

# Graceful Choices

The gospel of Mark presents Jesus as a man with incredible power, yet not just a man but God clothed in human form. It is a fast paced account of key points in Jesus' life that leaves the reader gasping for breath as he races from one event to the next. He sets out to convince his readers that this Jesus of Nazareth not only is no mere mortal but he is also worthy of our worship, trust and devotion. Mark focuses on Jesus' raw power over any demon or spirit, and for all of this raw power, Jesus makes graceful choices—choices to help the helpless and deliver those trapped by sin, disease or evil spirits. Jesus heals people at will, commands the sea and wind and, most astounding, proves he can forgive sin (Mark 1:29-34; 6:45-52; 2:1-12).

Mark's audience was raised on stories of gods and goddesses, demons and strong spirits. Mark clearly notes Jesus' superiority over them. They heard of stories of gods becoming men. Yet, this story was different. Jesus reduces himself to being a mortal. He allows himself to be ridiculed and killed. He teaches people to love others even if they are hurting you. Jesus redefines power—not as mere force but as force tenderly shaping love into the lives of others. He gave his life to give life.

## Author

While the gospel provides little in terms of clues to its authorship, early Christian writers point to John Mark, a relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), as the author. He traveled with Paul and Barnabas only to return home before the trip was done (Acts 13:13). Paul did not want Mark to continue with them on the next tour while Barnabas insisted on the lad's presence. Paul and Barnabas part company over the matter. Barnabas continues his missionary efforts with Mark at his side. Barnabas influences him to work hard for the cause of Christ. Paul even calls for him to come to him as he faces death (2 Timothy 4:11). Early traditions tell us that Mark became a very good ambassador for Christ. What a difference Jesus has made in his life!

Peter seems to have worked closely with Mark because in his greetings he calls Mark his son (1 Peter 5:13). This has led some to believe that Mark's primary source on Jesus' life was Peter. However, his inclusion of story about a young man fleeing naked from the scene of Jesus' arrest has led some to believe that he was the young man (Mark 14:51-52). Nevertheless, we know that his ultimate source was the Holy Spirit.

## A Brief Outline

1. Jesus begins his ministry (Mark 1-4).
  - a. John the Baptist prepares Jesus' way and baptizes him (1:1-11).
  - b. Jesus goes into the desert alone to meet Satan face to face and wins (1:12-13).
  - c. Jesus selects his followers telling them that they will learn to catch men (1:14-20).
    - (1) Jesus bids them to come.
    - (2) They leave their nets and follow him.
  - d. Jesus casts out demons, heals the sick, claims power to forgive sin (and thereby deity), eats with sinners and asserts his Lordship over the Jewish holy day, the Sabbath. (2:1-28).
  - e. Many begin to follow him because of his power to perform miracles (3:1-12).
  - f. Jesus selects twelve men to be with him (3:13-19).
  - g. Jesus' opponents claim that Jesus' power comes from Satan (3:20-30).
  - h. Jesus teaches the people about God's family (3:31-4:34)
  - i. Jesus stops a storm (4:35-41).
2. Jesus demonstrates his power over demons, an incurable disease and even death itself (Mark 5).
3. Jesus is rejected in his own hometown (Mark 6:1-13).
4. John the Baptist is killed (Mark 6:14-29).

5. Jesus feeds 5,000 and walks on water (Mark 6:30-56).
6. Jesus teaches that sin comes from what is inside our hearts (Mark 7:1-23).
7. Jesus helps a non-Jew, heals a deaf man and a blind man, feeds 4,000 and warns his followers against following the Pharisees (Mark 7:24-8:26).
8. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ and then learns the import of his rash statement (Mark 8:27-9:32).
9. Jesus discusses what it means to follow him (Mark 9:33-9:45)
10. Jesus heals a blind man ((Mark 10:46-52).
11. Jesus teaches the people about himself and his kingdom openly in the temple courts while the Jews plot to kill him (Mark 11:1-14:2).
12. A woman honors Jesus with expensive perfume (Mark 14:3-9).
13. Jesus eats a final meal with his disciples and Judas betrays him for thirty pieces of silver (Mark 14:10-26).
14. Jesus goes to the garden to pray before he dies (Mark 14:27-42).
15. The Jewish authorities arrest Jesus and hold a kangaroo court in order to find some charge to make the execution look legal (Mark 14:43-65).
16. Peter denies that he knows Jesus because he fear grips him (Mark 14:66-72).
17. Jesus is taken to Pilate and executed (Mark 15:1-47).
18. Jesus rises from the dead and instructs his disciples to spread the good news throughout the world (Mark 16:1-20).

## Conclusion

Mark captures very crisp, fast paced moving snippets of Jesus' life and ministry for us so that we can decide whether he can rule over the demons in our lives. He emphasizes Jesus' ability to handle any problem no matter how large or how small. Death held him for only three days simply because he allowed it. Since no storm or scheme can keep him down, we know he has the power to instill us with life. Yet, despite his power, Jesus did not overlook the little people. He served and left that example of service for us to follow today. In fact, it is not just his power but how he uses that power that separates him from the gods whom Mark's readers have begun to disbelieve. In dying, Jesus saves us all. In rising, he prepares for us a *real* home.

## Suggestions for Personal Study

- Box out a time for prayer and reading at least twenty minutes every day.
  - Pray for an understanding and open heart.
  - Pray to be changed.
- Use a good study Bible and reliable translation.<sup>1</sup>
- Think in lists.
  - List details.
    - Specificity is a beautiful thing.
    - Details help round out the story and make the past come to life.
  - List people, places and things of interest.

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<sup>1</sup> While the NIV (New International Version) is good, the ESV (English Standard Version) offers a more precise translation. I recommend using the ESV study Bible, which has extensive notes even for serious Bible students and can be previewed online (see Online Study Tools). Also consider using the NET (New English Translation), a web-based translation that offers more than 60,000 translator notes. The free version only offers a portion of these notes but the small fee for the entire translation is well worth the cost.

- Use Bible dictionaries and other references to learn more. Especially check out free online resources
  - Write down questions as you go along.
  - Mark passages that are unclear for further study.
    - Catalogue your lists with descriptions of your findings.
- Retrace the journey of each major character.
  - Use a Bible atlas to learn more about each place.
  - Find pictures of what it looks like today so you can better visualize the sights and sounds of Jesus' time.<sup>2</sup>
- Mark passages with special meaning using with color-coding, symbols, etc.
- Select one passage per week to memorize or meditate upon.
- On a daily basis, focus on the reading(s) in bold print and thoughtfully answer the questions.
  - Not every question has a straightforward answer, but is designed for us to think more deeply about the passage.
  - Write down your thoughts before checking reference works and commentaries.
- Enjoy your summer!
  - Don't get stressed out if you fall behind, and try to read your Bible every day even if it is for only five minutes.
  - The important thing is to develop a habit for Bible reading.

## Online Study Tools

- [crosswire.org](http://www.crosswire.org) offers free downloadable Bible software for most computer platforms. I recommend downloading the ESV and NET Bible translations along with the NIV or other translation that you may be using.
- <http://www.esvbible.org> allows you to preview the **ESV Study Bible**, one of the most extensive study Bibles now available.
- <http://www.bible.org/netbible> is the online version of the NET Bible
- [studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org) offers a modern Bible dictionary for average Bible readers.
- [biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) also offers Bible references.
- <http://www.padfield.com/downloads/amplified.html> has photographs of many Bible places.
- [heartlight.com](http://www.heartlight.com) offers several devotional aids.
- [wbschool.org](http://www.wbschool.org) offers free Bible courses online.

## Mark's Portrayal of Jesus

### Mark 1:1-8

- Why does Mark begin his telling of the good news with John the Baptist?

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<sup>2</sup> One book I recommend is by Rex Nicholls, **The Gospel of Mark: Illuminated**, published by Lion Publishing in 1990.

- Who was John the Baptist? What was he like? What was his mission?

### **Isaiah 40:1-8**

- Why does John begin his ministry in the middle of nowhere?
  
- How does John pave the way for Jesus?

### **Malachi 2:17-3:5**

- How does what we think God ought to do with what he does in dispensing justice?
  
- Who does God oppose?

### **Malachi 4:1-6**

- Describe “the coming day”.
  
- Why is turning the hearts of fathers and children to their fathers so important?

### **Mark 1:9-11; Psalm 2; Isaiah 42:1**

- What is the significance of the heavens opening at Jesus’ baptism?
  
- How is Jesus God’s son?









- What were the twelve authorized to do and why?

**Mark 3:22-30; Isaiah 49:24-26**

- What is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

- Why is it unforgivable?

**Mark 3:20-21, 31-34**

- Why does Jesus' family think that he has lost his mind?

- How does it make you feel that even Jesus' family had trouble believing in him? How does this compare with your family?

- Who is Jesus' true family?

**Mark 4:1-9**

- List the different soils and what happens to each.

- Does how much harvest the good soil produces depend on how good the soil is?

**Mark 4:10-20 (cf. Isaiah 6:8-13)**

- How important to our understanding of the meaning of this parable is that Jesus told his disciples?
- How do we identify which soil type (heart)?

**Mark 4:21-25 (cf. Proverbs 11:5,12, 17)**

- How do we hide goodness or light under a bushel? Can it be done without getting burned?
- How do we measure others, and how will others measure us?

**Mark 4:26-29 (cf. Isaiah 55:6-13)**

- Wherein lies the power of the seed (or word of God) to grow?
- What does the harvest represent?

**Mark 4:30-34**

- Why does Jesus maintain an aura of secrecy concerning his teachings to those outside his circle of disciples?
- How and why do tiny things impact things so much larger?



- Why could Jesus do no mighty works among the people of his hometown?

**Mark 6:7-13**

- How does Jesus train the Twelve for ministry?
- What charge does he give them?

**Mark 6:14-29**

- What did Herod believe about John the Baptist?
- Why does Herod execute John?

**Mark 6:30-44 (cf. Exodus 16:1-12)**

- How does the feeding of the five thousand compare to manna from heaven?
- How much does this miracle convince the vast throng that Jesus is the Messiah?

**Mark 6:45-52; John 6:1-15**

- Why did Jesus force his disciple to depart before he dismissed the crowds?

- Given the context, what might have been the content of Jesus' prayer?
- What do the disciples still not understand even after Jesus walks on water?

**Mark 6:53-56**

- What did the throngs want from Jesus?

**Mark 7:1-13<sup>5</sup> (cf. Isaiah 29:13)**

- What place does tradition have in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees?
- Do we practice corban<sup>6</sup> today (cf. Acts 4:32-5:11)? If so, how do we do it today?
- Are traditions acceptable in the church (Mark 7:8; 1 Corinthians 11:16)? If so, how?

**Mark 7:14-23 (cf. Exodus 20:12; 21:17; Deuteronomy 23:21,23; 14:3-21; Leviticus 11:3-4, 8, 32-35)**

- What is holy and what is not? How do we know whether something is holy or not?

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<sup>5</sup> Josephus, Antiquities 13:10.6; "The Pharisees have taught the people a great many observances received from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup> Corban is to dedicate something completely to God's service, thus making it holy and utterly God's.

- What defiles a person's heart?

**Mark 7:24-30**

- Why does Jesus refuse to help her at first?
  
- What changes Jesus' mind?

**Mark 7:31-37 (cf. Isaiah 35:4-6)**

- Why did Jesus charge those he healed to not tell what he had done?
  
- Which is easier to heal physical deafness or spiritual deafness?

**Mark 8:1-10 (see Psalm 78:19-25)**

- Why does Jesus collect the leftovers?
  
- In spreading a table in the middle of nowhere, what is Jesus proving?

**Mark 8:11-14; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Isaiah 38:7-8; Psalm 95:5-10**

- What sign from heaven do the Pharisees want?

- Would they believe even if Jesus gave it to them?

**Mark 8:14-21; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2, 11**

- What is the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod?
  
- How can attitude affect belief?

**Mark 8:22-26**

- Why does Jesus lead the blind man out of the village before healing him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does Jesus go about healing him and why?

**Mark 8:27-30; Deuteronomy 18:18-22**

- How clearly do the disciples see Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In confessing him to be the Christ, how does their concept of the Messiah compare to that of Jesus?

**Mark 8:31-9:1; Isaiah 53:1-11 (cf. Hosea 6:2; Jonah 1:17)**

- Why does Peter have such a difficult time accepting Jesus' impending crucifixion?

- What does it mean to take up a cross and follow Jesus?

**Mark 9:2-13; Exodus 24:1-2, 15-16; 34:29-30**

- Compare Jesus' transfiguration with Moses' shining face (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7-11).

- What does this event teach us about Jesus?

**Psalm 2; Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Malachi 4:4-5; Hebrews 1:1-4; 3:1-6; 4:14-16**

- What place does Jesus hold for us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why did Jesus become like us, and why did he have to suffer?

**Mark 9:14-29; Psalm 78:5-7**

- Why could the disciples not heal this boy? Explain verse 29.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Which was more important in this setting—that Jesus heal the boy immediately so he does not suffer or that the father come to belief? Why?



**Mark 10:13-16**

- If Jesus has time for little children in his busy schedule, what does this say about whether he has time for us?

**Mark 10:17-31; Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-8**

- How do riches become a deadly trap spiritually?

- Is being rich sinful?

**Mark 10:32-34**

- Why does Jesus repeat this dire prediction so often?

**Mark 10:35-45**

- Is the desire for greatness sinful?

- How can a leader be both a leader and a servant at the same time?

**Mark 10:46-52**

- What does Jesus mean when he says, "...your faith has made you well?"





- What position did the Pharisees and Herodians take on this issue?
  
- How does Jesus' answer confound them?

**Mark 12:18-27; Daniel 12:2<sup>7</sup>**

- What will the resurrection be like?<sup>8</sup>

**Mark 12:28-34 (see Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18)**

- What motivates the scribe to ask his question?
  
- Why does no one else dare to ask him questions after this answer?

**Mark 12:35-37; Psalm 110:1; 2 Samuel 7:4-5; 5: 12, 16; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1**

- How can the Messiah be both a descendent of David and David's Lord?

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<sup>7</sup> Josephus, **Antiquities** 13:10.6 and 17:1.4, "The Sadducees say that we are to consider obligatory those observances which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the traditions of the fathers...The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: that souls die with the bodies; and they do not observe anything besides what the law enjoins; they consider it virtuous to dispute the teachers of philosophy."

<sup>8</sup> The Pharisees believed in a physical resurrection wherein we will have bodies as the ones we now have and live much as we do now. This is why they have no answer to the Sadducees and Jesus does.

**Mark 12:38-44**

- Compare the character of the scribes with that of the poor widow.

**Mark 13:1-13 (cf. Jeremiah 26:6, 1—a description of the destruction of the first temple)?**

- How does relying on things even sacred things destroy our faith?

**Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24; Daniel 11:31; 12:1, 11<sup>10</sup>**

- What is the abomination of desolation in Daniel?

- How does Jesus use this term?

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<sup>9</sup> Josephus describes the destruction of the temple of Jesus' time. Josephus, **Jewish War**, vi, 230ff., (For six days the most powerful battering-ram of all had been pounding the wall incessantly without result; this like the others made no impression on stones so huge and so perfectly bonded. At the northern gate a second team attempted to undermine the foundations, and by tremendous efforts they did lever out the stones in front; but the inner stones supported the weight and the gate stood firm, till despairing of all attempts with engines and crowbars they set up ladders against the colonnades...By now the soldiers were setting fire to the gates. The silver melted and ran quickly exposing the woodwork to the flames, which were carried from there in a solid wall and fastened onto the colonnades. When the Jews saw the ring of fire, they lost all power of body and mind...")

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, **History of the Church**, Book 3 Chapter 5, "The members of the Jerusalem church, by means of a prophecy given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the City before the war began and settle in a town in Peraea called Pella. To Pella those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem."

**Mark 13:24-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4**

- What is the coming of the Son of man in Mark?

**Mark 13:28-37**

- Are there any warning signs for the end of the world?

**Mark 14:1-11 (cf. 1 Samuel 16:12-13, Deuteronomy 15:11)**

- What is the final event that leads Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus and why?

**Mark 14:12-21; Deuteronomy 16:1-7**

- Describe the Passover feast.

**Mark 14:22-25; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 41:9; Isaiah 53:12; Exodus 24:8**

- Why does Jesus select this time to institute his own memorial?
  
- What connection is there between Passover and this memorial?



**Mark 14:66-72 (see also Psalm 38:11-14)**

- Even the bravest can cave under fear of the unknown. Contrast Peter's earlier assertions (vv. 29, 31) with what he does now.

**Mark 15:1-5**

- Why do Jewish authorities deliver Jesus to Pilate?

**Mark 15:6-15**

- Why do the masses turn on Jesus so quickly?

**Mark 15:16-20**

- How do Roman soldiers humiliate Jesus?<sup>12</sup>

**Mark 15:21-32;<sup>13</sup>**

- If Jesus could perform so many miracles, what kept him on the cross?
  
- How can Paul see this dark event as a triumph (see Colossians 2:9-15)?

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<sup>12</sup> A cohort or battalion of soldiers usually consisted of one tenth of a legion or 600 men.

<sup>13</sup> Romans used crucifixion as a means to maintain civil order: Quintilian, **Declamations** 274, "Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect."





THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN THE TIME OF JESUS

Herod's Temple Mount was the best part of Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. Strong and Jerusalem's north-eastern slope. It occupied one-third of the city's area. Higher than the Golan, the Temple Mount's foundation was expanded to encompass approximately 1.5 million square feet (140,000 square meters). It had a wall with an ornate facade along its perimeter. The largest tower being 65 feet high, 115 feet high, and 12 feet thick (19.8 m by 35.1 m by 3.7 m).

Herod's high tower, a bridge over the frequent valley below, leading from the Temple Mount to the Antonian Plaza, a section of the western wall south of Herod's Arch (187 feet/57 m long, sometimes called the Valley Arch) has been a place of prayer for Jews for the last 200 years. The lowest seven stone courses, which can be seen at ground level are Herodian.

The early square Temple Mount presented its domes as a separate area with its own walls and gates.

The Antonian citadel was where Herod had his palace. It was connected to the palace in order to protect the temple and to separate religious and secular activities.

Herod's Temple, the magnificent domed structure, was 115 feet (35 m) high.

The Court of the Women was the smallest part of the inner temple complex that women could enter.

The Pool of Bethesda was probably used to wash so-called animals before they were led to the Temple Mount.

See a detailed plan of the Temple Mount in the Antonian Plaza. Herod's Gate, the main entrance to the Temple Mount, is the Antonian Gate.

Some of the walls of Jerusalem's eastern wall, with a piece of comparison (1.3 km/0.23 miles S.W.).

The strong iron, tiled, stone or clay-paved floor or non-paved floor, with a piece of comparison (1.3 km/0.23 miles S.W.).

The Court of the Gentiles was the largest part of the Temple Mount. It was the place where the Jews gathered to pray and to hear the rabbis teach.

The Royal Stoa was a 917-foot-long (279 m) portico, containing four rows of 40 columns. The portico met in the central area of the temple. The columns were decorated with the faces of the kings of Judaea, and 300 feet (91 m) to the right, there was the portico of the temple mentioned in Luke 21 and Luke 23.

