

Who is Jesus? Names of Jesus in Mark's Gospel

Mark is a story that carries us on a journey to discover: Who is Jesus? The disciples will be asked this question throughout the book and we will see how they come to understand that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God, who must die and be raised.

Son of God

Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1)

- **At the beginning** the audience is given advance notice of the information that the characters will struggle with throughout the Gospel.¹
- Some **old Greek Manuscripts** only say “Jesus Christ” and lack “Son of God.”² But a few lines later (v. 11), the Voice from Heaven calls Jesus “Beloved Son” and there are no manuscripts that are different here
- The title **“Son of God”** is a slap in the face of Roman Emperors who called themselves “sons of the divine” (*divi filius*).³
- **Angels and Messengers** were called “sons of God” in the Old Testament (Gen 6:2-4; Job 1:6; 38:7; Dan 3:25).

¹ Garland, *Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 183.

² Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 62.

³ Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT 2, 61.

Son of God

- **Unclean Spirits** (1:24; 3:11; 5:7) — the demons themselves knew who Jesus was and were deeply afraid. They both “fell before him.” Another place a demon cries out “I know who you are *Son of the Most High God*” which seems to be an attempt to “gain power” over Jesus. Finally there is a place where a demon calls him “the Holy One of God” or the “Holy One *from* God.”
- **The Son Doesn't Know the Hour** (13:32) — here Jesus himself talks about the “Son” not knowing the hour when God will send His Son back. Jesus does not explicitly say “I am the Son” but this is the only place in Mark he uses that word.
- **Son of the Blessed** (14:61-62) — the High Priest asked Jesus if he is the “Christ, the Son of the Blessed” to which Jesus says yes.
- **Roman Centurion** (15:39) — after Jesus gave himself up to die, a Roman Centurion standing nearby exclaimed “*surely* this man was the “Son of God.”

Beloved Son

“You are my Beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (1:11)

“This is my Beloved Son; listen to him!” (9:7)

- **A Voice from Heaven** — God himself speaks from heaven and calls Jesus his “beloved Son” at Jesus’s baptism (1:11) and when Jesus is transfigured (9:7). Because it is God who gives him this title, we should pay very close attention to it and give it more weight than what people call Jesus.
- **Old Testament Context**
 - a. *Abraham and Isaac* (Gen 22:2) — an angel tells Abraham to take his “only son” (Heb.) or “beloved son” (Grk.) and sacrifice him.
- **Vineyard Parable** (12:6) — Jesus alludes to the fact that he is the “son of the vineyard owner” that the “wicked tenants” had killed to take over the vineyard.

Christ and Messiah

Christ or Messiah?

- **Christ** (*Christos*) — literally means “the anointed one.” It has a strong royal connotation and is tied to kingship.
 - *God’s Anointed Kings* — the Greek Old Testament uses the word “Christ” to talk about God’s anointed kings, especially David (1 Chr 16:22; 2 Chr 6:42; Ps 132:10; 1 Sam 2:10). David even calls Saul a “Christ” (1 Sam 24:6); Cyrus the Persian is God’s anointed to conquer Israel (Isa 45:1).
 - *God’s Anointed Priests* — see Lev 4:5.
- **Messiah** (*Messias*) — “Anointed One.” It does not mean “Savior.” Messiah is the Hebrew/Aramaic word for Christ. It does not appear in the book of Mark, but John tells us that Messiah = Christ (John 1:41; 4:25). In all the places “Christ” appears in the OT it reads “Messiah” in Hebrew.

The Christ in Mark

“You are the Christ” (Peter in 8:29).

*“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?
And Jesus said, ‘I am...’” (14:61)*

*“Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come
down from the cross that we may see and
believe” (15:32)*

- **Peter’s Confession** (8:29) — Mark begins the Gospel calling Jesus “the Christ” or “the Anointed One” or “the Messiah” but it would take Peter *eight whole chapters* to figure this out himself (8:29).
- **High Priest & Jesus** (14:61) — asks Jesus at his trial whether he is the Christ. Jesus says “I am” and then proceeds to tell about his second coming.
- **Mockers** (15:32) — at the crucifixion scene, several bystanders who will mock Jesus use his Christological Titles but don’t really mean it.

Jesus of Nazareth

- Basically is Jesus’s name.
 - Mark calls him this (1:9)
 - Demons call him this (1:24)
 - People called him this (10:47; 14:67)
 - Angels call him this (16:6)
- Jesus the man was “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Son of David

- **Blind Bartimaeus** (10:47–48) — Bartimaeus hears that “Jesus of Nazareth” is passing by and so he cries out “Son of David have mercy on me!”
- **Is Christ the Son of David?** (12:35) — most people expected the “Christ/Messiah” to come from David’s offspring. This passage contains a tricky interpretation of Scripture based on Psalm 110:1 “The Lord Said to My Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’” Jesus explains that David says this Christ is “lord” so then the Christ cannot be the offspring of David.

Son of Man

*“The Son of Man has authority on earth to
forgive sins” (2:10)*

*“And he began to teach them that the Son of
Man must suffer many things” (8:31)*

- This is the most frequently used title by Jesus to **refer to himself** in third person (2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41, 62).
- **No one else uses this title**, not even Mark as the Narrator.
- Factors predominately in his **predictions of death** (8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

Son of Man in the Old Testament

1. **A Human** (Num 23:19; 2 Sam 7:14; Job 16:21; etc)
 - Moses tells us that God is “not a son of man

that he should change his mind.” Bildad the Shuhite calls a son of man “a worm.”

2. **A Prophet** (Ezek 2:1; Dan 8:17) — in Ezekiel’s visions the angelic figure always calls him “son of man” (93x!)
3. **Daniel’s Son of Man** (7:13) — Daniel has a vision of someone “coming with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man” and this one “comes to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.” When Jesus talks about “Son of Man” this is the intended reference.

Son of Man’s Authority

1. **Authority to Forgive Sins** (2:10) — while on earth, the Son of Man (Jesus) has authority to forgive sins. This is why he forgave the paralytic and forgave the thief on the cross.
2. **Lord of the Sabbath** (2:28) — Pharisees critique Jesus for eating on the Sabbath and then Jesus cryptically reminds them that “the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath.”

Son of Man’s Suffering

- Son of Man forms part of Jesus’s *passion predictions* (see 10:33)
- Son of Man was *predicted to suffer* (9:12)
- Son of Man to be *handed over* to men to die, buried, rise (9:31)
- Son of Man will *give his life* in service to many (10:45)

Son of Man’s Return

- He will return *with judgement* and be ashamed with those who are ashamed of him (8:38).⁴
- He will return in *clouds with great power and glory* (13:26).

- He will be *seated at the right hand of Power* (Psalm 110:1) and *coming with the clouds of heaven* (Mark 14:62).

Jesus is Lord

“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (5:19).

- **Who is Lord?** Whenever Jesus uses the title “Lord” (*kyrios*) it is intended to link his identity to the Old Testament God of Israel (esp. 11:13).⁵ Lord is both God *and* Jesus.⁶
- **Lord in the Old Testament** — in the Old Testament *kyrios* replaces the divine name YHWH. Jesus himself assumes this role in 5:19 and later tells his disciples to tell the man with the colt “the Lord has need of this.”
- **Master** (2:28; 12:9; 13:35) — sometimes the word carries the sense of “master” over something or “Lord” in a feudal sense (2:28). In the parable of the vineyard the master of the vineyard is called “Lord” and also it is said “stay awake for you do not know when the master of the house comes”
- **Title of Respect** (7:28) — one other exception is the Syrophenician woman who calls Jesus “lord” or “sir” but perhaps as a title or respect.
- **One Who Comes in the Name of the Lord** (11:9) — an indirect reference appears when Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowd cries out “Hosanna (praise God!), blessed is the one who comes in the name of the *Lord*.”

⁴ Edward Adams, “The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark’s Gospel,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56 (2005): 49.

⁵ Daniel Johansson, “*Kyrios* in the Gospel of Mark,” *JSNT* 33 (2010): 102–3

⁶ Johansson, 105.

Parabolic Titles

The Physician

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners.” (2:17)

The Sower

“The sower sows the word...” (4:13)

The Shepherd

“He saw a great crowd and they were like sheep without a shepherd.... He commanded them to lie down on the green grass” (6:34,39)

“It is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd (Jesus) and the sheep (disciples) will be scattered.’” (14:27)

Stone the Builders Rejected

- After telling the *Parable of the Vineyard / Wicked Tenants* in 12:10 Jesus cites Ps 118:22 and calls himself the “stone the builders rejected” which becomes marvelous or the cornerstone.
- The builders are the Jews and they would naturally reject him as “unfit to be part of our building.”

Teacher and Rabbi

- **Teacher** (*didaskalos*) — Jesus was undoubtedly a teacher throughout his ministry, but this is a title he did not necessarily embrace.
- Many people called him teacher including disciples and opponents (4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1).
- Only self reference as Teacher is in 14:14

- **Rabbi** (9:4; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45) — this is the Aramaic word meaning “my teacher” or “my master.”⁷

A Prophet

- Examples (6:4, 14–15; 8:28).
- A title of misunderstanding usually given when people think Jesus is one of the resurrected prophets of old (Elijah, Moses).
- Jesus does not fully embrace this title but likens himself to a prophet when he says “a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown” (Mark 6:4).

King of the Jews

- This is unusual one. Pilate is the one who uses this title and Jesus somewhat affirms it, “You have said so.” (15:2, 9, 12)
- Soldiers call him this to mock him (15:18)
- A sign nailed to the cross read “King of the Jews” (15:26)
- Mocked on the cross and called “King of Israel” (15:32)

⁷ BDAG, 902.