



### THE HISTORICAL JESUS XIII:

# The Gospel of Mark: Jesus as the New Joshua

THE GOSPEL OF MARK opens: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . .” (Mark 1:1). The word “Christ” means “Messiah” (the “Anointed”), while the name “Jesus is the common Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua.”<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew, “Joshua” means “Yahweh [is] salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

The Tanakh mentions at least four Joshuas. In writing his Gospel, however, the author of Mark regarded Joshua, the son of Nun, as the exemplary predecessor of Jesus (Joshua) of Nazareth. Joshua, the son of Nun, was a faithful spy, loyal minister, and successor of Moses in support of the old covenant. His accomplishments are recorded in the book of Joshua. Mark’s purpose in writing his Gospel was to

---

*Mark’s purpose in writing his Gospel was to metaphorically portray Jesus of Nazareth as the new Joshua who would lead his people to the new covenant and the new Promised Land.*

---

metaphorically portray Jesus of Nazareth as the new Joshua who would lead his people to the new covenant and the new Promised Land, just as the old Joshua had led the chosen people with the old covenant and to the old Promised Land.

In the book of Joshua, the children of Israel arrived at the bank of the Jordan and waited to cross the river. As soon as the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant touched the river, a breach in the waters occurred: “. . . [T]he waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap . . . and those that came down toward the sea of the plain . . . failed . . .” (Joshua 3:16). The priests then stood on the bed of the river while the people passed over. In the Gospel of Mark, John the Baptist began his

ministry by baptizing people in the waters of the Jordan. When Jesus (Joshua) of Nazareth heard this, he left home to join his cousin, John, at the Jordan. Meanwhile, John declared to the assembled people, “There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose” (Mark 1:7). Soon thereafter John baptized Jesus. Although the waters of the Jordan did not part, “the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove . . . [descended] upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:10, 11).

On the one hand, after crossing the Jordan and meeting with the captain of the Lord’s host, Joshua, the son of Nun, led the war to conquer and possess the land for his people. His army destroyed the cities of Jericho and Ai. He defeated “the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;” and then he apportioned land to each of the 12 tribes of Israel (Joshua 24:11 ff.). On the other hand, Joshua of Nazareth traversed the land with his 12 disciples. He did not conquer or kill the people. Rather, he fed the hungry, healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead and stilled the storm.

On the one hand, when the children of Israel were settled, Joshua, the son of Nun, called the people together and “made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem” (Joshua 24:25). “And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in

---

*Mark emphatically stated that Joshua of Nazareth would ultimately fulfill the new covenant when “the Son of man . . . cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

---

Timnathserah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash” (Joshua 24:29, 30). On the other hand, when Joshua of Nazareth had fulfilled his ministry, he observed the Passover with his disciples. Shortly thereafter he was betrayed by Judas and arrested and tried on the charges of blasphemy and treason. Then he was crucified by the existing power structures. Finally, “Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Mark 15:37, 38). Joshua of Nazareth thus fulfilled the old covenant. Next, early in the morning on the first day, he rose from the dead and appeared to the women and later to his disciples. “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). Thus the new covenant was inaugurated. Furthermore, Mark emphatically stated that Joshua of Nazareth would ultimately fulfill the new covenant

[when] the Son of man . . . cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. . . .  
[S]ome of them that stand here . . . shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. — Mark 8:38 – 9:1.

. . . but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time . . . and in the world to come eternal life. — Mark 10:30.

For when they shall rise from the dead, they . . . are as the angels which are in heaven. — Mark 12:25.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. — Mark 13:26.

. . . I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. — Mark 14:25.

. . . [Y]e shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. — Mark 14:62.

The first Joshua began his ministry with the breach in the waters of the Jordan. He ended his ministry with his burial at Timnathserah, where he undoubtedly rests today. The second Joshua began his ministry with a breach in the heavens and the voice from heaven that said, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). He ended his ministry at Calvary with a breach in the Temple veil that portrayed the heavens.<sup>3</sup> “And when the centurion, which stood over against him,” saw the rending of the veil, “he said, Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

## Conclusion

The author of Mark thus portrays Joshua of Nazareth as the metaphoric counterpart of the first Joshua. Both the book of Joshua and the Gospel of Mark concur that “Yahweh is salvation.”

---

*The book of Joshua and the Gospel of Mark concur that “Yahweh is salvation.”*

---

---

## Endnotes

1. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. David Flusser, “Jesus.”
2. *The Free Dictionary*, s.v. “Joshua,” at [www.thefreedictionary.com/Joshua](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Joshua).
3. See David Ulansey, “The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic ‘Inclusio,’” at [www.well.com/user/davidu/veil.html](http://www.well.com/user/davidu/veil.html): “In other words, the outer veil of the Jerusalem temple was actually one huge image of the starry sky! Thus, upon encountering Mark’s statement that ‘the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom,’ any of his readers who had ever seen the temple or heard it described would instantly have seen in their mind’s eye an image of *the heavens being torn*, and would immediately have been reminded of Mark’s earlier description of the heavens being torn at the baptism.”