

## WHO IS THAT MASKED MAN? Read Mark 1:9-11 and 15:37-39

As a child, I enjoyed watching a weekly TV drama entitled, “The Lone Ranger.” At the conclusion of each episode, the hero, dressed in white and wearing a black mask over his eyes to cover his identity, galloped off on a white horse with his friend Tonto. Invariably the townsfolk, who had been saved by his valiant efforts, asked one another, “Who is that masked man?” The reply was always, “He’s the Lone Ranger!” You might say that Mark, in his gospel, purposed to answer that question for Jesus who, while on earth, was God the Son, masked as a human.

Mark was so earnest in his endeavor to identify Jesus, that he placed brackets around his gospel in order to reveal the truth of His identification. As noted in previous “Keys to Dynamic Bible Study,” brackets are like identical bookends surrounding a psalm, narrative, or book. These parallel words and phrases that envelope a text, challenge us to read the enclosed text with this information in mind. Hence, as we read of Joseph’s enslavement under Potiphar followed by his unfair imprisonment, we must take note of the brackets which frame the story. The author’s words at both the beginning and the end of the text, inform the reader that “the LORD was with Joseph” (Gen. 39). Without this knowledge, we might be tempted to think otherwise.

Brackets around Mark’s gospel work in the same way. At the Gospel’s opening we meet the baptizer named John. As Jesus “was being **baptized** by John in the Jordan,” the “heavens **ripped apart**” and a voice from the heavens announced, “You are **My beloved Son**” (Mark 1:9-11). Even though this proclamation that Jesus is God’s Son is made at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus seems to be masked to the ones to whom He has come, to the disciples and the Jewish people. A surprising assortment of characters, however, do realize who Jesus is.

The first are the demons who, at Jesus’ presence, shout out, “You are the Son of God!” (Mk. 3:11). Second, at the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin the High priest asks Jesus if He is claiming to be “the Son of the Blessed One” (Mk. 14:61). When Jesus acknowledges His right to be called the Son of God, the High Priest began “tearing his clothes” and accusing Jesus of blasphemy (vv. 62-64). The third character to declare that Jesus is the Son of God is a Gentile—the centurion “standing right in front of Him” at the cross (15:39). After the “veil of the Temple was **ripped apart**” the centurion affirms, “Truly this man was the **Son of God!**” (vv. 38-39). This scene, and the scene at the baptism of Jesus, form the brackets around the gospel. At both ends of the gospel there is something that is “**ripped apart**” and Jesus is declared to be the “Son of God.” There is even a “**baptism**” at the crucifixion! Mark, earlier, presents us with a clue so that we can read the crucifixion story as a baptism.

In Mark 10:35-38 Jesus’ disciples, James and John audaciously request that “We may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” Jesus responds negatively: “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be **baptized** with the **baptism** with which I am **baptized**?” Jesus calls His crucifixion a cup to be drunk as well as a baptism.

Thus, at the beginning of the gospel there is a baptism, a ripping apart of something, and an announcement that Jesus is God’s Son. And, at the end, these three elements are pointedly duplicated in order to form brackets around the book of Mark and, thereby,

proclaim Jesus' deity—He is the Son of God. This revelation is crucial to Mark's gospel because "Without a divine Savior, Christianity is no better than any other pagan religion" (As Athanasius wrote in 400 AD). Our masked man is therefore revealed by Mark as "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).