

The Gospel of Mark



Christianity
EXPLORED

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Read this first!

You have just opened a truly remarkable book.

It tells the extraordinary story of the most influential man who ever lived – Jesus Christ. It’s a story that is both heart-warming and shocking. It’s a story that people died to write down and preserve so that you can hold it in your hands today and read it. It’s a story that has changed the lives of countless people around the world and throughout history.

Most of us will have heard something about Jesus, and know some of the details of his life and teaching. Perhaps you listened to some stories about Jesus when you were a child. Or maybe you learned something about him at school. But many people have never taken time as an adult to examine Jesus—to consider the meaning of the man from Galilee from a mature viewpoint.

The book you are holding is a great place to start. It was written by a man called Mark, who researched his information from people who were eyewitnesses of the life and death of Jesus. These same eyewitnesses were also there when the astonishing events of the first Easter unfolded. Mark writes his book knowing it to be the truth – not made-up stories, but history.

Mark’s Gospel is the shortest of four accounts of the life of Jesus in the Bible. The word “Gospel” means “good news”. These people that wrote the Gospels were convinced that Jesus was good news for the whole world.

In his opening words, Mark tells us what this good news is that he wants to share with us: it is about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It is about the **identity** of Jesus.

So can we encourage you to read this book with an open mind, and an open heart? As you read it, ask the question that Mark asks: **Who is Jesus?** You may be surprised by what you discover...

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

Read it slowly...

You can read through Mark's Gospel in less than two hours. But to really think about what Mark is saying about Jesus, it is better to take it slowly. Use the reading plan on page 6 to work your way through a bit at a time.

Read it thoughtfully...

Many of the stories Jesus told were a bit like puzzles. The people at the time didn't "get them" immediately. So rather than speeding through to get to the end, take time to pause and think about the meaning of the stories and incidents. Because Mark's Gospel is so old, there are details that may be unfamiliar to you. There is a map on page 57 to show you where the events described in Mark happened.

Read it responsively...

There's a short section in the middle to help you think about some of the things raised in the first half. And after you have finished Mark there is a section at the back – on page 57 – that explains how you might respond to what you have read. And finally...

Read it prayerfully...

Mark wrote his Gospel because he had found forgiveness and new meaning in life through Jesus. Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, God wants to help you understand what you are reading. He is willing to answer even the most faltering prayer. The words below may help you.

A PRAYER TO USE BEFORE READING MARK

*Lord God, please help me as I read Mark's Gospel.
Help me to understand why what he has written is good news.
Help me to understand who Jesus is and why he came.
Help me to understand the parts that I find difficult,
and above all help me to respond to Jesus in the right way.*

Amen.

The Gospel of Mark

A reading plan: Mark in three weeks

You can read through Mark's Gospel in less than two hours. But to really think about what he is telling us about Jesus, it is better to take it slowly. Use the reading plan below to work your way through Mark, taking time to think about what you read.

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Day 1. Mark 1:1-28 | ■ Day 12. Mark 9:1-32 |
| ■ Day 2. Mark 1:29 – 2:12 | ■ Day 13. Mark 9:33 – 10:16 |
| ■ Day 3. Mark 2:13 – 3:6 | ■ Day 14. Mark 10:17-52 |
| ■ Day 4. Mark 3:7-34 | ■ Day 15. Mark 11:1-33 |
| ■ Day 5. Mark 4:1-41 | ■ Day 16. Mark 12:1-44 |
| ■ Day 6. Mark 5:1-20 | ■ Day 17. Mark 13:1-37 |
| ■ Day 7. Mark 5:21-43 | ■ Day 18. Mark 14:1-52 |
| ■ Day 8. Mark 6:1-29 | ■ Day 19. Mark 14:53 – 15:15 |
| ■ Day 9. Mark 6:30-56 | ■ Day 20. Mark 15:16-47 |
| ■ Day 10. Mark 7:1-37 | ■ Day 21. Mark 16 |
| ■ Day 11. Mark 8:1-38 | |

A note about chapters and verses

Throughout this book you will see some large numbers and some smaller numbers. The larger numbers are chapters that Mark has been split into. The smaller numbers are the verses that make up each chapter. The chapters and verses weren't in the original but have been added later to help us find our way around. We often use a kind of shorthand so that Mark chapter 1 and verse 1 will be written as "Mark 1:1" or sometimes as "Mark 1 v 1".

John the Baptist prepares the way

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

*'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way'*^c –

³ *'a voice of one calling in the wilderness,*

*"Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."*^d

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 baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round 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 baptise you with^e water, but he will baptise you with^e the Holy Spirit.'

The baptism and testing of Jesus

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised 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

a 1 Or *Jesus Christ. Messiah* (Hebrew) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean *Anointed One*.

b 1 Some manuscripts do not have *the Son of God*.

c 2 Mal. 3:1

d 3 Isaiah 40:3

e 8 Or *in*

he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted^f by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus announces the good news

¹⁴After 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!’

Jesus calls his first disciples

¹⁶As 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.’ ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him.

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

Jesus drives out an impure spirit

²¹They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³Just 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!’ ²⁶The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷The 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.’ ²⁸News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

^f 13 The Greek for *tempted* can also mean *tested*.

Jesus heals many

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

³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and 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.

Jesus prays in a solitary place

³⁵Very 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. ³⁶Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'

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

Jesus heals a man with leprosy

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

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

⁴³Jesus 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.' ⁴⁵Instead 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

^g 40 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

^h 41 Many manuscripts *Jesus was filled with compassion*

in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Jesus forgives and heals a paralysed man

2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’

⁶Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

⁸Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things? ⁹Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk”? ¹⁰But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the man, ¹¹‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ ¹²He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’

Jesus calls Levi and eats with sinners

¹³Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples,

for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’

¹⁷On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’

Jesus questioned about fasting

¹⁸Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, ‘How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?’

¹⁹Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. ²⁰But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

²¹‘No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²²And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.’

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

²³One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn. ²⁴The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’

²⁵He answered, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.’

²⁷Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man,

not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'

Jesus heals on the Sabbath

3 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. ²Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.'

⁴Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent.

⁵He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Crowds follow Jesus

⁷Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. ⁸When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. ¹⁰For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' ¹²But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus appoints the Twelve

¹³Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve^a that they might be with him and that he might send them out to

^a 14 Some manuscripts *twelve – designating them apostles –*

preach ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder'), ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus accused by his family and by teachers of the law

²⁰Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹When his family^b heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'

²²And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'

²³So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. ²⁷In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. ²⁸Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.'

³⁰He said this because they were saying, 'He has an impure spirit.'

³¹Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A crowd was sitting round him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.'

³³'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked.

³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle round him and

^b 21 Or *his associates*

said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'

The parable of the sower

4 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ²He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³'Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.'

⁹Then Jesus said, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'

¹⁰When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹He told them, 'The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹²so that,

*"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"^a*

¹³Then Jesus said to them, 'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷But since they have no root, they last only

a 12 Isaiah 6:9,10

a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.’

A lamp on a stand

²¹He said to them, ‘Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? ²²For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. ²³If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.’

²⁴‘Consider carefully what you hear,’ he continued. ‘With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more. ²⁵Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.’

The parable of the growing seed

²⁶He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’

The parable of the mustard seed

³⁰Again he said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³²Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.’



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