

# **The Gospel of Mark — Teacher's Guide**

## **Week 1: The King Arrives**

### **Mark 1:1–20**

#### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

The opening twenty verses of Mark serve as the launching pad for everything that follows in this Gospel — and indeed for the entire ministry of Jesus. Mark moves swiftly, but every sentence is loaded with theological weight. In these verses we are shown the identity of Jesus (Christ and Son of God), the preparation of His way (through John's preaching of repentance and baptism), His own submission to the Father's will (His baptism, the descent of the Spirit, and the Father's voice), His victory over the tempter in the wilderness, His central proclamation (the kingdom of God has arrived; repent and believe), and the immediate, costly response of those He calls (Simon, Andrew, James, and John). The teacher's goal in this opening lesson is to help students see the unity of these events and grasp the urgency Mark conveys: the King has arrived, the kingdom is breaking in, and there is no neutral response. Throughout the lesson, ground students in three foundational truths: (1) the Scriptures are reliable, and what God promised through the prophets He has fulfilled in Christ; (2) the kingdom Jesus announced is a present, spiritual reign that came in His ministry and was established in His church, not a future earthly political kingdom; and (3) discipleship is not a single decision or a private feeling but a costly, lifelong following of Jesus that begins with repentance and faith and continues in obedient surrender.

#### **Question 1**

##### **Student Question:**

*Mark 1:1 introduces this book as “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Why does Mark identify Jesus with both titles — “Christ” (Messiah) and “Son of God” — in the very first verse, and what does each title affirm about who Jesus is?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Mark wastes no time in establishing who Jesus is. In a single sentence he uses three loaded designations: Jesus (His personal name, meaning “Yahweh saves”), Christ (the Greek equivalent of Messiah, the long-promised anointed King of Israel), and the Son of God (a title affirming His unique relationship to the Father and His divine nature). Together, these titles announce both Jesus' mission and His identity. He is the promised deliverer from David's line, and He is also the eternal Son who shares the Father's nature.

Mark's purpose is clear: before any miracle is described or any sermon is recorded, the reader must know who Jesus is. The whole Gospel will then unfold as evidence for what Mark declares

at the outset. This is also a corrective to false views of Jesus. He is not merely a teacher, not merely a prophet, not merely a good moral example. He is the Christ, the Son of God — and the only adequate response to such a Person is faith and discipleship.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The deity and Messiahship of Jesus declared from the very beginning
- Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic hope
- The full identity of Jesus — fully God and fully man — as the foundation of the gospel
- The Gospel of Mark presents evidence for the claim made in v. 1

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does the title “Christ” tell us about Jesus’ connection to the Old Testament promises?
- Why is it important that Mark identifies Jesus as the “Son of God” before describing any of His works?
- How does a low view of who Jesus is inevitably weaken a person’s response to the gospel?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verses 2–3, Mark grounds the arrival of Jesus in Old Testament prophecy, quoting from Malachi and Isaiah. Why is it significant that Mark begins his Gospel by anchoring the ministry of John and Jesus in passages written hundreds of years earlier?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Mark blends a quotation from Malachi 3:1 (“Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way”) with Isaiah 40:3 (“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord”). By doing so, he ties John the Baptist’s ministry — and Jesus’ arrival — directly into the unfolding plan of God revealed through the prophets centuries before. The coming of Jesus is not a surprise; it is the fulfillment of what God had been promising for ages.

This grounding in the Old Testament accomplishes several things. First, it underscores the unity and reliability of Scripture: what God speaks, He brings to pass. Second, it presents Jesus as the climax of God’s redemptive plan, not a new religion. Third, it points to the Old Testament as a trustworthy guide for understanding who Jesus is and what He came to do. For students today, this is a powerful reminder that we hold a Bible that hangs together as one unified message from Genesis to Revelation, with Jesus at the center.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The unity and reliability of all Scripture
- Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy

- God's redemptive plan unfolding consistently across centuries
- The authority and trustworthiness of the prophets

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it tell us about God that He announced these events centuries before they happened?
- Why is it important for Christians today to read and value the Old Testament?
- How does fulfilled prophecy strengthen the case for Jesus being who Mark says He is?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*John the Baptist appears in verses 4–8, preaching “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” What do John’s message, his lifestyle, and his location in the wilderness teach us about what was needed to prepare people to receive Jesus?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John appears in the wilderness — a place of separation from the comforts and corruptions of settled life — preaching a stark, urgent message: repent, and be baptized in the Jordan River as an expression of that repentance, in view of the forgiveness of sins. His clothing of camel's hair and his diet of locusts and wild honey echo the appearance of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and signal his role as a prophet calling Israel back to covenant faithfulness. His lifestyle confirms his message: this is no soft, comfortable spirituality.

John's baptism was a baptism of preparation. It was not yet Christian baptism (which would not be given until after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; see Acts 19:1–5 where Paul rebaptizes those who had received only John's baptism). But the principle remains: people had to acknowledge their sin, turn from it, and prepare themselves to receive the Lord. The same principle applies today. Before a person can truly receive Jesus, the heart must be brought low by an honest reckoning with sin. Modern hearers, like first-century Judeans, often need to be called out of comfortable assumptions and into honest repentance before they are ready to embrace Christ on His terms.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Repentance as essential preparation for receiving Christ
- John's baptism as preparatory, distinct from Christian baptism instituted after the resurrection (Acts 2:38; 19:1–5)
- The prophetic role of calling people away from cultural and religious complacency
- Genuine repentance involves turning from sin, not merely feeling sorry for it

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why must repentance precede a sincere reception of Jesus?
- What does it look like in our day to be called out of comfort and into honest self-examination?
- How is John's baptism similar to — and different from — the baptism Christ commanded for the church (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38)?

#### **Question 4**

##### **Student Question:**

*In verses 7–8, John insists, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.” How does John’s humility serve as a model for how Christians today should point others to Christ rather than to themselves?*

##### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John was wildly popular. Crowds streamed out to the wilderness from Jerusalem and all Judea to hear him. Anyone less centered on God's purpose might have used such influence to build a personal following. Instead, John deflected attention from himself with striking clarity. He was unworthy even to perform the task of the lowliest household servant on behalf of the One who was coming. His role was preparatory; the Coming One alone was worthy of devotion.

This is a model for every Christian teacher, parent, and worker for the kingdom. The temptation to take credit, to attract followers, or to draw attention to oneself is always near. John's posture — “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30) — must shape how we serve. The goal of Christian influence is never to gather a personal following but to lift up Christ so others can see and follow Him.

##### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Humility as essential for faithful service
- Pointing others to Christ rather than to ourselves
- Christ alone is worthy of ultimate devotion
- Faithful ministry seeks to magnify Jesus, not the minister

##### **Discussion Prompts**

- What temptations to self-promotion do Christians face in church work, teaching, or social settings?
- How can a teacher or leader recognize when they are starting to gather a following rather than directing people to Christ?
- What practical habits help us “decrease” so that Christ may “increase” in the eyes of others?

#### **Question 5**

**Student Question:**

*Verses 9–11 record the baptism of Jesus. Why would the sinless Son of God submit to John’s baptism, and what does His example teach about obedience to God’s revealed will?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The sinless Son of God did not need baptism for repentance. Yet Jesus came from Nazareth and submitted to John’s baptism. Matthew records that John resisted at first, but Jesus said it was necessary “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Several truths are at work here. Jesus identified with the sinful people He came to save. He set His public seal of approval on John’s God-given ministry. And He showed Himself willing, from the very first day of His public work, to do whatever God required, regardless of how it might appear to others.

Jesus’ baptism is not the same as Christian baptism, but it does teach us something profound about obedience. If the Son of God Himself submitted to baptism in order to do everything the Father required, then surely it is fitting for those who claim Him as Lord to submit to whatever He commands — including the baptism He later instituted for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and as the response of faith that puts believers into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Wherever God speaks, the obedient heart says yes.

**Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Jesus’ baptism identified Him with sinful humanity He came to save
- Jesus modeled obedience to God’s revealed will from the beginning of His ministry
- Jesus’ baptism is distinct from Christian baptism instituted after the resurrection
- Christian baptism is commanded for believers in connection with faith and repentance (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27)

**Discussion Prompts**

- Why was it important that Jesus submitted to baptism even though He had no sin to repent of?
- What does Jesus’ obedience here teach us about our own response to God’s commands?
- In what ways is Christian baptism connected to — and distinct from — the baptism John administered?

**Question 6****Student Question:**

*At the baptism, the Father speaks from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (v. 11), and the Spirit descends on Jesus. What do these events reveal about the identity of Jesus and about God’s pleasure in obedience?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Mark gives us one of the clearest pictures in all of Scripture of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit acting together. The Son is being baptized. The Spirit descends like a dove and rests upon Him. The Father speaks audibly from heaven. The unity and distinct persons of the Godhead are on display at the very threshold of Jesus' public ministry. There is no room here for the false view that Jesus is merely a man whom God adopted, nor for any view that diminishes either His full deity or His full humanity.

The Father's declaration — "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" — echoes Psalm 2:7 (the royal Son) and Isaiah 42:1 (the chosen Servant). The King and the Suffering Servant are one and the same. The Father affirms the Son just as the Son begins the path that will lead to the cross. This is also a quiet but powerful encouragement: the Father takes pleasure in faithful obedience. The Son had not yet preached a sermon or healed a single person, but His willingness to obey at every step was already pleasing to the Father.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit visibly acting together
- The deity of Jesus affirmed audibly by the Father
- Jesus as both the royal Son and the chosen Servant
- God's pleasure in obedient faithfulness, not merely visible accomplishment

## **Discussion Prompts**

- What do we learn from this scene about the nature of God — one God in three Persons working together?
- How does the Father's affirmation of the Son point us to what truly pleases God in our own lives?
- Why is it significant that the Father affirms Jesus before any miracles or sermons have occurred?

## **Question 7**

### **Student Question:**

*Verses 12–13 briefly describe Jesus being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan for forty days. Why is it important that Jesus faced and overcame this testing before beginning His public ministry, and what encouragement does this give to believers?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Mark gives only the briefest summary — two verses — but the weight of what is said is enormous. The same Spirit who descended on Jesus at His baptism now drives Him into the wilderness to be tested by Satan. Forty days in the wilderness recalls Israel's forty years in the

wilderness, where the people repeatedly failed; Jesus, the true and faithful Son, prevailed. Where Adam fell in a garden of abundance, Jesus stood firm in a wilderness of want.

For believers, this provides deep encouragement on at least two levels. First, our Savior knows what it is to be tempted. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Second, His victory over the tempter assures us that He is qualified to be our deliverer. He has met our enemy and overcome him. The Christian’s call is not to face temptation in our own strength but to walk in dependence on the One who has already conquered.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Jesus as the true and faithful Son who succeeded where Israel and Adam failed
- The reality and personal nature of Satan as a tempter
- Christ’s sinless endurance of temptation qualifies Him as our High Priest
- Believers face temptation but never alone — Christ has overcome

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What encouragement do you find in knowing Jesus Himself was genuinely tempted, yet did not sin?
- How does Jesus’ victory in the wilderness shape how we should approach our own temptations?
- Why is it significant that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the place of testing?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verses 14–15, Jesus proclaims, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” What does it mean that the kingdom of God was “at hand,” and why does Jesus pair the commands to “repent” and to “believe”?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This sentence is the heart of Jesus’ early preaching, and it should shape how we understand the whole Gospel of Mark. “The time is fulfilled” means the season of preparation through the prophets has ended; the appointed moment has come. “The kingdom of God is at hand” means the long-promised reign of God is now drawing near in the person and work of Jesus. It is not a distant, future political kingdom; it is the reign of the Messiah that breaks in with His ministry and is established when His church begins on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus said the kingdom would come with power within the lifetime of His hearers (Mark 9:1), and it did. Believers today are members of that kingdom — Christ’s church, which Daniel said would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

Jesus pairs two commands that must never be separated: “repent” and “believe.” Faith without repentance is empty profession; repentance without faith is despair. To repent is to turn from sin; to believe is to trust in the gospel — the good news of who Jesus is and what He has come to do. These are inseparable in Jesus’ preaching, in the apostles’ preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:36–38), and in the gospel call today. There is no entering the kingdom apart from a genuine turning to God in faith and obedience.

Be careful here to set aside the popular notion that the kingdom is a future, earthly, political reign yet to come. Mark presents the kingdom as already arriving with Jesus. Christ is reigning now from the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22), and His kingdom — the church — is advancing in this present age until He returns to deliver it back to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24–25).

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The kingdom of God arrived with Jesus and was established in His church (Acts 2; Daniel 2:44)
- Christ is now reigning, not waiting to begin His reign at some future earthly date
- Repentance and faith are inseparable and equally required
- The gospel call demands a response, not mere intellectual assent

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does Jesus mean by saying “the kingdom of God is at hand”?
- Why do repentance and faith always have to go together?
- How does the truth that Christ is reigning now affect the way we live as His people?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*In verses 16–20, Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John, who “immediately” leave their nets — and even their father — to follow Him. What does their swift, costly response teach us about the nature of true discipleship?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Mark loves the word “immediately,” and he uses it here to underline how decisive the response of these fishermen was. They left a profitable trade, their tools, their crew, and their family responsibilities to walk after Jesus. They did not first negotiate the terms. They did not first try Jesus out for a few weeks. They heard the call, and they followed.

True discipleship is not casual. Jesus calls people to leave whatever competes with His lordship and to walk after Him in trust. He promises Simon and Andrew that He will make them “become fishers of men” — discipleship is not only following but being shaped into people who bring

others to Christ. James and John leave their father Zebedee with the hired servants and the boat; following Jesus may require difficult adjustments in family expectations and economic security. None of this is to suggest that every disciple must literally abandon work and family; Peter still had a home, and the apostles still cared for their wives and parents. The point is that nothing — not job, not family, not possessions — may stand between Jesus and the disciple's allegiance.

This is also an honest picture of how discipleship continues. Following Jesus is not a single moment of decision but a lifelong walk that begins with leaving and continues with going wherever He leads. The same Jesus who called these men beside the Sea of Galilee calls every Christian today to ongoing surrender.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Discipleship begins with leaving whatever competes with Christ's lordship
- Jesus shapes His followers to bring others to Him ("fishers of men")
- Following Jesus may carry real cost in work, family, and security
- Discipleship is a lifelong walk of continued surrender, not a one-time decision

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What do these men's response teach us about how quickly and decisively we should respond to Christ's call?
- What things in modern life are most likely to compete with full surrender to Jesus?
- How does seeing discipleship as a lifelong walk — not just a single decision — change how we live?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Looking at this passage as a whole, how does Mark introduce Jesus as the King who has arrived, and what does it mean for us today to recognize Him as King and respond as His disciples?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

By the time we reach the end of Mark 1:20, Mark has packed an extraordinary amount of theology and biography into just twenty verses. Jesus is declared Christ and Son of God (v. 1). His coming fulfills ancient prophecy (vv. 2–3). His way is prepared by a humble forerunner (vv. 4–8). He is baptized and affirmed by the Father and the Spirit (vv. 9–11). He overcomes the tempter in the wilderness (vv. 12–13). He announces the arrival of the kingdom and calls all people to repent and believe (vv. 14–15). And He immediately begins to form a community of disciples who leave everything to follow Him (vv. 16–20).

The cumulative message is clear: the King has arrived. The kingdom is not far off; it has broken into history in the person of Jesus. There is no neutral ground. Every reader is being summoned to do what John summoned the crowds to do, what Jesus summoned Galilee to do, and what those first disciples actually did — repent of sin, believe the gospel, and follow Jesus wherever He leads. To recognize Jesus as King is to surrender the throne of one's own life. It is to enter His kingdom on His terms — through faith, repentance, baptism into Christ, and a lifetime of obedient discipleship in His church.

As the foundation of this twenty-week study, this passage frames the whole Gospel. Mark will continue to show us this same Jesus — His authority, His compassion, His suffering, His resurrection, and His commission. The question Mark places before us in chapter 1 is the question we will return to again and again: have we recognized the King, and are we following Him?

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Mark's opening establishes the identity and authority of Jesus
- The kingdom of God has arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus
- Every hearer is called to repent, believe, and follow
- Faithful discipleship is the only adequate response to who Jesus is

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What aspect of Jesus' arrival in this passage strikes you most as we begin this study?
- If Jesus is truly King, what areas of your own life still need to come under His reign?
- How does this opening passage prepare us for everything we will see in the rest of Mark's Gospel?