

Mark



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Personal Study Guide • Fall 2023 • CSB

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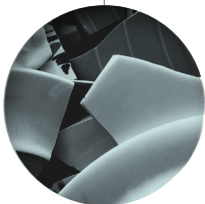
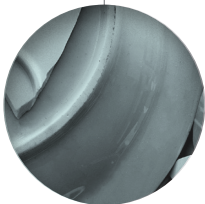
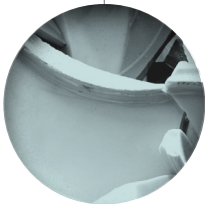
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*Evangelistic Emphasis



MEET THE WRITER

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FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

I've heard it said, "If you really want to get to know someone, drive across the state of Texas together in the summer without air conditioning. You'll see what they're really like." It's true. We get a front-row seat to a person's character and priorities when we spend time together, especially when challenges arise creating a less-than-comfortable experience. Difficulties reveal our communication skills and our ability to persevere through trials, among other qualities. Experiences like this can forge a strong, tested relationship, taking us beyond a superficial friendship.

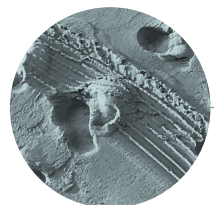
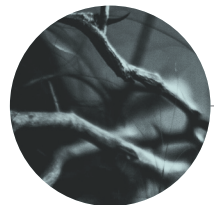
The Gospel of Mark is a fast-paced account of Jesus's earthly ministry detailing numerous events and experiences He encountered. Mark gives us a vivid depiction of who Jesus is, what He is like, and what He came to do. We get to know Jesus in the pages of Mark's narrative. In the very first verse, Mark identified Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus's divine nature is a major emphasis for Mark (1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62). We also see Jesus's humanity in this Gospel (4:38; 5:30; 8:12; 13:32). Jesus experienced hunger, tiredness, and a whole range of emotions, just like we do. Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension conclude this Gospel account, irrefutable evidence of Jesus's identity.

Jesus is both fully divine and fully man. He is God's Son and the long-awaited Messiah. Mark's narrative affords us an up-close view of this truth—and it is such good news. It is the foundation of our relationship with Him.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

amber.vaden@lifeway.com



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Beelzebul [bee EL zee buhl]—a reference to a Philistine deity (Baal-zebub, see 2 Kings 1:2). By the first century, the Jews used it as a name for Satan (Mark 3:22).

Centurion [sen TYOOR ee uhn]—an officer in the Roman military who commanded one hundred soldiers (Mark 15:39).

Decapolis [dih KAP oh liss]—region on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, the name was derived from ten Greek cities largely inhabited by Gentiles (Mark 7:31).

Denarii [dih NEHR ih igh]—plural of denarius; one denarius was equivalent to a day's wage (Mark 6:37).

Ephphatha [EF uh thuh]—Aramaic expression that means “be opened” (Mark 7:34).

Gethsemane [geth SEM uh nih]—from a Hebrew word that means “press of oils”; a garden located outside of the city of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley on the lower slope of the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:32).

Salome [suh LOH mih]—wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John (Mark 16:1; Matt. 27:56); possibly the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as alluded to in John 19:25; one of the women who helped prepare Jesus's body for burial.

Sidon [SIGH duhn]—city located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee, about twenty miles north of Tyre, and an important port of trade; Jesus spent time in the region (Mark 7:24,31); Paul visited the place on his way to Rome (Acts 27:3).

Syrophoenician [sigh roh-fih NEE shuhn]—combination of Syria and Phoenicia, the two areas were joined as one district under Roman rule (Mark 7:26).

Tyre [TIGHR]—city located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Galilee, twenty miles from Sidon, and an important port of trade (Mark 7:24); some scholars believe Tyre was more populous than Jerusalem at the time Jesus visited there (Mark 7:24); Paul spent seven days in Tyre after his third missionary journey (Acts 21:3-4).

BIBLE READING PLAN

SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Mark 1:1-8
- ☐ 2. Mark 1:9-13
- ☐ 3. Mark 1:14-20
- ☐ 4. Mark 1:21-28
- ☐ 5. Mark 1:29-38
- ☐ 6. Mark 1:39-45
- ☐ 7. Mark 2:1-12
- ☐ 8. Mark 2:13-17
- ☐ 9. Mark 2:18-22
- ☐ 10. Mark 2:23-3:6
- ☐ 11. Mark 3:7-12
- ☐ 12. Mark 3:13-19
- ☐ 13. Mark 3:20-30
- ☐ 14. Mark 3:31-35
- ☐ 15. Mark 4:1-9
- ☐ 16. Mark 4:10-20
- ☐ 17. Mark 4:21-25
- ☐ 18. Mark 4:26-34
- ☐ 19. Mark 4:35-41
- ☐ 20. Mark 5:1-20
- ☐ 21. Mark 5:21-43
- ☐ 22. Mark 6:1-6
- ☐ 23. Mark 6:7-13
- ☐ 24. Mark 6:14-20
- ☐ 25. Mark 6:21-29
- ☐ 26. Mark 6:30-44
- ☐ 27. Mark 6:45-56
- ☐ 28. Mark 7:1-23
- ☐ 29. Mark 7:24-30
- ☐ 30. Mark 7:31-37

OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Mark 8:1-10
- ☐ 2. Mark 8:11-21
- ☐ 3. Mark 8:22-26
- ☐ 4. Mark 8:27-29
- ☐ 5. Mark 8:30-33
- ☐ 6. Mark 8:34-38
- ☐ 7. Mark 9:1-7
- ☐ 8. Mark 9:8-13
- ☐ 9. Mark 9:14-18
- ☐ 10. Mark 9:19-24
- ☐ 11. Mark 9:25-29
- ☐ 12. Mark 9:30-32
- ☐ 13. Mark 9:33-37
- ☐ 14. Mark 9:38-41
- ☐ 15. Mark 9:42-50
- ☐ 16. Mark 10:1-12
- ☐ 17. Mark 10:13-16
- ☐ 18. Mark 10:17-22
- ☐ 19. Mark 10:23-27
- ☐ 20. Mark 10:28-31
- ☐ 21. Mark 10:32-34
- ☐ 22. Mark 10:35-40
- ☐ 23. Mark 10:41-45
- ☐ 24. Mark 10:46-52
- ☐ 25. Mark 11:1-11
- ☐ 26. Mark 11:12-14
- ☐ 27. Mark 11:15-19
- ☐ 28. Mark 11:20-26
- ☐ 29. Mark 11:27-33
- ☐ 30. Mark 12:1-12
- ☐ 31. Mark 12:13-17

NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Mark 12:18-27
- ☐ 2. Mark 12:28-34
- ☐ 3. Mark 12:35-37
- ☐ 4. Mark 12:38-40
- ☐ 5. Mark 12:41-44
- ☐ 6. Mark 13:1-2
- ☐ 7. Mark 13:3-8
- ☐ 8. Mark 13:9-13
- ☐ 9. Mark 13:14-23
- ☐ 10. Mark 13:24-31
- ☐ 11. Mark 13:32-37
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- ☐ 30. Mark 16:9-20

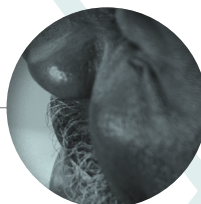
BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

- Most Bible scholars view Mark as the first of the four Gospels and believe both Matthew and Luke drew from Mark's Gospel for their writings.
- The Gospel of Mark is anonymous, though early Christian tradition and many Bible scholars today assert that it was written by John Mark.
- John Mark was the son of a widow named Mary, in whose house the church sometimes met (Acts 12:12-17), and the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10).
- Though we do not see Mark's name in his Gospel, many think his presence appears in the incident in which a young man, following Jesus after His arrest, was captured by Roman soldiers. As the soldiers grabbed his garment, the young man slipped from it and ran away naked (Mark 14:51-52).
- Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5) but turned back during the journey (13:13). This caused Paul and Barnabas to part company (15:36-41). Later, Mark accompanied Barnabas on a separate journey (15:39) and helped Paul during his closing days of Roman imprisonment. Paul said of Mark, "he is useful to me in the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).
- Many Bible scholars believe the content of Mark's Gospel is based on the recollections of the apostle Peter. Peter referred to Mark "my son" in 1 Peter 5:13.
- Mark likely wrote his Gospel from Rome around the time of Peter's martyrdom. The Gospel's attention to Peter's failures and the ongoing Christian persecution under Emperor Nero during that period support that general time frame. Also, the reference to Mark in 1 Peter 5:13 puts him at Rome with Peter.
- Internal evidence suggests Mark wrote for Gentile believers in Rome. His explanation of Jewish customs suggests that he wrote for Gentiles who were unfamiliar with Jewish practices (Mark 7:3-4). Mark sometimes used Latin equivalents to explain Greek expressions (12:42; 15:16). He translated Aramaic expressions so his Roman readers could understand them (3:17; 5:41; 15:34). He also quoted rarely from the Old Testament, which would have been more compelling for a Jewish audience than for Gentiles.
- Mark likely wrote this Gospel to encourage believers facing the Roman persecution instigated by Emperor Nero.

See the article "Mark: the Man and the Gospel" for further background information (p. 127).

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue to the Gospel (Mark 1:1-13)
- II. Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (Mark 1:14-8:21)
- III. On the Way to Jerusalem (Mark 8:22-10:52)
- IV. A Week in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-16:8)
- V. Appendix: Jesus's Appearances (Mark 16:9-20)





Introduced!

Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

MARK 1:1-13

All your relationships have something in common. In one way or another, you were introduced to that person by someone, either another person or yourself. With family members who are older than you, it may be difficult to recall the exact moment of the introduction. Nevertheless, every relationship has some type of an introduction because each has a beginning point. Being introduced to someone has the capacity to change your life forever.



**What introductions do you remember most clearly?
How did the introduction impact the nature of that relationship?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

MARK 1:1-13


Mark’s Gospel was the first gospel to be written. Scholars generally affirm this Mark to be synonymous with John Mark who is mentioned on multiple occasions in the New Testament (Acts 12:12; 13:5,13; 15:37-39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5:13). Although he initially failed in his missionary service, he was eventually restored to a place of helpful and fruitful ministry.

Mark reflects themes relevant to the time in which it was written. Persecution of followers of Christ at the hands of the Roman empire was emerging. Believers would have felt threatened, and Mark wrote to address the situation.

The subject of the wilderness was one way Mark sought to encourage believers undergoing hardship. Frequently in the Old Testament, the wilderness was where people encountered God. People came to John the Baptist there to hear the challenge of the word of God and a call to repent (Mark 1:4-5).

Mark likely intended this wilderness reference to be a reminder of Israel being confronted with the challenge of wholeheartedly trusting God after the exodus. In the wilderness, no natural resources exist for human sustenance. Only the supernatural provision of God can deliver and sustain. Christians were helpless to defend themselves before the power of Roman persecution, and Mark’s reference to the wilderness and the provision of God would have spoken to their experience.

Perhaps Mark’s most important recurring theme is the identity of Jesus as the Son of God (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32). This description serves as “bookends” to this Gospel (1:1; 15:39). Knowing that Jesus is God’s Son provides a sure foundation for life, even when it becomes challenging.

 **As you read Mark 1:1-13, locate all the occurrences of “wilderness.” What significance did the wilderness have in the history of Israel (Deut. 8:2-6,15-16)? How might that relate to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PROPHECY (MARK 1:1-3)

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. ³ A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!

VERSE 1

Mark’s initial reference to *the beginning* echoes Genesis 1:1. The coming of *Jesus Christ* marked a new, decisive moment in history. While connected to the past, as seen in the next two verses, the coming of Christ to earth was and remains unparalleled.

The statement of this monumental arrival is described as *the gospel* (literally, “good news”). Believers sometimes need clarification on the nature of the gospel. Mark wrote “a Gospel,” and it communicates “the gospel” to us. A summary of the gospel could be stated like this: it is the declaration of all that God did through His Son, Jesus Christ to reconcile us back to Himself.

Part of this declaration is that Jesus is *the Son of God*. Mark used this phrase to communicate the divine nature of Jesus. Jesus is eternally God’s Son in His very nature.

 In what way was the coming of Jesus a “beginning”?

VERSES 2-3

The Old Testament predicted a messenger would prepare the way for the Messiah. Mark affirmed this by referencing Exodus 23:20, Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1. Mark obviously had a strong confidence in the authority of the written word of God, as did the Lord Jesus Himself. We know that Jesus is the Messiah because the Bible tells us so.

It is easy for modern Christians to lose sight of how much time passed before the Old Testament prophetic promises of the Messiah actually came to fulfillment. We live in a world of instant feedback, and our digital devices providing us answers to questions immediately. However, God rarely provides His people with such similar immediate gratification.

While God’s eternal Son did come into a moment of time in history, it was the moment of His choosing, not our preference.

 **How did John’s fulfillment of prophecy validate the role of Jesus as Messiah?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Read Exodus 23:20; Isaiah 40:3; and Malachi 3:1. Take some time to read the verses before and after each of these verses to understand the context in which they were written. Jot down some notes to gain a deeper understanding of how Old Testament prophecy is linked to John the Baptist’s preparing the way for Jesus. Read Mark 1:1-13 and consider this question: What do these passages teach us about John the Baptist and him preparing the way for the Lord?

PREPARED (MARK 1:4-8)

⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶ John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, “One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

VERSES 4-5

John's ministry was one of preparation, helping people see how they needed to respond to Jesus. His preaching attracted large numbers of people, but it was no feel-good message drawing the crowds. Rather, it was a message of **repentance**, calling on people to confess their **sins** so that they might receive **forgiveness**.

Their penitent attitude was to be expressed through baptism. While not the same type of baptism we see in Acts that portrayed the death and resurrection of Jesus, it was still a significant spiritual moment. Baptism was a ritual for proselytes—non-Jewish people who wanted to become worshipers of Yahweh. Therefore, large numbers of people from the **Judean countryside** and **Jerusalem** being baptized was no small matter. It was a sign of spiritual renewal among the people of God.

The word **wilderness** occurs four times in this week's lesson passage. Think about this wilderness in terms of a desert. Nothing grows there. No water is available. It is quite a dangerous place. This is the place where John performed his work, as well as the place to which Jesus would be driven by the Holy Spirit (v. 12). Perhaps the reason why the work of John took place in such a location was to remind people of the need for complete dependency on God.

The **Jordan River** held spiritual significance in the history of Israel. The people of God crossed over it to enter the land of promise. Moving into the water of the Jordan was an act of faith in the days of Joshua. The same was true of those who received the baptism of John. It required the faith to believe that the message being preached was true.

***“This is how we prepare for a spiritual renewal,
by examining our hearts to see if they are
undivided in their loyalty to Christ.”***

VERSES 6-8

The attire of John, a **camel-hair garment** and **a leather belt**, called to mind the Old Testament prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). As a prophet of the Lord, he confronted the idolatry found among the people of God in his era. The work of Jesus in our lives is thwarted by idols of the heart, when we love other things more than we love God. This is how we prepare for a spiritual renewal, by examining our hearts to see if they are undivided in their loyalty to Christ.

Part of John's preaching included the promise, ***One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me***. John was a charismatic figure with a compelling personal presence. Even years later in the book of Acts

some still followed his teaching (Acts 19:1-4). The possibility existed that those who came from Judea and Jerusalem would become fixated on him, not the coming Messiah. So John took pains to ensure that the spotlight would be directed toward Jesus.

John's attitude was unusual among people in general, much less of someone to whom great crowds were coming. Of this One to come, he said: ***I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals.*** Untying the strap of someone's sandals was one of the most menial tasks that a slave would perform. John felt he was not even worthy to be a slave of the Messiah and to perform the most menial task for him. His attitude was one of complete humility and submission.

 **Why is humility crucial in offering an effective witness to Jesus?**

John's mission was to introduce people to Jesus. He did this by contrasting what he could do for them with what Jesus the Messiah would do for them. His baptism of them was with ***water***, but Christ would perform a baptism for them of the ***Holy Spirit***. It would purify a person internally, changing them through spiritual power.

“Like John, believers are tasked with pointing others to Jesus.”

Like John, believers are tasked with pointing others to Jesus. This requires a humility of spirit and heart that realizes how much greater and more important He is. Being a witness to Jesus requires certain attitudes, such as a focus on crucial issues over peripheral ones, a willingness to defer to others when needed, and a long-term, eternal perspective.

 **How did John's message set the stage for the earthly ministry of Jesus?**

BAPTIZED (MARK 1:9-13)

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰ As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a

dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.” ¹² Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

VERSES 9-11

Brevity is a characteristic of Mark’s Gospel; it is succinct and to the point. Nothing is said about the birth or childhood of Jesus. Mark simply affirms that He ***came from Nazareth in Galilee***. Another example is the account of Jesus’s baptism. Mark simply recorded that Jesus ***was baptized in the Jordan by John***.

Because Jesus ***came up out of the water***, we can assume He had been immersed in it. In that moment, He ***saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove***. The reference to the heavens being torn open calls to mind the description of the temple curtain in Jerusalem being torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). In both places, an affirmation of the divine Sonship of Jesus follows.

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See Mark 3:11; John 1:1-3.)

At the moment of Jesus’s completed baptism, ***a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”*** These words from heaven are a compilation of two Old Testament references: Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. The former refers to the Messiah, to God’s Son, while the latter points to the Servant of the Lord, a title Jesus took for Himself (Matt. 12:14-21). One denotes glory, while the other denotes suffering. Even from His baptism, Jesus was affirmed as the Son who would suffer on our behalf.

The Father’s approving words of the Son seem to echo joy and satisfaction. As earthly parents, we understand the beaming pride we feel over our children when they behave in a stellar, upright fashion. The Father expressed His joy over His Son Jesus at His baptism. Acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God—agreeing with the words spoken from heaven in verse 11—brings satisfaction and joy to our hearts as well.

VERSES 12-13


The experience of Jesus’s baptism transitioned into a time of testing. ***Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness***, where Jesus


was ***tempted by Satan***. This period of temptation lasted ***forty days***, a period of time often associated with key events in the Scriptures (see Ex. 24:18; 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Acts 1:3). Some see this as representative of Israel's forty years in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2). If this is correct, then we can rejoice in the fact that where they failed, Jesus succeeded. While the fact of Jesus's triumph is an example for us upon which we can draw, this is but a derived application of it. By not yielding to temptation, Jesus demonstrated His sufficiency as our Savior and as the Son of God.

Every test in life is a temptation, and every temptation is a test. When we go through difficulties, we are susceptible to sinful choices. The times in which we are tempted to do evil are the greatest test of our intimacy and relationship with God. Prior to His temptation, and before He performed an act of ministry or power, Jesus heard the affirmation of His Father of His Sonship. Remembering that we belong to God as His adopted sons and daughters strengthens us to remain true to His commandments.

***“Every test in life is a temptation,
and every temptation is a test.”***


The wilderness is challenging not only because of its inhospitable conditions but also its isolation. Jesus endured the temptations of Satan alone, without any human support systems. However, He was not completely alone, for both ***wild animals*** and ***angels*** were present with him. It may be that the *animals* were a potential threat to Him while the angelic beings were protecting Him. Since Mark was likely writing to believers whose lives were threatened by persecution, there would be comfort in knowing that divine aid would be given to them in their time of need.


 **How should God's declaration of Jesus as the Son inform a person's declaration of faith in Jesus?**

 **In what ways does your belief in Jesus as the Son of God bring joy to your life?**

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can know with confidence that Jesus is the Messiah.
- + Believers can point others to Jesus as the Son of God.
- + Believers find joy in acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God.

 **Discuss as a group some reasons you have confidence in Jesus and His sufficiency for your life. What are some traditions your group can establish in your small group meetings that would nurture and grow this confidence?**

 **Reflect on the life of John the Baptist and identify characteristics found in his life that would help to point other people to Jesus. How could you begin to incorporate these characteristics in your life? Pick one characteristic and develop at least one action step that you can take this week to begin building it into your life.**

PRAYER NEEDS
