



# MARK

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Dane C. Ortlund



**J. I. Packer**

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

Dane C. Ortlund

SERIES EDITOR

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A 12-WEEK STUDY



Dane C. Ortlund

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## S E R I E S P R E F A C E

**KNOWING THE BIBLE**, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org). The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer  
Lane T. Dennis

# WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



## Getting Acquainted

The Gospel of Mark plays a unique and strategic role in the Christian Bible. In this account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we see him fulfilling in himself the Old Testament hopes for a coming king, the Messiah,<sup>1</sup> yet we also see the stark ways in which Jesus confounds public expectations of what this king will do: he will suffer. Mark's Gospel also gives us a vivid portrayal of what authentic discipleship<sup>2</sup> looks like for those who follow a rejected king.

Of the four Gospels, Mark was probably the first one written. It is the shortest and also the fastest-paced Gospel account. For example, Mark repeatedly transitions to a new section of his narrative with the word “immediately.” While Matthew and Luke share quite a bit of material with Mark, Matthew and Luke contain large blocks of behavioral teaching by Jesus that Mark does not include. This absence gives Mark a feel of heightened intensity as events rapidly hurtle toward the final week of Jesus' earthly life.

Mark's Gospel is concerned with presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the king, the Son of David, who is rejected by the religious authorities and calls his followers to radical discipleship in the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1889–1892; also online at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)



## Placing It in the Larger Story

While Matthew focuses on Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, Luke describes Jesus as the one who welcomes the outsider, and John emphasizes Jesus as the eternal Son of God, Mark focuses on Jesus as the one who ushers in the kingdom of God. Through his life and teaching, but especially through his death and resurrection, Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament hopes and promises, bringing in the long expected new age.

## Key Verse

“Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14–15)

## Date and Historical Background

Mark wrote his account of Jesus in perhaps the mid- to late-50s AD. He probably relied heavily on the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter. Though written in Rome, Mark’s Gospel was aimed at the wider church, especially those who had not been raised as Jews, as is evident from the way Mark at times explains Jewish customs.

Mark wrote roughly 25 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the time of writing, Nero was emperor in Rome, Paul was in the midst of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:16), and Jerusalem was about ten years away from being besieged by the Romans under the leadership of Vespasian and his son Titus (66–70 AD.).

## Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1–15)
- II. Demonstration of Jesus’ Authority in Ministry (1:16–8:26)
  - A. Jesus’ early Galilean ministry (1:16–3:12)
  - B. Jesus’ later Galilean ministry (3:13–6:6)
    1. Calling of the Twelve (3:13–35)
    2. Parables (4:1–34)
    3. Nature miracle, exorcism, and healing (4:35–5:43)
    4. Rejection at Nazareth (6:1–6)

**C. Work beyond Galilee (6:7–8:26)**

1. Sending of the Twelve (6:7–13)
2. Death of John the Baptist (6:14–56)
3. Teachings on moral defilement (7:1–23)
4. Opening the door of grace to Gentiles (7:24–30)
5. Additional miracles in Decapolis and Bethsaida (7:31–8:26)

**III. Demonstration of Jesus' Authority in Suffering (8:27–16:8)****A. Journey to Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)**

1. Peter's confession (8:27–33)
2. Call to discipleship (8:34–9:1)
3. Transfiguration and healing (9:2–29)
4. Instruction on discipleship: putting others first (9:30–50)
5. Instruction on discipleship: divorce, wealth, humility (10:1–52)

**B. Entering and judging Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)**

1. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1–11)
2. Jesus' judgment on religious leaders (11:12–12:44)
3. Jesus and the coming universal judgment (13:1–37)

**C. Death and resurrection in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8)**

1. Betrayal (14:1–52)
2. Trial (14:53–15:20)
3. Crucifixion and resurrection (15:21–16:8)
4. ["Longer ending of Mark" (16:9–20; see note)]

**As You Get Started . . .**

What is your general understanding of the role of Mark's Gospel related to the other three Gospels? Do you have any sense of what Mark uniquely contributes?

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## WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

How do you understand Mark's contribution to Christian theology? From your current knowledge of Mark, what does this account of the life of Jesus teach us about God, humanity, sin, redemption, and other doctrines?

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What has perplexed you about Mark's Gospel? Are there any confusing parts to this Gospel that you hope to resolve as you begin this study of Mark?

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of Mark. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

#### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Messiah** – Transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “anointed one,” the equivalent of the Greek word *Christ*. “Anointed one” signified kingship. The Messiah therefore came to mean the anticipated coming king who would liberate Israel once and for all and bring in the kingdom of God. Jesus affirmed that he was the Messiah sent from God (Matt. 16:16–17).

<sup>2</sup> **Discipleship** – Submitting to the teachings of another and following that person's way of life. In the NT, disciples were those who submitted themselves to the teaching of Jesus, especially the twelve men who traveled and lived with Jesus during his earthly ministry.

<sup>3</sup> **Kingdom of God** – The rule of God manifested in the long-awaited restoration of his people and indeed the whole world, in which God would reign under the glad submission of all people. When Jesus came two thousand years ago, he announced that the kingdom of God had arrived (Mark 1:15; Luke 17:20–21). Yet because of ongoing rebellion and rejection of Jesus and his rule, the kingdom still awaits its final consummation and fulfillment in Jesus' second coming (Mark 14:25). For this reason we pray for the kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10).

# WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION

Mark 1:1–20



## The Place of the Passage

This opening passage of Mark sets the stage for the rest of the Gospel. Mark starts with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Mark is writing, above all else, about the gospel, as the first words out of Jesus’ mouth reiterate: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). What is the gospel? Mark explains that it is the good news of the fulfillment of God’s promises, and the rest of Mark will show how Jesus fulfills yet transforms Old Testament hopes, especially the hope for a coming king.

## The Big Picture

Mark 1:1–20 shows us the good news that Jesus came as the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Read through the complete passage for this study, Mark 1:1–20. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions—first with regard to John the Baptist (vv. 1–9) and then with regard to Jesus (vv. 9–20). (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1893–1894; also available online at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)

**1. The Ministry of John the Baptist (1:1–9)**

In the first verse of his Gospel Mark indicates what is driving him to write, and then immediately quotes the Old Testament as he begins writing. What do these opening few verses teach us about why Mark is writing and the roles both John the Baptist and Jesus play in this?

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Many scholars believe Mark introduces Jesus as bringing about a new “exodus”<sup>1</sup> for the people of God, similar to the liberation from Egypt in the book of Exodus. This is because Mark frequently seems to allude to passages in Isaiah in which God promises a new “exodus” to his people (e.g., Isa. 11:11–16; 40:3–11; 42:16; 43:2, 5–7, 16–19; 48:20–49:11; 51:10). What in Mark 1:1–13 might lead to this conclusion?

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There are several similarities between Isaiah 40:1–3 and the way Mark presents John the Baptist. What are some of them?

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Untying the straps of sandals can be the responsibility of a low servant, but it was something that a Jewish person was not supposed to do. What does this tell us about John’s statement in Mark 1:7?

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John says that the one coming after him “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”<sup>2</sup> (1:8). We know from Mark 1:2–3 that Mark sees his Gospel account as building on the Old Testament, so what might Mark have in mind in verse 8? For clarification read Isaiah 32:15, 44:3, Ezekiel 11:18–19, and Joel 2:28. Note also what happens with the Spirit in Mark 1:10.

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## 2. The Ministry of Jesus (1:9–20)

Jesus comes to the Jordan River and is baptized<sup>3</sup> by John. John himself has already made it clear that Jesus is greater than he is, so this cannot be an act of submission to John. Instead Jesus is likely identifying with the people. How might later statements by Jesus, such as Mark 10:45, further fill out the significance of Jesus’ baptism?

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With the descent of the Spirit, Jesus is commissioned for unique service (note Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). In light of the way Mark views Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, what is the significance of this? Others had been commissioned for unique service to God in the past—Adam, for instance, or Israel. How is Jesus both similar to and different from these other servants? How

## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION

does the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan<sup>4</sup> reinforce the connection between Jesus and other Old Testament servants of God? Where else in Scripture do we see a servant of God being tempted by Satan while “with the wild animals” (Mark 1:13)?

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Mark 1:14–15 is a sort of summary statement of Mark’s whole Gospel. Here we see that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” God has done this by bringing history to a climax (“the time is fulfilled”), yet at the same time people are called to respond in a certain way (“repent and believe”). What do we learn of the nature of the kingdom of God here? How does this differ from popular expectations of the Jews at this time regarding what the coming of God’s kingdom would look like, as they visualized the kingdom in terms of political liberation from Roman rule?

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In 1:16–20 Jesus calls the first four disciples. Read Jeremiah 16:15–17 and consider what it meant for Jesus to call these four men to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

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What do we learn from verses 18 and 20 about the nature of Christian discipleship?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

### Gospel Glimpses

**GOOD NEWS AT ITS CORE.** While the Bible is filled with commands, and these commands must unquestionably be heeded by believers, the overarching story line of the Bible is one of rescue and deliverance—of gospel. The message of the Bible, at its core, is what has been done by God in Christ for sinners, as the first verse of Mark underscores: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark wrote to recount good news. His Gospel relates what God has done for us in Jesus.

**THE PROMISE-KEEPING GOD.** In Mark’s focus on Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations, we see the grace<sup>5</sup> of God in his commitment to keep his promises to his people, despite their waywardness. “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” was a constant refrain throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23). Yet God’s people were consistently faithless. God sent his own Son, however, to do what his people had always failed to do. Although Adam and Israel were both God’s “son,” to neither of them could God finally say, “with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Those who are in Christ, however, can be fully assured that God is “well pleased” with them, because they have been covered by Christ’s righteousness and adopted into God’s family as his very children. God keeps his promises.

**CALLING THE ORDINARY.** We also see the grace of God in the calling of the first four disciples. Peter, Andrew, James, and John did nothing to seek out Jesus. Jesus sought *them* out. Indeed, not only is the initiative totally on the side of Jesus, but Jesus goes to blue-collar, untrained fishermen to begin to build his church. Here, as throughout the Bible, God in his grace chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27).



## Whole-Bible Connections

**SON OF GOD.** In Mark 1:1 Jesus is called “the Son of God.” One layer of meaning here may highlight the deity of Christ: Jesus is God’s Son in that he is himself God. Another layer of meaning, however, connects the title “Son of God” in Mark 1:1 with a whole-Bible trajectory. Adam was “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Adam failed, however, to walk in obedience to God. God later called Israel to be his “son,” and the Bible even describes God as calling Israel his “firstborn” (Ex. 4:22–23). Yet Israel, too, failed. Jesus, however, was the final Son of God, the true Firstborn, the Son who succeeded where all others had failed (Mark 1:11). Because of his obedient sonship, God is pleased to adopt into his own family those who are united to the Son by faith (Rom. 8:14–17; Heb. 2:10). Mark 1 taps into this whole-Bible theme.

**WILDERNESS TESTING.** Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he is tested for 40 days. This picks up a theme that travels through the Old Testament: Moses spent 40 days on barren Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28); Israel was tested for 40 years in the desert (Deut. 8:2); and Elijah spent 40 days in the desert, too (1 Kings 19:8). In each case the “wilderness” experience was a testing ground of sorts.

**KINGDOM OF GOD.** Jesus’ first words in Mark are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). The coming of the kingdom of God means that God’s rule over people’s hearts and lives is being established in and through Jesus. The kingdom is a whole-Bible theme in that Eden was set up as a little “kingdom” of God with Adam, the first king, commissioned to rule over the earth (Gen. 1:28). The king theme is heightened with the setting up of the kingship in Israel, and especially with David, to whom God promises a lasting dynasty (2 Sam. 7:8–16). With Jesus this kingdom dawns decisively, and he will one day bring this kingdom to completion, sitting on his throne for all the world to see (Rev. 4:1–11).

## Theological Soundings

**DEITY OF CHRIST.** Jesus is “the Son of God” (Mark 1:1), not only in that he is the one called by God to rule the earth as God’s representative, but also in that he *is* God. This is reinforced in Mark 1:3, where “prepare the way of the Lord” (Isa. 40:3) originally referred to Yahweh but is applied by Mark to Jesus. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is included in the divine identity (1 Cor. 8:6; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:3). While there are distinctions of persons within the one Godhead, Jesus Christ is as much God as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

**TRINITY.** In Mark 1:9–11, Jesus is baptized. We are told that the Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice from heaven affirmed Jesus’ sonship. We see here all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit. Broadly speaking, Christian theology teaches that the Father orchestrates salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation.

**SALVATION.** “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Repentance and faith (*faith* is the noun form of the Greek word translated *believe*) are the two basic motions on the part of the believer in receiving Christian salvation. Throughout the New Testament these two are linked (e.g., Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1). We might say faith and repentance are two sides of the single coin of salvation. In repentance we turn from sin; in faith we turn to God.

**Personal Implications**

Take time to reflect on the implications of Mark 1 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

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**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

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