

discover

MARK

Book One:
The Beginning of the Gospel

LEADER GUIDE

discover

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The Beginning of the Gospel



CoffeeBreak





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Maps: Matthew P. Faber

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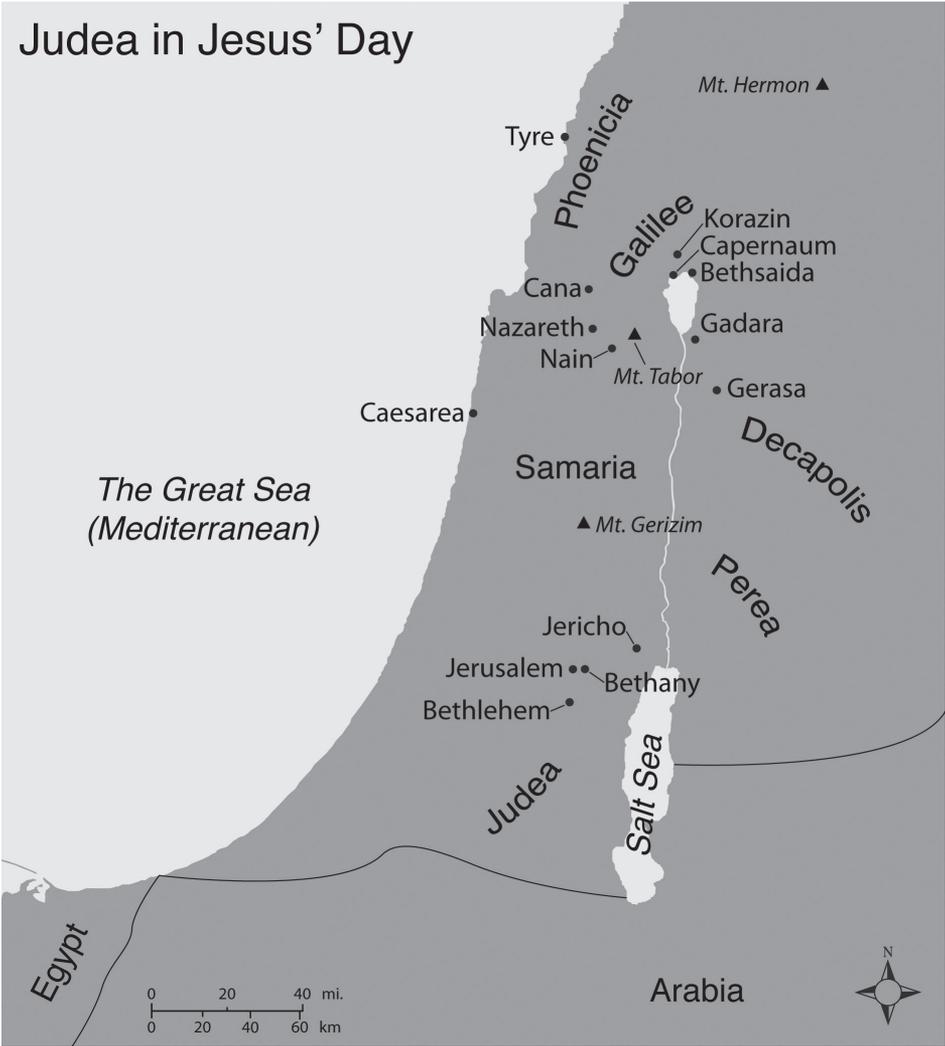
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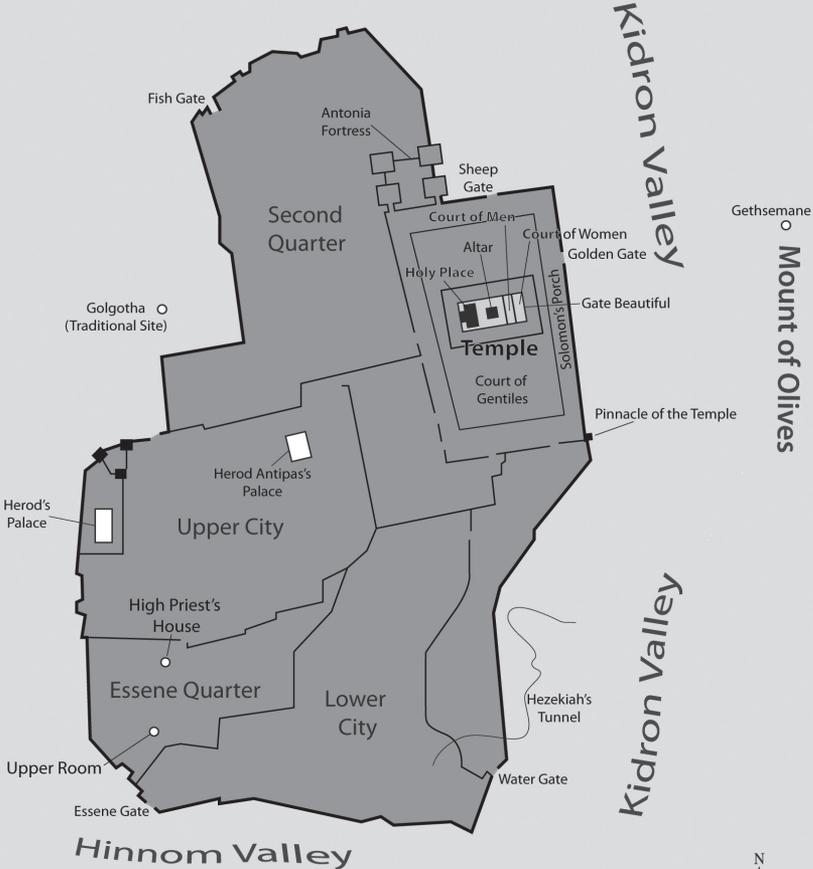
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Judea in Jesus' Day



Jerusalem in Jesus' Day



City Boundary in the Time of Christ



To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

Bible discovery leaders help people discover together what the Bible says and means. They are not teachers but guides, facilitators, and conversation leaders.

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader by coming alongside you in your own personal work. Always answer the study guide questions first, using the suggested basic steps of preparation. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

We encourage you to study ahead of time so that you do not have to rely on the leader guide during your Bible study group meeting. You don't want to give the impression that the leader guide is an answer book. The answers are in the Bible; you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

This leader guide aims to include helpful ideas from a number of sources. Ideally you should use this information *only after* you have studied the text yourself. Read the passage and first ask your own questions. Allow God to speak to you through his Word. Look for answers in the text. What was God saying to the original readers and listeners, and what is he saying to us today? Consult the glossary if there are names and places with which you are unfamiliar.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

The "Conversation" boxes in the study guide are for extra questions. The text of the leader guide includes many extra questions that you may wish to use to help build the group's conversation around the text. We also suggest that you adapt the questions in the booklet or write your own questions as needed. You know the interests, personalities, and needs of your group members. You know what they will be curious about or when they will want to dig deeper into a Scripture passage. Put those extra conversation-building questions in the "Conversation" boxes and use them during your group time to help get dialogue started.

Also, encourage group members to put their own questions and discoveries in the “Conversation” boxes. By doing this, they will also be preparing for the group discussion. You might want to start a group discussion by saying, “What is in your ‘Conversation’ box? What would you like to talk about together?”

The Opening Share Questions provided in each leader-guide lesson are optional. Use them if your group needs time to relax or rebuild relationships. As leader, be sure to adapt the questions to fit your group!

If you are able to prepare and pray thoroughly before each group session, you will be able to lead without frequent references to your notes. This will free you to be more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit during your group discussion time and to focus more effectively on your facilitation and leadership responsibilities. You will also be able to keep better eye contact and listen more carefully.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others into truth by using questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. 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.

Use the comments in this leader guide to help the discovery process of your group. You are leading a conversation on the text, and you want to help guide the conversation so that group members will hear the “big ideas” from the text rather than getting bogged down in small details. Avoid using this leader material to “teach” the lesson.

Assume that you will not use all the information supplied in this leader guide. Ask questions that will help you get at what the text says and means. The questions in italics are the main questions. There are additional bulleted questions designed to clarify and assist in answering these main questions. The bulleted questions in bold print expand on the thoughts found in the main question, or they might simply rephrase the main question to help encourage a response from group members. *Do not feel you have to ask all of these questions.* Use only those that are helpful for your discussion. Use questions as well as comments in the leader guide only when it is helpful to guide the discussion and answer

some questions that may arise. *Do not bring up information simply because you find it interesting.* Introduce it only if it will help the members of your group. In other words, tailor the questions to your particular group members. If some people in your group are new to the Bible, make certain that you help to clarify information. But do not use extra background material that may add confusion. Feel free to delve a bit deeper with groups who may be familiar with the Bible. However, keep in mind the evangelistic purpose of this study and make certain that you are being most sensitive to members who may be new to Bible study and may not yet be believers in Christ.

Should differences of opinion arise, allow members to disagree. Your purpose is not to win arguments or even to defend a particular idea. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of your group members.

Help to Apply

Ask God to guide you to ask application questions throughout the lesson when it seems appropriate for your group. As leader, pray that God will first teach you what he wants you to hear from his Word. Then ask God to guide you in helping others hear what he is saying to them. **Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is not to fill minds with facts but to change hearts as we learn what God is teaching us through his Word.**

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Holy Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson and encourage group members to do additional follow-up reflection at home.

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.

Opening Share Question

What is a high school or college cheer you remember?

Describe a time you had a surprise visitor.

What Does the Bible Say?

1. Mark 1:1

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

- **What is the book the beginning of?**
- **Why is it called “good news”? (Some translations have the word “gospel.”)**
- **Who is the main character of the book?**
- **List the various names of Jesus. What is the significance of each one? (Consult the glossary.)**

Mark's book is about Jesus the **Messiah**, the **Son of God**. It tells the story of the “**good news**” about Jesus and his ministry. The beginning of this good news starts with identifying the main character of the book. There will be many characters mentioned in Mark's narrative, but Mark's focus is always on one person: Jesus. The names listed in these opening verses have special meaning. Jesus means “the Lord saves,” and Messiah means “anointed one”—that is, the one chosen by God to be a savior. Some translations may say “Jesus Christ.” The name “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” Jesus is also called the Son of God. Encourage group members to use the glossary to find out why Jesus is identified as the Son of God.

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?*

- **Which Old Testament prophet does he quote? (Look up Isaiah in the glossary.)**
- **Who is this messenger?**

Isaiah is an Old Testament **prophet** who lived and prophesied around 700-750 B.C. Prophets spoke the word of God to the people, and Isaiah prophesies in this passage about a messenger who will prepare the way for the coming of the promised Jewish Messiah. **John the Baptist** is a cousin of Jesus (**Luke 1:39-45, 57-80**), and from his birth it was known that he would be a prophet. His coming is also predicted by the prophets Isaiah (**Isaiah 40:30**) and Malachi (**Malachi 3:1**).

Malachi was the last prophet in Israel and lived about 430 years before John the Baptist and Jesus. The first part of the prophecy is from Malachi, and the second half is from the book of Isaiah.

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

- **How does Isaiah's prophecy apply to John?**

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 "Gentileness." It would have been unusual for Jewish people to feel they needed to be baptized.

- **Why do the Jewish people feel the need to be baptized?**
- **Describe those who follow John.**
- **What is significant about the baptism that John is practicing?**

- **What does repentance mean?**
- **Why does repentance come before forgiveness?**
- **Who is providing the forgiveness?**
- **What is the relationship between confession and repentance?**

John, often called John the Baptist, was in the Judean **wilderness**. Thousands of people would go out to listen to his preaching. John encouraged his listeners to confess their sins and repent. In Matthew's account (**Matthew 3:7-10**), we find that John is particularly hard on the religious leaders, and later in Mark's gospel, Jesus points out that they did not believe John's message. Instead of the religious leaders, it is the common people who respond to the call to repent. **Repentance** means to "turn around" or "turn back" from sin and to desire to change. When the people repented, they would be symbolically cleansed by the water of baptism. In their repentance they indicate they need God's forgiveness.

Avoid a detailed discussion on baptism. John's purpose in preaching and baptizing is to point the people to the Messiah. Baptism, as it is practiced in churches, signifies God's covenant. It is applied either to believers after they come to faith or to a child who receives baptism as the sign of the covenant. Churches that practice infant baptism expect that a person baptized as an infant will later declare their faith in the God who claimed them. The water of baptism doesn't save anyone but, rather, is symbolic of the work of the Holy Spirit. Should someone in the group want to discuss this further, offer to talk with them at another time.

*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?*

- **Why do you think John is so popular?**
- **How long had it been since there was a prophet in Israel? (Consult the glossary entry for "prophet.")**
- **For whom or what are the people looking?**

The statement about who went to see John (all of **Jerusalem** and the whole Judean countryside) is likely an exaggeration showing John's popularity with the people. Talk about the anticipation this must have built in his listeners. Here was John, a dramatic and effective preacher,

the first prophet to appear in Israel in more than 400 years. Yet soon there would come someone greater who would have even more authority and power.

If members of your group are unfamiliar with the Bible, explain briefly that the Jews had been waiting for centuries for the coming of a powerful leader. The Messiah, who was predicted by the prophets, would act as a savior and deliverer for the kingdom of Israel. Ever since Israel had been taken over by other kingdoms and many of its leaders had been carried off into exile, the Jews had no control of their own nation. Many of the local Jewish people probably thought John was this Messiah. John made it clear that he was not.

*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**).*

- **How is John identifying himself by wearing the same type of clothing as Elijah?**
- **How does this indicate that he is a prophet?**

John is further identifying who he is by wearing clothing similar to that of an earlier powerful prophet named Elijah and would be easily recognized as such. It was predicted that an Elijah-like person would come before the Messiah. Since John wears the same type of clothing as Elijah wore, it reinforces the idea that he is a prophet with an important message.

3. Mark 1:7-8

a. What is John the Baptist's message?

- **To whom is John referring?**
- **How does he compare himself to the one coming after him?**

John's message is very simple. He indicates that someone (the Messiah) will come after him. This person will be much more powerful than he is.

b. What is John's perspective of himself? What can we learn from him?

- **How could he be so humble?**
- **Is it hard to be popular and humble at the same time? Explain.**

- **What does John’s attitude tell us about his view of Jesus?**
- **How would we come across to people if we had John’s attitude?**

Despite his popularity, John takes the role of a servant in describing his relationship to the one who will come after him. It is difficult to be both popular and humble, but John knew that his role was only to prepare the way for the Messiah. He states that he is “unworthy” to perform even the servant’s duty of untying his master’s sandals.

If it will be helpful for your group, discuss how our explanation of the truth would be received if we were humble like John. Pointing to Christ rather than taking credit for our behavior will help others to see that the gospel is not a set of moral principles but, rather, a relationship made possible through a Savior who is “greater.”

c. *How will Jesus’ **baptism** be different from that of John the Baptist?*

- **What does it mean to be baptized by the Holy Spirit?**

John’s purpose was to make the people aware of their sins and their need for forgiveness, and so to prepare their hearts for the coming King. The baptism he performed only symbolized the washing away of sin. John pointed to the Savior who would also provide an inner renewal through the **Holy Spirit**.

4. Mark 1:9-11

Note: In the gospel of Matthew, we read that John the Baptist questions Jesus’ need to be baptized, saying: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (**Matthew 3:14**). John complies when Jesus explains that he wants to be baptized not because he needs to repent but, rather, to identify with sinful people and their need for repentance. Jesus states in Matthew that he wants to “fulfill all righteousness.”

*What happens at Jesus’ **baptism**? What does this tell us about Jesus, God, and the **Holy Spirit**?*

- **What does Jesus see and hear?**
- **Why would the Spirit descend on Jesus?**
- **What affirmation does Jesus receive?**

- **Why is this important?**
- **What can we learn about the love relationship in the Trinity?**
- **What can this tell us about God’s love for us?**

Jesus sees the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove. In the original language Mark says the heavens were “torn open” or “torn apart.” Jesus is beginning his ministry at this point. The Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father identify Jesus as “my Son” and give him reassurance and affirmation of his calling and identity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This is critical because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all work together to proclaim the good news to humanity. All three persons of the Trinity work together in harmony and desire to provide God’s love for us.

5. **Mark 1:12-13**

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

- **Why does Satan tempt Jesus? What do we learn from this?**
- **How might Jesus’ time of temptation in the wilderness prepare him for ministry?**
- **Who helps him?**
- **How would the angels be a comfort?**

Point out that two other New Testament books (**Matthew 4:1-11** and **Luke 4:1-13**) tell us more about Jesus’ time in the wilderness. But Mark tells us all we need to know. Before Jesus even enters into public ministry, his purpose is to challenge and ultimately to break the power of **Satan** in others. This enemy had to be met and defeated on the battleground of Jesus’ own life. It may be helpful to point out that because Jesus was tempted, he understands when we are tempted. References to this can be found in **Hebrews 2:18** and **4:15**. Mark demonstrates the loneliness of Jesus’ struggle in the wilderness with the words “and he was with the wild beasts” and shows the severity of the situation in that “angels ministered to him.”

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?

- **What is the “good news of God”?**
- **Why would the coming of God's kingdom be good news?**
- **How is God's kingdom different from other kingdoms?**
- **What does it mean that the “kingdom has come near”?**

Jesus now begins his public ministry in the region of **Galilee** (consult the map). Mark emphasizes that Jesus' message to his listeners is to believe the “good news” and repent. Mark also conveys Jesus' sense of urgency with “the time has come” and “the kingdom of God has come near.” It might be helpful to ask the group what they think Jesus meant by “the kingdom of God.” Perhaps the simplest definition is “wherever God is obeyed as King.” This would apply to individual hearts of believers as well as to God's broader rule.

As we learn more from Jesus in the book of Mark, we will see that the kingdom of God is at the heart of the good news he proclaimed. If you have time, invite people to imagine a kingdom of justice in which peace, joy, goodness, and a full life can flourish. It is a kind of government far different from the ones we are familiar with today. It wouldn't be primarily political or geographical; it would be characterized by *shalom*, a Hebrew concept that refers to peace, wholeness, and the flourishing of all that is good.

The “good news” is that Christians can begin to be part of God's kingdom now because of what Jesus has done for us. In the prayer Jesus taught his followers, he prays, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew 6:10**). In this life, with God's help, we can seek to bring his kingdom to earth, and while it will always be imperfect, the good news is that because of Christ, we are able to experience, in part, God's perfect kingdom now, which will later become fully present.

7. Mark 1:16-20

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

- **Whom would you expect Jesus to choose as disciples?**
- **Whom does he call? What do we learn from this?**
- **Why do they follow him?**

Jesus' choice of followers shows that he is not primarily interested in the elite, the wealthy, or the powerful. Jesus' first followers are hard-working fishermen from the region of Galilee. This is the region in which Jesus had grown up. Galilee, in fact, is a region of Israel that many of the religious elite looked down on.

You might tell your group that this probably is not Jesus' first contact with the men he chooses (see **John 1:35-51**). These men leave their boats "at once" and "without delay," leaving family and friends behind. Scholars have noted that in Jewish society the opportunity to be a rabbi's disciple was considered a high honor. It would not surprise the fishermen's families that they would leave everything given the opportunity to follow this teacher. Jesus already had a reputation based on John the Baptist's testimony and Jesus' own teaching and miracles. What perhaps surprises the families is that Jesus chooses these men for such a privileged position!

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

- **What are disciples supposed to do?**
- **Why does Jesus gather disciples to follow him?**

Jesus has asked these two teams of brothers to leave their daily work and follow him full-time so that they can begin training for their future task of "fishing for people." As your group discusses what it means to "fish for people," hopefully they will see that these men would now begin learning how to "catch" the hearts of people in order to bring them into the kingdom of God. For the next three years these disciples would learn from Jesus. After Jesus' death and resurrection, it would be up to these disciples to teach others how to "fish for people" and grow God's kingdom.

Taking It Home

- a. *What new things did you learn about Jesus in today's lesson?*
- b. *With so much "bad news" in the world today, how can the "**good news**" make a difference in our lives?*

Use these questions or others that you think would be helpful to summarize what your group members have learned from this lesson.

For Further Study

Isaiah 40:3

Malachi 3:1

Luke 1:39-45, 57-80

Matthew 4:1-11

Luke 4:1-13

Hebrews 2:18; 4:15

John 1:35-51