

discover

MARK

Book One:
The Beginning of the Gospel



STUDY GUIDE

discover

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The Beginning of the Gospel



CoffeeBreak





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Maps: Matthew P. Faber

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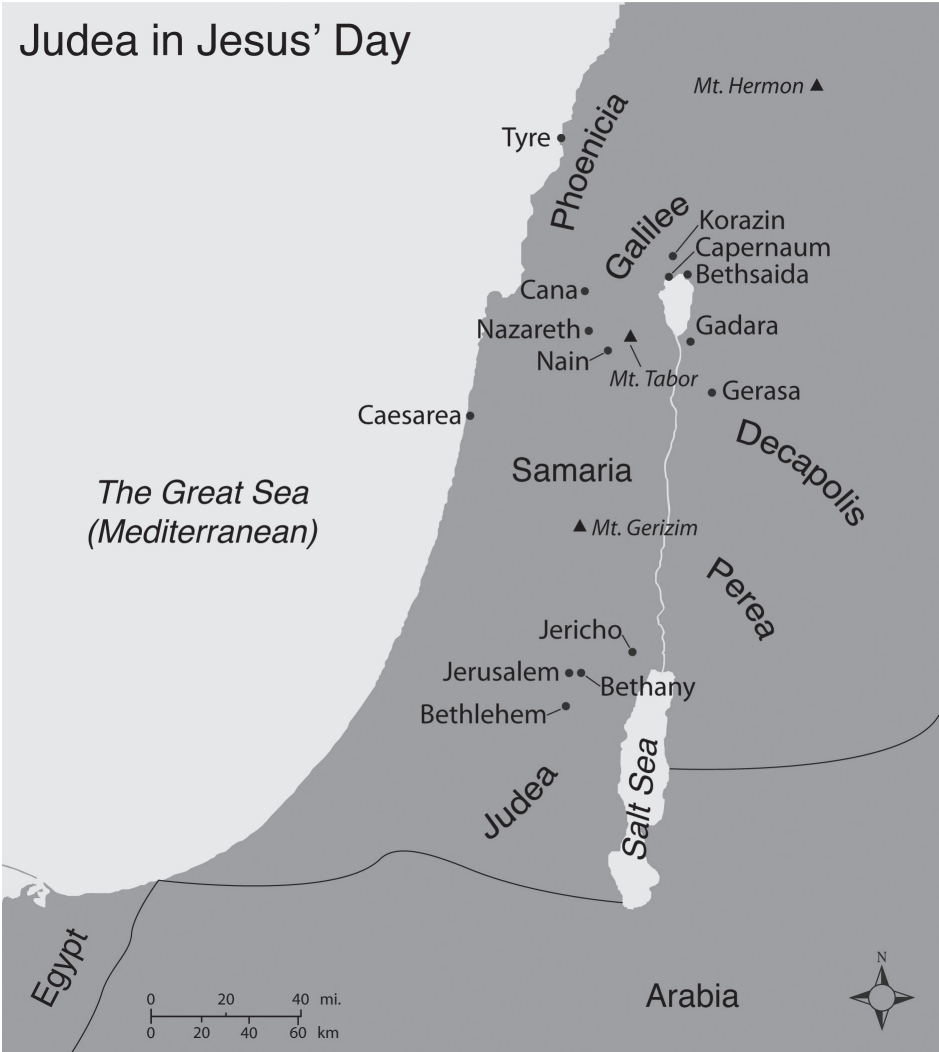
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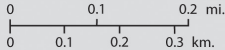
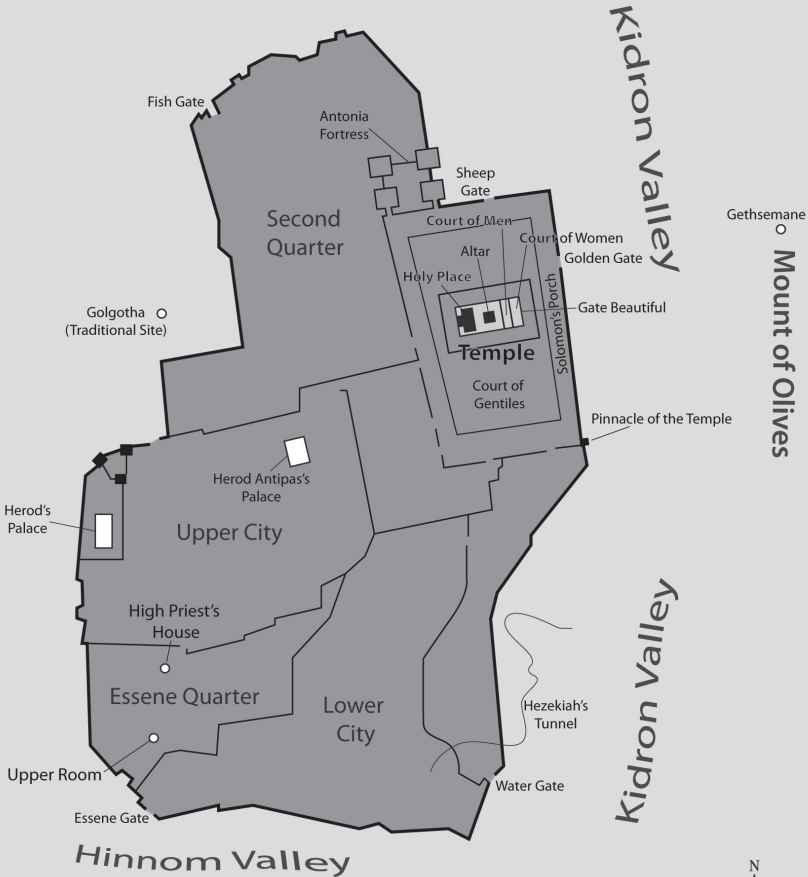
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Judea in Jesus' Day



Jerusalem in Jesus' Day



City Boundary in the Time of Christ



How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you “do it yourself” and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers’ thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1.

.....

Read through each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

Step 2.

.....

Answer the questions in the “What does it say?” section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

Step 3.

Fill in the “Conversation” boxes with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the “Conversation” boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?

Step 4.

Have fun talking with others about what you have discovered!

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

1 **Isaiah 1**
Judgment and Justice

Getting Started
The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

What Does It Say?

1. Isaiah 1:1
What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

2. Isaiah 1:2-9
What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

3. Isaiah 1:10-15
In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to *atone for* ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10; 9:26-28).

New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and

Let's talk about ...

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New Testament Snapshot

The New Testament contains twenty-seven books. The first four books are called the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word *gospel* means “good news.” These biographical books tell the story of Jesus. The writers of the gospel books included two of the twelve disciples: Matthew (also called Levi) and John. Luke was not one of the twelve disciples, but he was a historian and physician who accompanied the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. John Mark, the writer of the gospel of Mark, also was not one of the Twelve but followed Jesus as part of a larger group. He was the nephew of Barnabas, an early church leader. Mark was a source of a disagreement between Barnabas and Paul because Paul did not feel Mark should accompany them on a missionary journey. The reason was that Mark had turned back from a previous journey (Acts 15:36-41). Years later, however, Paul mentioned Mark’s being in Rome with him (Colossians 4:10) and called him a “fellow worker” (Philemon 24.) Some scholars believe the apostle Peter gave Mark much of the information that appears in Mark’s writing. Peter calls Mark “my son” (1 Peter 5:13), which can be interpreted as the two having a close relationship. More information about the gospel of Mark as well as about John Mark himself will be discussed below in the introduction to this study.

The only books included in the New Testament are books written by an apostle of Jesus, books written by someone who knew an apostle personally, and books with a connection to an apostle. The writings in the New Testament are known as the Christian part of the Bible because each of the writings focuses on the life and teachings of Jesus, the Messiah. The New Testament also includes thirteen letters written by the apostle Paul. Those letters alone make up almost a quarter of the New Testament. The other letters present were written by Peter, James, John, and Jude. The author of Hebrews is unknown, but it was included in the New Testament because its content corresponds to the other letters and appears to have been written by an apostle or by someone close to an apostle. The final book, Revelation, was written by John, and is described as apocalyptic because it contains a futuristic description of when Christ will return.

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Many scholars believe that Mark is the earliest gospel book because it was written no later than A.D. 70. This means that the information contained in Mark was written only a generation after Jesus' life on earth. Many people who knew Jesus and heard his teachings were still alive. They could vouch for the truth of what Mark wrote in his gospel account.

John Mark is mentioned in several places within the New Testament as working alongside the apostles. You can find his name mentioned in Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24; and 1 Peter 5:13. Some believe that the young man described in Mark 14:51 is actually John Mark, the author of the book of Mark. A significant detail (other than that he fled naked out of fear) is that he left behind a "linen garment." The fact that his garment is made of linen possibly indicates that John Mark comes from a wealthy family who would have access to linen. Some believe his home may have been a meeting place for Jesus and his disciples. For that reason, Mark may have been an eyewitness to some major events such as the Last Supper.

The gospel of Mark is an action-packed narrative of Jesus' life and ministry. Unlike the accounts of Matthew and Luke, which include genealogies and stories about Jesus' conception and birth, Mark begins simply by declaring that Jesus is "the Son of God."

Some scholars believe that Mark may have written his account for Roman Christians. There are several places in the gospel where Mark translates certain Aramaic words that would seem to be directed to a non-Jewish audience unfamiliar with Aramaic, the language spoken in Palestine at that time. Mark also emphasizes Jesus' power over creation, evil, religious leaders, and other forces, which would have been encouraging for the persecuted Christians in Rome. In this study, you will have the opportunity to understand this historical audience. You will also learn more about Jesus' own life and what he claimed about himself. Throughout, you will also explore the claim he makes on your life.

Note: When words in the glossary first appear in the text, or in a question, they will be bolded. In addition, extra verses that may add to the study of the lesson are found at the end of each lesson under "For Further Study."

Additional Notes to the Leader: At points it may be helpful to consult parallel accounts in other gospel books to answer the discussion questions more fully. For example, with Mark 9:12-13, when Jesus discusses “the Elijah who has come,” it is helpful to read the Matthew account, where it states the disciples understood that he was referring to John the Baptist. On the other hand, Matthew 8:28 indicates that there were two Gadarene men possessed by demons while Mark 5:2 indicates there was only one such man who lived among the tombs; it will probably not be fruitful to bring this discrepancy into the discussion. However, it will be helpful to be prepared with the information in the leader guide should someone in the group bring it up.

Be aware that there are places in Mark where a verse or verses either have been left out or are in italics. If a group member is reading a translation other than the 2011 NIV, they may have a verse that others might not have. Explain that that verse or those verses are not in the best and oldest manuscripts (the ones closest to when Jesus lived), and that is why they are omitted or placed in italics.

You should also be aware that some of the lessons are quite long. The decision was made to split the Mark study into two books with ten lessons each, as many leaders requested. The original study covered twenty-six lessons. A subsequent version covered only twelve lessons and had to omit much of the material. Do your best to cover as many questions as possible. If time is limited, you can ask a group member to give a brief synopsis of a particular story. All of the verses in Mark are covered, though, so groups may choose what they will cover more thoroughly in each lesson.

Glossary

Abba: The Aramaic term for Father. Jesus uses it as a term of endearment for his heavenly Father.

Abomination of Desolation: A description given in Daniel 9:27 to indicate that the temple would be desecrated. This happened when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

Abraham: The father of the Hebrews, the people of Israel. He is called the “friend of God” in Genesis.

apostle: Literally a messenger; someone who is sent out to preach the gospel.

baptism: Baptism with water, as performed by John the Baptist, is an outward sign of repentance and is a physical sign of God’s renewed covenant. Often described as “dying and rising with Christ,” Christian baptism symbolizes cleansing, renewal, and adoption by God. In most churches, baptism is done either by sprinkling or by immersion in water.

Beelzebul: “Lord of Heaven” in Greek, this refers to the prince of demons: Satan. This is a play on words (a near homonym) from the Philistine god Ekron who was called “Lord of the Flies” (Baal’Zebul). The Pharisees mockingly referred to Satan this way.

blaspheme: To misuse God’s name or to speak about God in an irreverent way.

Capernaum: A fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus spent a significant part of his ministry. It was also the central village for the homes of Jesus’ disciples Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew.

centurion: A Roman officer responsible for 100 soldiers.

Caesarea Philippi: The home of Herod Philippi. It is also the location of a temple built to Caesar Augustus where he was worshiped as a god.

chief priests: Chief priests are chosen by certain ruling families and would meet with the council (Sanhedrin) to discuss important matters.

covenant: An agreement between two parties, such as the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 17. Obedience to God’s covenant leads to his blessing; disobedience leads to his curse.

David: The greatest king of Israel. He was an exceptional military leader as well as a musician and poet who wrote many of the psalms. God promised him that the Messiah would come from his royal line.

elect: Anyone chosen by God for salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior.

Elijah: A revered Old Testament prophet who was faithful to God. He spoke to God's people and did God's work in Israel. Elijah is also significant in that he did not die (2 Kings 2:11) but was taken straight into heaven. John the Baptist is considered to be similar to Elijah because he dressed like him and ate similar foods. The Old Testament indicates that an Elijah-like person would prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus.

fasting: Abstaining from food for a period of time, often as an expression of repentance that is accompanied by prayer.

flogging: Roman flogging was not an ordinary whipping. Many prisoners died under the Roman flog, which often had sharp bone or metal fragments tied to the ends of long leather strips. Sometimes called scourging.

Galilee: The northernmost province of Israel in the first century; the location of Jesus' home and of the homes of most of the disciples.

Gentiles: A term used to describe all people who were not Jews.

Gethsemane: The lower section of the Mount of Olives.

good news: The literal translation of the Greek word *euangelion*, often translated as "gospel." It can also mean "good message."

Hallel psalms: Psalms that begin or end with "Hallelujah" or "Praise the LORD." Psalm 111 to 117 (with the exception of Psalm 114) are Hallel psalms.

Herod: A number of Herods were appointed as rulers over Israel under the Roman Empire. Some are mentioned in the Bible. The Herod referred to in Mark is Herod Antipas, ruler over two provinces: Galilee and Perea. Herod the Great attempted to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus' birth. Herod Agrippa interviewed the apostle Paul.

Herodians: A Jewish political party who supported the Herodian dynasty and helped keep them in power. They were often embroiled in bitter disputes with the Pharisees and Sadducees over the political future of Israel.

Holy Spirit: One of the three persons of the triune God. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus). They are three persons in one being, united as God. Christians often refer to the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. In Mark's gospel, the Holy Spirit is responsible for the manifestation of God's power, influence, anointing, and guidance in the world.

impure spirit: A term used in Mark to describe an evil spirit or demon that can take possession of or control a person.

Isaiah: One of the major prophets in the Old Testament. He is quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet, and he prophesied about Jesus' identity and work at least 700 years before Jesus was born.

Jerusalem: The capital and main center of religious worship in Israel. The temple was built there.

Jesus: The main focus of Mark's gospel account, Jesus is both the son of Mary and the Son of God, being the physical incarnation of God as a human being (*incarnation* refers to God's becoming fully united with humanity in the person of Jesus). Jesus is also referred to as the second person of the Trinity (see **Holy Spirit**). The name *Jesus* literally means "to rescue, to deliver" and is often interpreted as "the Lord saves," "salvation," and "he saves."

John the Baptist: In a sense the last Old Testament prophet, John called the Jewish people to repentance before Jesus' ministry began. This was done to prepare them for the coming Messiah. The baptisms he performed took place in the Jordan River. He was killed by Herod Antipas.

law: In the New Testament, this refers to the law given to Israel through Moses. This includes both moral and ceremonial laws; other laws added by religious authorities are often designated as oral law.

legion: A Roman military unit made up of several thousand men.

leprosy: Almost any skin disease in ancient Israel; having a skin disease would designate one as being "unclean," meaning they could not freely participate in the daily life of their own society.

Levi: Also called Matthew; a former tax collector whom Jesus called as a disciple. He is the apostle who wrote the gospel of Matthew.

Messiah: The Messiah is the one chosen by God to be the savior of his people. This Hebrew term means "anointed one," designating kings,

priests, and others as having been chosen by God. In Greek, the word is translated as “Christ.” The terms are interchangeable.

Moses: The Old Testament prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and received the Ten Commandments.

Mount of Olives: A mountain just east of Jerusalem that is frequently mentioned in the New Testament.

nard: A very expensive perfume from India. It was often kept in alabaster jars and worth a laborer’s annual wages. It was used to anoint Jesus on at least two occasions.

Nazareth: A small, rural town located in the northern province of Galilee; it has significance as both the home village of Mary and where Jesus grew up.

parable: A short story designed to illustrate or teach a spiritual truth with the use of word pictures.

Passover: Probably the most important feast of remembrance in Jewish tradition. It commemorates the tenth plague that led to the Israelites’ release from slavery in Egypt. God commanded the Israelites to put lambs’ blood on the doorframes of their homes as a sign for the angel of death to pass over their homes. The Egyptians lost their firstborn children and animals, leading to Pharaoh’s decision to free the Israelites.

Pharisees: An elite group of Jewish religious leaders whose positions were often based on family lineage and who emphasize precise obedience both Torah Law and traditional law. The term “Rabbi” is most commonly associated with the Pharisees. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council in Israel. Differing from the Sadducees, Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body, a final judgement, and eternity in either heaven or hell. They also held to the idea that the Law could be accurately reinterpreted by reason for new times and social challenges. It is also notable that the Pharisees were the main group who were actively expecting a Messiah to come, thus their extreme interest in the claims and actions of Jesus.

Pontius Pilate: The appointed Roman governor over Judea from A.D. 26-36. He had the final authority in ordering an execution.

prophets: God’s special representatives in the world. The prophetic office is often characterized by teaching how to bring life back into proper relationship with God’s commands, accurately predicting the future, and declaring God’s judgment. There are about thirty-five

named prophets in the Bible, including Moses, Deborah, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

repentance: In Hebrew, the word for repentance refers to both a sincere sorrow for sin and turning back to a committed relationship with God. In Greek, it signifies a change in one's heart and mind. Mark reflects both of these meanings in his usage of the word.

Sabbath: According to Genesis, God concluded the acts of creation by setting aside the seventh day as a day of worship, rest, and renewal. The Sabbath is the last day of the week for Jews and an important day for worship, where work is forbidden, beginning at sundown on Friday and ending at sundown on Saturday. Christians celebrate the Sabbath principles on Sundays because this is the day on which Jesus was resurrected.

Sanhedrin: This group of about 70 men made up the ruling council of Israel. It was composed of elders, members of religious parties, and teachers of the law. They were only allowed to rule on religious and ethical matters. It was the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to die.

Sadducees: A Jewish religious party based primarily in the ruling families of Jerusalem. It is notable for their discussions with Jesus that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They only accepted the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) as authoritative, any rule created outside of that did not need to be followed for religious purposes. A number of the Sadducees were part of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council in Israel.

Satan: This name means “adversary” or “accuser” (see Zechariah 3:1). Satan is an evil spiritual being described in many ways throughout the Bible—for example, as the destroyer, the tempter, the god of the world, the father of lies, and a roaring lion. Satan can also disguise himself as “an angel of light.” Satan tempted humanity to sin and wants to destroy God's kingdom.

scribes: A well-trained group of men who studied the law and made declarations about it. They were known as lawyers, and more commonly as “teachers of the law.”

Sea of Galilee: An inland freshwater lake in northern Israel, about 15 miles from Nazareth.

synagogue: Local Jewish worship centers in most towns and cities in Israel. While synagogues were a common feature throughout Israel, there was only one temple, located in Jerusalem. Many synagogues

were oriented to Jerusalem, indicating the importance of the city and the temple.

Sidon: An ancient city of Phoenicia north of Tyre. In Jesus' day it was in a Gentile area. Today it is located in Lebanon.

sin: Understood as “missing the mark” in thought and action. Sin is a violation of what God requires; therefore it needs to be forgiven and removed from a person's life through Jesus' righteousness, death, and resurrection.

Son of God: A term used by Jesus to describe his relationship to God the Father. Jesus rarely referred to himself this way, but when he did, people understood that he claimed equality with God the Father. This was also a provocative title for Jesus to claim because it was the name currently in use by Rome's imperial cult for Caesar.

Son of Man: A term that Jesus often used to refer to himself. This title was used by Old Testament prophets in reference to the coming Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14). In the original Hebrew, the title means “The Human One” denoting someone human or someone who becomes human descending from heaven and reuniting the people of God with their Creator. By using this title, Jesus was claiming to be the divinely appointed Messiah.

teachers of the law: See **scribes**.

temple: The magnificent set of buildings initially built by Solomon and designated as God's residence in Israel. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and later rebuilt by the leaders of Israel (Ezra 3-7), and then later expanded by Herod the Great. In Jesus' time, beyond the religious significance of being the central place for worship, the temple also remained a powerful cultural symbol of God's standing with Israel in the world.

temptation of Jesus: The temptation of Jesus took place in the Judean wilderness. There Satan promised Jesus great earthly power and an escape from human suffering and death if Jesus would worship him. Satan tried to convince Jesus to abandon his Father's plan for Jesus to die to save God's people from their sins. But Jesus refused; he did not give in to Satan's will.

Torah: The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are the Torah. In Judaism, these five books contain all of God's Law as given by Moses, the contents of which are sometimes referred to as Torah Law, or just Torah. For

important notes on the usage of the Law at the time of Mark's gospel, see the notes on Pharisees and Sadducees.

Tyre: An ancient seacoast city in a Gentile area. Today it is located in the country of Lebanon.

wilderness: In Scripture this term refers to any desolate, wild place uninhabited by people. Often it was an actual desert but was not limited to that. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years. It is seen as a place where they are tested, but also as a place where God meets with his people.

zealot: A term used to describe people who opposed the rule of Rome and wanted Israel to be independent. Some of these people were militant and were expecting a messiah who would bring emancipation from Rome through violent revolution; others despised the Romans but sought independence for Israel through political means.

1 Mark 1:1-20

The One More Powerful

Getting Started

As you begin this study, take note of Mark's style. The gospel of Mark is concise and direct. He often only offers a brief explanation of events, just as he begins **Jesus'** story at the start of Jesus' three-year ministry. Although Mark's account is the shortest gospel book, it still contains all that is needed to learn about Jesus' life and ministry.

What Does the Bible Say?

1. Mark 1:1

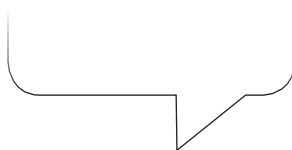
How does Mark introduce his book? What do you expect will follow?

Let's talk about...

2. Mark 1:2-6

Note: In Bible times, a monarch about to make a royal journey would often send an officer ahead of him to level and mend the highways he needed to use.

- a. Why does Mark begin his book by quoting an Old Testament **prophet**?
How is this quote connected to **Jesus**?



b. What do we learn about **John the Baptist**? Where is he? (Consult the map at the front of your book.)

c. What kind of **baptism** is John doing, and who is being baptized?

Note: Baptism or ceremonial washing was practiced in the Old Testament. The washing symbolized a spiritual “cleansing.” Those who were converts to Judaism had to go through a ceremonial washing. In a sense they were being cleansed from their “Gentleness.” It would have been unusual for Jewish people to feel they needed to be baptized.

d. What does the statement “all the people of **Jerusalem** and the whole Judean countryside went out to John the Baptist” tell us about John and his message?

e. What are some possible reasons for John’s clothing and diet? (Refer to **2 Kings 1:7-8** and the glossary entry for **Elijah**).

For conversation . . .

5. Mark 1:12-13

What happens after Jesus is baptized?
Why might this be important before
Jesus begins his ministry?

For discussion ...

6. Mark 1:14-15

Note: John the Baptist was put in prison by Herod. What happens to John will be covered in Mark 6. John the Baptist has prepared the way; now it is time for Jesus to begin his ministry.

What is Jesus' main message? How is this different from John's?

7. Mark 1:16-20

a. What does Jesus do as he begins his ministry?

b. What do you think Jesus meant when he tells them that now they would fish for people?

