

discover

MARK

Book Two:
Prophecy Fulfilled



LEADER GUIDE

discover

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Prophecy Fulfilled



CoffeeBreak





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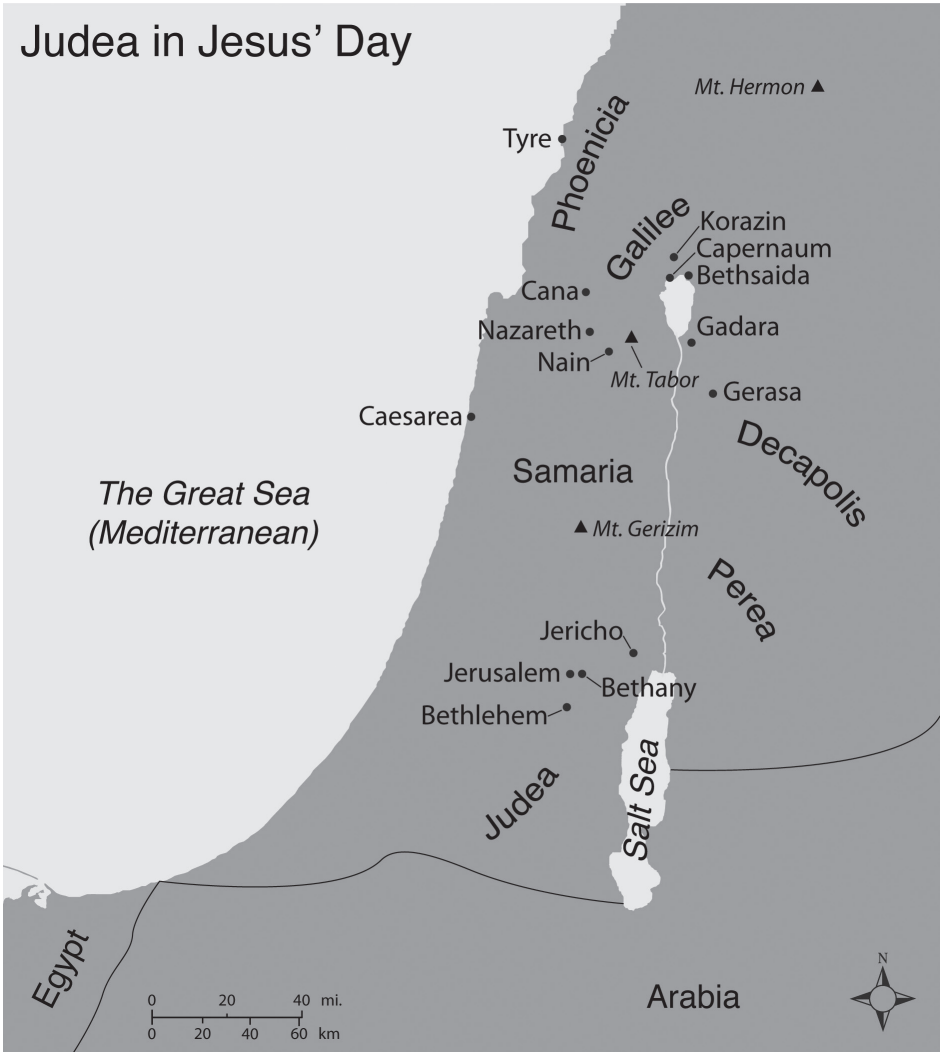
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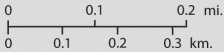
Contents

Map: Judea in Jesus' Day	4
Map: Jerusalem in Jesus' Day	5
To the Leader	6
New Testament Snapshot	9
Introduction to the Gospel of Mark	10
Glossary.....	12
Lesson 11	
So Much to Teach, So Little Time	19
Lesson 12	
Marriage, Children, and Money	26
Lesson 13	
Journey to Jerusalem	35
Lesson 14	
The Beginning of the End	43
Lesson 15	
Tension Mounts	52
Lesson 16	
Questions and Warnings	58
Lesson 17	
Jesus and His Closest Friends.....	71
Lesson 18	
Arrest and Trial	80
Lesson 19	
The Greatest Death	90
Lesson 20	
The Greatest Life	99
An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment.....	108
Bibliography.....	110
Evaluation	

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?”

“Opening Share Questions” provided are optional. Use them if your group needs time to relax or build relationships. Please, adapt the question to fit you 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.

Book Two – Prophecy Fulfilled

Lessons 11–20

This is the second book in a two-part series, the first is *Mark, Book One: The Beginning of the Gospel*. Book One covers from the time of Jesus' baptism through his Transfiguration on the Mount of Olives. You might want to keep a copy of the first book as a convenient reference for when you begin this study. This book, *Mark, Book Two: Prophecy Fulfilled* picks up where Book One leaves off and takes us through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

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 cousin 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 gospel 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 a question, they will be bolded. This glossary contains all of the terms from *Mark, Book One* and adds additional content specific to *Book Two*. Additionally, 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 gospels to answer the 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 demoniacs and Mark 5:2 indicates there is only one demoniac 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 the verse or 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. Culturally on the level of “daddy,” this is what young children would have called their 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 or founder of the Hebrews. 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 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) 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 or that Jonathan made with David in 1 Samuel 18:3. The second of these is the covenant that is most often experienced, as one between equal parties. The first mentioned is importantly between unequal parties, it is a blessing

of God to step down into a covenant with Abraham. Historically, covenants of almost any nature would have been sealed with blood. While the expectation of such a covenant is that adhering to it will bring blessing and leaving it will bring curses (thus the requirement of blood), the Bible provides a long history of God continuing to uphold God's end of the covenant even when the other party (Israel, you and I) have walked away.

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.

Denarius: A silver Roman coin equal in value to a drachma (a day's wages). In context, the 200 denarii needed to buy bread for the crowd at the Sea of Galilee (Mark 6:37) would have been 8 month's wages, and the jar of ointment used to anoint Jesus (Mark 14:5) would have been more than a year's worth of work.

Elect: Anyone chosen by God for salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. This term also refers to individuals and groups who have been elected to fulfill a purpose or task, and those who have otherwise specially received God's blessing.

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 never dies (2 Kings 2:11) but is taken straight into heaven. John the Baptist is considered to be similar to Elijah because he dressed like him and had a similar diet. 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 whip, which often had sharp bone or metal fragments tied to the ends of long leather strips. Part of the intention was to leave the recipient disfigured and marked for life, should they be permitted to live.

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

Gentiles: A term used to describe all non-Jews.

Gethsemane: The lower section of the Mount of Olives.

Good News: The literal translation of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, or *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 in Israel, Galilee and Perea. Herod the Great attempted to kill all male babies in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus’ birth. Herod Agrippa interviewed the apostle Paul.

Herodians: A group of people who supported the Herodian Dynasty and helped keep them in power. They were often embroiled in bitter disputes with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Holy Spirit: One of the three “persons” of God that appear in scripture. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus). They are three persons in one being, united as God, with theologians frequently referring to the Holy Spirit to 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 guiding in the world.

Hosanna: A word initially belonging only to the Psalms, meaning to cry out for help, to cry out for rescue, it eventually became a name and a title - rescuer, savior. In Mark 11:9-10 it is used in both of these ways.

Impure spirit: A term used in Mark to describe an evil spirit or demon that possesses or controls certain people.

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

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

Jesus: Is the main focus of Mark’s gospel. The person Jesus is both the son of Mary and the Son of God, being the physical incarnation of God as a human being (incarnation is God becoming fully united with humanity in the person of Jesus); Jesus is also referred to as the Second Person of the Trinity (see the entry on the Holy Spirit). The name 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 is 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 comprised 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: In Hebrew, "anointed one," designating kings, priests, and others as having been chosen by God. The messiah is the one chosen by God to be the savior of Israel. 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 was given 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 and rural town located in the northern province of Galilee; it has significance as both the home village of Mary and where Jesus grew up.

New Covenant: During the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-26), Jesus names the drink in his cup as the blood of the new covenant. Normally a covenant would be sealed with the blood of an animal (Genesis 15:9-19). This covenant, sealed with Jesus' blood, is one sided in operation, and with it, Jesus offers a covenant to all human beings for salvation. See **Covenant**.

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 being allowed to leave 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 let the Israelites go free.

Pharisees: An elite group of Jewish religious leaders whose positions were often based on family lineage and who emphasize precise obedience to Scriptural 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.

Pilgrimage Festivals: In Judaism, there are three major festivals which are celebrated by feasting and pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These are Pesach, or Passover; Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, done at first harvest; and Sukkot, the Festival of Tabernacles, done at the end of harvest (Deuteronomy 16:1-17). All are designed to remember, celebrate, and offer thanks for God's blessings upon Israel.

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

Prophet: 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 judgement. 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 includes 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 repentance.

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 is the Sanhedrin who 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 Zech. 3:1). Satan is an evil spiritual being described in many ways throughout the Bible. Some of the ways Satan is described are: destroyer, tempter, god of the world, father of lies, and 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 still only one Temple, located in Jerusalem. Many synagogues are 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 actual relationship to his Father God. Jesus rarely referred to himself this way, but when he did, people understood he claimed equality with God the Father. This

was also a provocative title for Jesus to claim as it was the same currently in use by Rome's imperial cult for Caesar.

Son of Man: How Jesus often referred to himself. This title was used by Old Testament prophets in reference to the coming Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14). By using the 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, designated as God's residence in Israel, destroyed by the Babylonians, and rebuilt 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 standing with Israel in the world.

The 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 die to save God's people from their sins. But Jesus refused; he did not succumb 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 located in what was considered a Gentile area. Today it is located in the country of Lebanon.

Wilderness: In Israel, any desolate, wild place uninhabited by humans. 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 a place where God meets with his people.

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

11 **Mark 9:30–50**

So Much to Teach, So Little Time

Getting Started

Jesus continues to prepare his disciples as they travel and spend time together. They have many questions, including some they are afraid to ask. And some of Jesus' teachings they would rather not hear. As we listen in on Jesus' conversations with his disciples, try to consider his words carefully. What is Jesus saying to us?

Opening Share Question

What learning style suits you best? Visual? Auditory? Verbal? Experiential?

What Does the Bible Say?

1. **Mark 9:30–32**

a. Why doesn't Jesus want anyone to know where they are going?

The crowds make it difficult for Jesus to be alone with his disciples, and there seems to be an urgency to spend time with them alone. His priority is to prepare them for the future, when he will not be with them in the same way, and he is particularly interested in their character development.

b. What specific subject does Jesus address, and how do the disciples react? (See also Mark 8:31.)

- **Why are the disciples puzzled?**
- **Why might they be afraid to ask?**

Jesus, for the second time, tells the disciples that he is going to be killed but will rise from the dead. The additional detail he now mentions is that he will be “delivered into the hands of men.” Some group members may have the word “betrayed” used in their translation of the Bible, but most commentators think this statement is not so much emphasizing Judas's betrayal as much as God's control of the situation. God will be the one to deliver Jesus into the hands of men. It is puzzling why the disciples don't ask Jesus to clarify what he means. In Mark 8:33, Peter is rebuked for telling Jesus that what he predicts will never happen. Perhaps this makes the disciples hesitant to respond. The parallel account

in Matthew states that they were “filled with grief” (**Matt. 17:23**). Luke states that Jesus’ meaning “was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it” (**Luke 9:45**). Jesus’ words seem so clear to us that we may have difficulty understanding the disciples’ reaction. The various gospel accounts describe the disciples as being afraid, saddened, and confused. All of these reactions are part of what they are experiencing. Their preconceived, flawed idea of what the messiah is to be may be clouding their ability to understand his words.

2. Mark 9:33–34

a. What are the disciples arguing about on the way to Capernaum?

- **What seems to be the reason for the conflict?**

The disciples’ argument gives us a window into their thoughts and explains some of their confusion in the previous verses. They still think in terms of an earthly kingdom, and they want to know who will be in the best position when Jesus sets up his reign. We don’t know specifically what is going on in the minds of all the disciples. But we do know that Peter, James, and John are part of an inner circle. They were with Jesus when he healed Jairus’s daughter and when he was transfigured. Because of this, it is possible that one of them believes they should have a more favored position.

b. How do the disciples answer Jesus’ question about their conversation?

- **Why are they quiet?**

- **Why do you think they were arguing about greatness?**

Jesus and his disciples are back in Capernaum, probably in Peter and Andrew’s home, and it is there that Jesus brings up their conversation. Instead of criticizing them, Jesus simply asks them the question, “What were you arguing about?” They might have been a little embarrassed to be caught being so self-absorbed. Jesus has just told them he is going to die, and they are arguing about who is the “greatest” disciple. The discussion of the disciples on the road betrays their competitive and disgruntled attitude toward each other.

3. Mark 9:35–37

a. How does Jesus respond to their silence? What do the disciples learn about greatness?

- **How does Jesus illustrate his point?**

Having listened to the disciples' argument, Jesus takes the time to explain how greatness is measured differently in God's kingdom. The greatest in God's eyes is not the person who has the most prominence or social recognition; it's the one who has placed themselves in a position of service to others. This is a hard lesson—not just for the disciples, but for anyone!

To illustrate what he wants them to learn, Jesus places a young child in front of them. By taking a child in his arms he provides a living illustration of how the disciples' perception should change. A child or toddler such as this in Jesus' culture would have been loved as in any other but would never have been deferred to and certainly held no special social status. Children were viewed as having no status or significance. So what does Jesus say? You want to be seen in a position of prominence standing beside me, but from God's perspective, it would be even greater to welcome a child and stand by that little one.

b. What does Jesus say to his disciples about welcoming a little child?

- **Who would they be welcoming?**

- **When Jesus says the “one who sent me,” who is the “the one” to whom he is referring?**

- **What can we learn from Jesus' example about confronting conflict?**

Jesus is teaching his disciples the lesson of servanthood. Those who seem to be insignificant to the world are significant in Jesus' eyes. In fact, Jesus, tells the disciples, whenever they serve the “least” in society, they serve Jesus and the Father.

Although this passage is about how greatness is viewed in God's kingdom, it also sheds some light on the nature of conflict. Jesus is the master teacher, and he recognizes that the root of the disciples' argument was the human desire for importance and self-reliance, which often causes conflict around us. When we are concerned more with taking care of “the least of these” (**Matt. 25:40-45**), we rarely run into self-interested conflicts. Jesus also demonstrates that simply asking a question will sometimes diffuse a conflict, helping a person see the error of what she is feeling or doing and leading to a natural discussion of new possibilities.

4. Mark 9:38–41

a. *Why do John and the other disciples want to stop the man who casts out demons in Jesus' name, and how does Jesus respond to their concern?*

- **Why is Jesus not concerned about someone they don't know performing a miracle in his name?**
- **What does it mean to do something in the name of Jesus?**

Jesus' reply to John is a gentle rebuke. Instead of endorsing division and hierarchy among his followers, Jesus teaches cooperation. He encourages acceptance of all who carry out ministry in the kingdom in his name. Someone who has listened to Jesus' teachings, observed his miracles, and has the faith to join in the ministry is not an enemy but a friend. According to Jesus, there is no middle road when it comes to a relationship with him. A person is either for Jesus or against him.

Further, to perform a miracle in Jesus' name is to act on his behalf through his power, so Jesus' approval would be assumed. When the disciples stopped someone from casting out demons in the name of Jesus, they were basically following the same path as the Pharisees. Jesus corrects them because he wants the kingdom to come and doesn't want religious people—be they Pharisees or disciples—opposing it.

b. *What attitude is Jesus encouraging?*

- **Why is Jesus' attitude better than competition or envy?**

Possibly the disciples see themselves as part of a special “club” with a limited membership. Jesus reminds them that his kingdom is wider than they might think, and he encourages them to support the kingdom of God no matter who is doing the work.

c. *What does this teach us about small acts of kindness and judging others?*

We don't know exactly why the disciples choose to stop the man who is casting out demons, but some of their motivation is probably based on their own feelings of importance. We should always look to the motivation behind our judgment of others. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that to be great in God's kingdom is not only about great deeds and miracles. The simplest acts of compassion build the kingdom Jesus is seeking and are worthy of reward. In God's eyes, the orientation of the work is more important than the magnitude of service.

5. Mark 9:42

a. *What does Jesus condemn?*

- **Who might be the “little ones” Jesus spoke about?**
- **What is the significance of Jesus saying “those who believe in me?”**
- **What is Jesus saying about believers’ responsibility to those whose faith might be weaker than theirs?**

Does “little ones” refer to those like the young child Jesus holds in his arms, or to the man the disciples had just reprimanded? Some commentators think verse 42 is closely related to the verses immediately preceding it. Perhaps Jesus is encouraging his disciples to be careful not to hurt the man’s faith in any way. If “little ones” refers to those who are weaker or smaller and who have less respect in the eyes of the world (see **Luke 17:1–2**), what is Jesus saying about our responsibility to others? The seriousness of the offense is clear from the punishment Jesus describes: drowning with a millstone hung about the neck, a type of capital punishment practiced by the Romans. The warning is harsh: No one should be a stumbling block to the faith of another.

6. Mark 9:43–48

a. *Are Jesus’ instructions to be taken literally? What might Jesus mean?*

Jesus frequently speaks in hyperbole to make a point. Because of this, Jesus’ exaggerated statements are often best taken figuratively. Here Jesus wants to dramatically emphasize how dangerous sin is to the soul and the drastic measures necessary to guard against it.

b. *Why does Jesus speak so severely?*

- **How does Jesus’ language illustrate the importance of guarding one’s own faith?**
- **What might hands, feet, and eyes represent?**

Jesus has spoken about the seriousness of harming others. Now he turns to how seriously people should take their own faith. Jesus may have chosen different parts of the body to illustrate general ways in which people turn aside from following him. The hand, for example, might be a symbol for what we do, the feet for where we go, and the eyes

for what we desire. Jesus dramatically states that the choice between heaven and hell is real. Anything that will harm a person's faith should be "cut off" in order to follow Jesus. No sin is worth going to hell for.

Study Note: The word translated here as "hell" is Gehenna, a Greek form of the Hebrew words *ge hinnom*, referring to the Valley of Hinnom located south of Jerusalem. Gehenna was a place used for burning the city's garbage. Its fires never went out and were visible day and night, so Gehenna's fires were commonly used as a symbol for the place of divine punishment.

c. What do these verses tell us about hell?

The topic of hell may create lots of group discussion. Be sensitive to those who struggle with the topic. Trust the Word to speak to group members. In earlier centuries the threat of hell was widely accepted. Today, many people choose to ignore it as a literal place. Jesus, however, presents it as a reality, and it is described in other New Testament passages like those in Matthew (**Matt. 10:28** and **23:33**). Jesus referred to hell as a place of everlasting destruction. Even though the descriptions of hell are to be understood figuratively, hell is probably worse than we can imagine. Avoid discussing who will or won't go to hell. Although we know Scripture teaches that belief in Jesus is the only way to God, it is only God who knows what is in a person's heart, and only God will determine who will be in heaven and who will be in hell. Our concern should be to take Jesus' warnings seriously.

7. Mark 9:49-50

Study Note: Normally salt is thought of as a flavoring. But there are other uses for salt. Particularly where there is no refrigeration, salt can be used as a preserving agent. Salt also signifies purification, cleansing, or preservation from destruction. Offerings in the Old Testament were required to be sprinkled with salt (Lev. 2:13 and Ezek. 43:24). The disciples would probably know about salt that came from the Dead Sea. Salt from this location in Israel would often lose its saltiness.

Fire in Scripture is occasionally used to denote suffering, trials, persecution, or general distress. In some cases, it refers to punishment; in other cases, to purification.

a. Discuss the purposes and properties of salt and how it might relate to what Jesus asks of his disciples.

- **How can a person be purified?**
- **What do you think Jesus means when he references fire?**

- **If salt purifies, gives flavor, and preserves, how does this apply to the disciples? To us?**
- **How are the disciples to be at peace?**
- **What happens if we lose the “saltiness” of our faith?**

Jesus’ references to salt in these verses can be somewhat challenging to interpret. Do not be too dogmatic as your group members discuss these verses. Commentators have offered various explanations. It may be helpful to note to group members that many commentators see two distinct references to salt in the two verses. In verse 49, Jesus probably refers more to the purification aspect of salt, then adding the purification aspect of fire as well. Jesus spoke of the necessity of getting rid of sin; perhaps he uses the metaphors to suggest that believers must go through a purifying process. Listen to the various ideas from group members about how this purification might occur.

To understand verse 50, suggest that group members connect the verse with the disciples’ dispute among themselves about who was to be the greatest. If they purified themselves of the sin of competitive pride, they would be more at peace with each other. In **Matthew 5:13**, Jesus told his followers they were the “salt of the earth.” Only after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when the Holy Spirit began to work in their hearts, could the disciples “flavor” and “preserve” each other and those around them. Encourage group members to discuss how we can be the “salt of the earth.”

Taking It Home

Jesus offers a lot in this lesson, from encouraging miracles in Jesus’ name to serving “little children.” What from this lesson spoke to you?

For Further Study

Mark 8:31

Matthew 17:23

Matthew 25:40–45

Luke 9:45

Luke 17:1–2

Matthew 10:28; 23:33

Leviticus 2:13; Ezekiel 43:24

Matthew 5:13