destroy the serpent and bring in the Triune God as the blessing of eternal life. However, at the age of thirty it was necessary for Him to be initiated into His ministry. The priests in the Old Testament were initiated at the age of thirty into the priesthood, and in a similar way the Lord, also at the age of thirty, was initiated into His ministry. Therefore, as the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus was born as the seed of woman and as the seed of Abraham and was later initiated into His ministry.

The gospel is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the custody of the law. This means that the gospel is the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies concerning the unique seed, the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham. Furthermore, the gospel cancels, annuls, and removes the custody of the law. Now we are no longer dependent on the Old Testament promises, the law, and the prophecies, for Christ, the unique seed, has come. This seed is the fulfillment of all the precious promises. Because we have Him, all the promises are fulfilled. As the fulfillment of the promises, He is also the fulfillment of the prophecies, which were given to confirm the promises. Furthermore, with Him is the removal of the custody of the law. Therefore, the unique seed is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and the removal of the custody of the law.

The coming of Christ was the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies and the cancellation of the law. The law has been removed, and God's chosen people no longer are under its custody. The law may be compared to a sheepfold, a place where sheep are kept at night. When day dawns, the sheep may come out of the fold. Likewise, because Christ has come as the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies, it is no longer necessary for God's chosen people to be under the custody of the law. In a positive sense the law was a custodian, but in a negative sense the law was a bondage, a slavery. But now the law, along with the promises and the prophecies, is over. The seed of woman has destroyed the serpent, and the seed of Abraham has brought in the blessing of the Triune God. Furthermore, this One has removed the law. Now we are no longer in the dispensation of the law, the promises, or the prophecies, for we have Christ.

If we see this, we can understand the significance of what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter proposed that three tabernacles be made—one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for the Lord Jesus. This suggestion was offensive to the heavens. Therefore, Matthew 17:5 says, "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" Then Matthew 17:8 says, "When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone." Moses represented the law, and Elijah represented the prophets. Christ, the unique One, is everything. He is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law. This means that He is the full replacement of the entire Old Testament. This is the gospel, the good news, the glad tidings. Praise the Lord for the gospel! Praise Him that Christ is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law!

If we understand what the gospel is, we shall realize that James made a great blunder in Acts 21 and in his Epistle in bringing the believers back to the law. On the one hand, James preached Christ; on the other hand, he still kept the believers under the law, in the old fold, which God had given up. The very thing that the Lord removed was brought back by James. We need to be impressed with the fact that in the gospel we no longer have the dispensation of the law, the promises, and the prophecies. Instead, in the gospel we have the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law.

Today many Christians have only a superficial understanding of the Scriptures. They may know the terms in the Bible, but not touch the depths of the riches of these terms. Let us use the word *gospel* as an example. Instead of understanding this matter in a superficial way, we need to see that the gospel is the fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies and also the removal of the law. For this reason, eventually the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration saw no one except Jesus only. No longer did they have the promises, the prophecies or the law; they had the Lord Jesus as the seed of woman and as the seed of Abraham. He is our Slave-Savior, and actually He Himself is the gospel.

The Fulfillment of the Types

The gospel is also the fulfillment of something else—the fulfillment of the types in the Old Testament. Therefore, in the gospel we have the fulfillment of the promises, the prophecies, and types.

With the Lord's word concerning the seed of woman in Genesis 3:15 we have a promise. But in the Lord's action of making coats of skins and clothing Adam and his wife, we have a type (v. 21). Abel's sacrifice, a sacrifice which was accepted by God, is another type. The lamb offered by Abraham in place of his son is also a type. Other types in the Old Testament are the Passover lamb, the manna in the wilderness, the cleft rock with the flowing river, and the tabernacle. Furthermore, people like David and Solomon are also types. The gospel is the fulfillment of these types. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, pointed to Him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Hence, Christ is the fulfillment of the type of the lamb. In 1:14 we have this word: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This indicates that Christ is the fulfillment of the tabernacle.

The gospel, then, is the fulfillment not only of the promises and prophecies, but also of the types. Furthermore, the gospel is also the removal of the law. This is a full definition of the gospel. **AFC**