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MARK

BIBLE STUDY

BUILDING OUR
FAITH ON A STRONG
FOUNDATION



KEVIN HARNEY
BASED ON COMMENTARY FROM
DAVID E. GARLAND

Mark Bible Study

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About the

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Life transformation . . . that is the bottom line. When the Holy Spirit spoke through James and said that followers of Christ are not to “merely listen to the word” but actually “do what it says” (1:22), it was a declaration that academic study of the Bible is not the whole story. God desires for us to read the Bible, seek to understand it in both its *original* context and in *today’s* culture, and then allow what we have read to propel us deeper into the will and ways of our Creator.

This is the goal of the series. The vision is for you to first dig into high-level scholarship that plumbs the depths of biblical history, culture, language, and theology. But you won’t just stop there! Next, you will connect the ancient words of the Bible to eternal truths and see how they carry throughout to our modern world today. Finally, the goal is for you to see those eternal truths of God come alive in every part of your life.

Each of the studies in the series is based on *The NIV Application Commentary*—one of the most dynamic and well-rounded volumes of commentaries available today. The scholars behind each of these works take readers on a round-trip journey first back to biblical times and then forward to our times today. Along the way, they dig into deep theological insights that bridge the ancient biblical text to the modern world with theological and interpretive integrity.

Prompts have been provided in each lesson of the series to help guide your experience. Each lesson begins with a brief introduction

that identifies a key theme for that session. You will then read the biblical text you will be studying. (Note that these are selected texts and not every passage in the book of the Bible that you are studying may be covered.) Try to read every passage slowly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully.

Each biblical passage is followed by an **Original Meaning** section, drawn from *The NIV Application Commentary*, that will help you understand the author's original intent behind the writing and how the original readers would have interpreted that text. This is followed by the **Past to Present** section, which is intended to help you bridge the gap between the ancient and modern and understand how to apply what you just read to your situation today.

You will find **application and reflection questions** in every lesson to help you in this regard. If you are doing this study on your own, use them for reflection, journaling, and digging deeper into your own growth in faith. If you are walking through this study with a few friends or in a small group, use them for group discussion and interaction.

Finally, at the end of each session is a brief **prayer prompt**. This is designed to be a launchpad into a time of personal prayer around the major theme or themes of the session. Use this prayer as a prompt to help you seek God, gain the understanding that he wants you to have, and discover his power at work in your life.

It will be a great adventure . . . so let's begin!



The Gospel of Mark at a Glance



Author: Although the Gospel does not have an author listed in the text, there is consistent testimony in the early church that John Mark is the author. He was a close associate of Peter, who would have passed on firsthand information about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Date: Many believe the Gospel of Mark was written in the AD 50s or early 60s. Others believe it was inspired and penned later, shortly before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. It is widely accepted by scholars that Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written.

Setting: Mark likely wrote his Gospel from Rome. The church was facing major crises at the time. Christians had to cope with the death of eyewitnesses, which created the need to conserve the traditions about Jesus. Christians also had to deflect government suspicion of them as a potentially subversive group and defend themselves against religious rivals who could foil the church's growth. Mark's written record of the preaching of Peter thus aided the church's task of proclaiming the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Focus: The focus of Mark's Gospel is that our faith in Jesus is built on the strong foundation that he is the divine Son of God who came in humility to announce the coming of God's kingdom to our world. Jesus, the Servant King, left the glory of heaven to bring hope, healing, life, truth, and grace to all who accept his message. Mark's Gospel is succinct, unadorned, and vivid. His action is fast-paced in the first half of the book but then slows down in the second half. Mark does this to call our attention to the centrality of the cross for disciples of Jesus. In his Gospel, which can be read aloud in about an hour and a half, we encounter the drama of the unveiling of the Messiah intertwined with the humanity of our Savior.



The Messiah Arrives

Mark 1:1-13, 14-15, 16-45

Writers understand the purpose and the power of *backstory*. It is not enough to just introduce a character into a plot and then carry on from there. No, we want to know what makes that person tick. What happened in the past that shaped his or her nature? What trials has that person had to overcome? What trauma stills lingers that is impacting how he or she thinks and acts?

When this information is missing from a story, we feel a bit short-changed. It is as if the writer didn't care enough about us as readers to include those vital details! This can be our reaction when we read the opening chapter in Mark. The only real backstory we are given about Jesus, the protagonist in the story, is a prophecy in Isaiah about a messenger who will prepare the way for him. (This messenger turns out to be John the Baptizer). Jesus then suddenly appears "from Nazareth in Galilee" on the shores of the Jordan River to be baptized.

We are given nothing about Jesus' lineage. No notes about Jesus' earthly parents. No mention of the magi, or the star in the east, or the mad king Herod. No angels appear, and no shepherds come to where Jesus is born. The question is . . . *why?* Why does Mark leave out these details that other Gospel writers include? This is a question we will examine in this lesson. Mark had a purpose in leaving out these details. In fact, what he leaves out tells us a lot about Jesus' identity.

Mark's Prologue [Mark 1:1-13]

¹The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—

³"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Original Meaning

Mark introduces his readers to Jesus, the promised Messiah and Son of God. The first verse serves as the title to the work, informing readers

the story he will tell is not a typical one. The remaining verses function as a prologue, through which Mark lets his readers in on certain secrets that will remain hidden to the characters in the drama that follows.

Jesus and John seem to appear out of the blue in Mark's Gospel, but it is clear they arise from the foundation of God's plan for the world. Mark shows their arrival is bound to God's promises in the Old Testament and continue the story of his saving activity. Long before the promise-filled preaching of John the Baptizer, there was the promise-filled preaching of Isaiah.

Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' background, pedigree, or birth. Jesus just appears at the shore of the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Mark says the heavens are "torn open" at the event—a sign that God is about to act (see Ezekiel 1:1). What is opened may be closed, but what is torn cannot return to its former state. The barriers have been removed, and God is now in humanity's midst. We can interpret the voice at the baptism as God's announcement that Jesus has been chosen to rule over his people and that he assumes royal power as king.

The Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus "like a dove" does not induce a state of inner tranquility. Rather, it drives Jesus into the desert and the clutches of Satan for forty days (a biblical round number). The mention of the wild beasts conjures up images of Adam, who also started with the beasts in the garden of Eden (see Genesis 2:19). Satan must now contend with a *new* Adam, who has the power of heaven at his side and angels in his corner.

❖ As you consider the significance of Jesus' identity, what is the significance of God removing the "barriers" between heaven and earth?

Past to Present

When it comes to determining how this passage applies to us in the *present*, we first have to look at what it meant to the original readers in the *past*. We will discover that there are timeless truths that can guide us today, much as they did in the time of the Bible.

The Wilderness

When Mark was written, Christians were facing persecution for their faith. So Mark wrote his Gospel to remind believers of the foundation on which that faith was built, introducing Jesus as the promised “Messiah” and “Son of God.” In the opening scene, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness to announce the Messiah’s arrival. In Scripture, the “wilderness” was where God led the Israelites during the exodus (see Exodus 13:18), the place they left to enter the Promised Land (see Joshua 3:1), and where God said he would lead his people back to him (see Hosea 2:14). The wilderness was God’s landscape for refining his people.

Just like Mark’s readers, we need a refined faith built on a solid foundation. We also need to know there will be times when God will lead us into the “wilderness,” just as Jesus was led into the wilderness for testing. As we experience situations that challenge and stretch our faith, we will be compelled to seek God in prayer and discover the truths that he reveals to us through his Word. It is in life’s wilderness journeys that we discover our relationship with him has deepened and we have grown in our faith.

- ❖ How do you know your faith is built on a firm foundation? When have others challenged that what you believe about Jesus is true?

- ❖ In what ways has God led you into the “wilderness”? What did you discover about his nature and character during those moments that strengthened your faith?

Satan’s Temptations

Mark reveals no details about Satan’s temptations in the wilderness or how Jesus overcame them. His readers would have simply understood that Jesus defeated him decisively, as Satan never reappears again in the story. The appearance of the Son of God is therefore depicted as a direct challenge to Satan’s realm. Furthermore, Jesus’ divinity is revealed in that he dwelt among “wild animals” without harmful consequences, that he had the power and authority to overcome Satan himself, and that he was attended by angels.

This scene teaches that when Satan attacks us, we can receive “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). Everything changed when Jesus entered into our world. Satan’s dominion is now under attack, and Jesus holds the power over him. As we follow after him, we witness that power and are able to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12).

- ❖ The psalmist wrote, “Search me, God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). How has asking God to search your heart helped you identify any areas of sin in your life?

- ❖ Jesus “was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus conquered sin for each of us. How has Jesus recently shown his power over temptations in your life?

Jesus Announces the Good News [Mark 1:14–15]

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Original Meaning

Jesus emerges triumphant from his battle against Satan and proclaims “the good news of God” throughout Galilee. This is not revival-type preaching (like John’s) but the foundational announcement that God’s kingdom has arrived. Jesus’ ministry begins when “the time has come” on God’s calendar. The time of waiting for God’s intervention is over, and all that God had said and done in history is reaching its climax. This emphasizes Jesus’ role as the Messiah.

Jesus’ proclamation comes with a call to action. In the first-century world, messengers who proclaimed the ascension of a new Roman emperor did so with a command for the population to accept him as their king. In the same way, Jesus’ announcement that God’s kingdom has arrived on earth comes with a demand: “Repent and believe the good news!” The term *repent* in the Greek (*metanoieite*) literally means “to change one’s mind.”

- ❖ Why did Jesus' proclamation call for a foundational response to first repent and believe?

Past to Present

Consider what this passage meant to the original readers and how it applies to us today.

In the Fullness of Time

Jesus declared that God's kingdom had arrived, yet believers were still facing problems like sickness, injustice, and Roman occupation. This raised a question: *If God's kingdom was now on earth, why did it seem as if the enemy was winning?* A clue is found in Jesus' statement that "the time has come." Mark does not tell us how to understand God's timeline—he just says Jesus' ministry began when God deemed the time was right. God had a plan, hidden from humans, that was working itself out in spite of the seeming triumph of evil powers. While all is not right with the world, it soon would be.

We find ourselves asking the same question today. If God is truly king, then why does it seem as if Satan is winning? Mark reassures us that God is in control of everything that happens but works in his own time. As Peter wrote, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8). Even though we can't always see *how* God is at work, we can trust that he *is* at work. For now, we live in a world where sickness, injustice, and corrupt governments often prevail. But one day, according to God's timing, evil will be defeated (see Revelation 20:10).

- ❖ What are some situations in your life where it took faith to trust the good news of Jesus? How did you witness God breaking through at times into that situation?

- ❖ What was a moment where you sensed God was asking you to wait on his timing? What was the hardest part of that waiting?

Scenes from Jesus' Early Ministry [Mark 1:16-45]

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

²¹ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony

to them.”⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Original Meaning

Mark follows Jesus’ announcement of the good news with five scenes that demonstrate the kingdom of God in motion. In the first scene (verses 16–20), Jesus appears by the Sea of Galilee and calls four fishermen to be his disciples. These men show their “repentance”—their complete change of mind—by dropping their nets to heed Jesus’ command.

In the second scene (verses 21–28), Jesus enters the synagogue and amazes the crowd with his teaching. The people recognize that Jesus is not just speaking *for* God or *about* God but with the authority *of* God. This is confirmed when an “impure spirit” in a man interrupts Jesus and identifies him as “the Holy One of God.” Jesus does not desire testimony about himself from a demon, so he exerts his authority and commands the spirit to come out of the man.

In the third scene (verses 29–34), Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. At the time, many people viewed fever as a divine chastisement curable only by God’s intervention (see Deuteronomy 28:22). In the evening, Jesus continues to exert his divine authority by healing the sick and demon-possessed who come pounding at his door. Jesus again prohibits the demons from speaking so they will not offer testimony about his identity, as in scene two.

In the fourth scene (verses 35–39), Jesus goes to a “solitary place” to pray. The Greek term (*eremon*) is also used for “wilderness” in verse 12, where Jesus battled Satan, and the same dynamic is at work here. Jesus travels to a solitary place to receive God’s strength, yet he is tempted to return to Capernaum and there receive the praise of the crowd. Jesus refuses and says he will instead travel throughout Galilee. The good news will not be limited to one place.

In the final scene (verses 39–45), a man with leprosy (which included a number of different skin conditions) begs Jesus for healing. Jesus says to the man, “Be clean!” In the Greek, the verb used is an imperative—a command. Jesus is not simply declaring the man to be clean but is commanding the disease to leave his body, just as he commanded the impure spirit to leave the man in scene two. This again illustrates Jesus’ authority as the Son of God.

❖ How do each of these scenes reveal Jesus’ authority over everything?

Past to Present

Consider what this passage meant to the original readers and how it applies to us today.

Discipleship

All Jewish rabbis in the first century had disciples. However, it was the *disciple* who chose the rabbi, not the other way around. A disciple chose a rabbi based on his knowledge and credentials. But Jesus chose his own disciples—and in doing so, he did not select from the most socially prominent, the best trained, or even the most religiously devout. Rather, his first picks were from a group of fishermen as they were going about their daily lives.

Jesus still calls people to follow him from all walks of life. He is not looking for those who have a certain number of social media followers, or who have achieved a certain level of status, or even who have the

most biblical training. Rather, he is looking for people who will leave everything behind unconditionally to follow wherever he leads. We can all be Jesus' disciples and learn from him if we are willing to allow him to transform our lives.

- ❖ What comes to mind when you think of being a “disciple” of Jesus? What are some of the things that Jesus called you to leave behind to be his follower?

- ❖ When are times in your life that you have been tempted to believe that God couldn't use you because of your background or because of something you lacked?

Jesus Has Authority

Jesus, in going to the synagogue to teach, was likely following a custom of the day that allowed recognized visiting teachers to preach at the invitation of its leaders. However, when Jesus began teaching, the people quickly recognized there was something different about him. Jesus first taught with *authority* and then revealed that he had *authority* over demons. He then showed that he had authority over illnesses by healing many who came to him.

There is significance in the order that Mark presents. Jesus *first* called a group of fishermen to follow him and *then* taught and ministered with authority. Those first disciples would have *witnessed* such acts of authority. Later, especially in the book of Acts, we find these disciples then *acting* in Christ’s authority. Jesus says to all his disciples, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). We have access to Jesus’ authority to overcome Satan in our own lives.

- ❖ What are some of the ways that Jesus has made his authority evident in your life?

- ❖ What are some ways that you have experienced that authority through prayer, ministry, and service in Jesus’ name?

The Pitfalls of Pride

Mark reveals that Jesus attained a level of popularity when he began his ministry. People were drawn to his teaching. They were amazed at his authority over demons and his power to heal. Soon, the whole town had “gathered at the door” of his home. This attention could have led Jesus, who was fully human, to become puffed up with pride.

Instead, Jesus *retreated* from the crowds and went to a solitary place to pray. When the disciples found him and said his “fans” were waiting for him, Jesus refused to give in to pride and instead said, “Let us go somewhere else.” Jesus understood the pitfalls of pride . . . and so should we. When we are tempted to get puffed up because of human praise, we should instead retreat to our heavenly Father and ask him to be the one who fills our lives.

❖ What are some areas in your life where you feel that you are most susceptible to pride?

❖ What steps could you take to be more like Jesus in how you handle these kinds of situations that could lead you into pride?

Closing Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are the beloved Son of God. You have defeated evil, and you embrace those who suffer. You have all authority, and you call us to leave things behind in order to follow you. You baptize your followers with the Holy Spirit. Please show us how to follow you. Give us the courage to leave behind whatever we need to leave in order to surrender our lives to you and follow you. In your powerful name I pray, amen.*

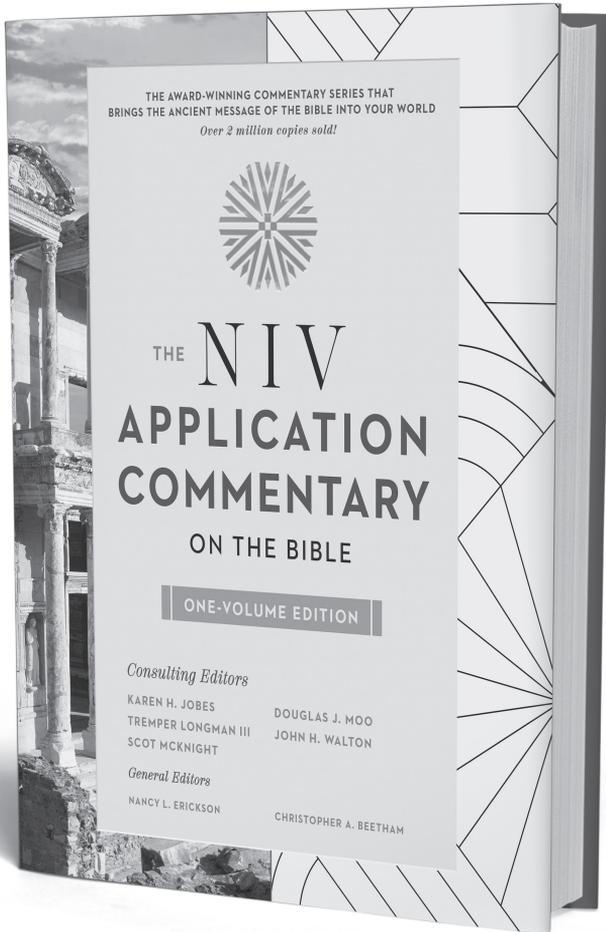
About

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