

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

The reMARKable Journey Begins

FAITH & HOPE

A STUDY OF MARK 1–3

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 BaptistWayPress®

Dallas, Texas

*The reMARKable Journey Begins: Faith & Hope—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on page 7 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1-866-249-1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, www.baptistwaypress.org. The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see

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- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.
- H. You can receive the lesson preview each week by signing up for the Baptist Standard weekly newsletter at no cost.
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The reMARKable Journey Begins

Faith & Hope

A Study of Mark 1–3

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Introducing

The reMARKable Journey Begins Faith & Hope

A STUDY OF MARK 1–3

The baptism. Men fishing. A man possessed. A leper. A paralyzed man. A tax collector and sinners. The Disciples. Family. A man with a shriveled hand. The multitudes. Each approaching Jesus with ***faith and hope*** for the future. Each wanting a better life. Each trusting Jesus for an answer to their problems.

Mark, Chapters 1–3, is an incredible fast-paced action start to the earliest historical account of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Mark’s narrative moves quickly and reflects the “no time to waste” action in Jesus’ life. There is certainly a sense of urgency that resonates in Mark’s Gospel.

Background on the Book of Mark

The opening words to this Gospel, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” states the purpose of this book and the title of our study, “The reMARKable Journey Begins.” Mark’s Gospel is the shortest of the early stories about Jesus. Many theologians believe this Gospel was the first to be written. Mark was writing to a Roman audience. The Romans loved action, and the action never stops. It certainly has all the punch of a short

story that is meant to make you face the truth about Jesus, God, and yourself. This book is called the Gospel of Mark, even though his name does not appear anywhere in the text. Mark is given the authorship credit from an early pastor named Bishop Papias, who wrote in the second century that this book was written by John Mark as told by Simon Peter. We know that Peter was a spiritual father figure to Mark because Peter ends his first letter by sending greetings “...and so does my son, Mark” (1 Peter 5:13). Chapters 1–3 of Mark’s Gospel are a divinely inspired and accurate historical record of the beginning of Jesus’ remarkable journey.

The Book of Mark in Our Day

Christianity is not a passive faith. It is an exciting and proactive way of life where God’s love motivates us to help those in need, to serve those around us, and as a result, to experience what it means to be a true servant leader. And there is no better example of this than Christ Himself whose life was defined by serving others.

This study of chapters 1–3 takes an in-depth look at the character of Christ and His remarkable message at the very beginning of His ministry. We see clearly, in these three chapters, how the heart of God is moved by the heart of His children. Our prayer is that this study will inspire you to pursue a lifestyle of serving others.

The reMARKable Journey Begins Faith & Hope

A Study of Mark 1-3

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| Christmas | Mary, Did You Know? | Luke 1:30-38 |

Additional Resources for Studying the Gospel of Mark

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NOTES

1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BaptistWay Press with all of its comments.

lesson **1**

A Voice for God

MAIN IDEA

We are called to help people find and follow God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Am I pointing people to God?

STUDY AIM

To realize the only way Jesus can become greater is when I'm willing to become less

QUICK READ

John's job was to prepare the way for the Lord. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that said a forerunner would come to introduce the Messiah.



Introduction

If you are studying these lessons in the timeframe the publisher envisioned, then you are getting ready for Christmas! What are you doing to prepare for the big day? I was in a restaurant for lunch one day when my least favorite Christmas song blared out from the speakers in the ceiling: “You better watch out, You better not cry; You better not pout, I’m telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town. He’s making a list and checking it twice; Gonna find out who’s naughty or nice: Santa Claus is coming to town.” Aside from the insufferable theological disaster of that song, the singer was not singing, she was shouting as if yelling might motivate all us girls and boys to straighten up and fly right. It may be true that as Christmas approaches uninitiated girls and boys will suddenly get back on the path of good behavior since Santa knows when you’ve been bad or good. Around Christmas time it is good to be good if you know what is good for you. It is very important to be behaviorally prepared for the big day. You certainly would not want to get to Christmas morning and be unprepared for the coming of St. Nick! So, be good, for goodness sake!

Mark 1:1-8

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.”

Preparing the Way (1:1-3)

For Christians, preparing for Christmas is preparing for the coming of the Lord. Even if you are not studying this lesson in December, it is always time to prepare for the Lord's coming. The Lord comes to us at every time of year.

Mark gets us ready for the Lord's coming quite abruptly. He does not fool around with shepherds and wise men and angels. He starts by shouting Scripture at us, warning everyone to get ready because the Lord is coming.

Mark looked back into the Old Testament prophets to give scriptural understanding of the story he was about to tell. He told us he was quoting Isaiah. Actually, the Scripture he pointed to comes from two Old Testament prophets. The first part of the quotation in verse 2 is from Malachi 3:1. The second part of the quotation in verse 3 is from Isaiah 40:3.

These prophetic Scriptures help us understand the role of John the Baptist. John was the eccentric preacher who came out of nowhere to let people know the Lord was coming and they better get ready! John, the messenger, played the role of a Shakespearean herald who comes onto the stage at the beginning of the play to announce the setting, then exits to let the play begin. John knew he was not the main event. He was there to get people ready for the main event. Once he did his part, he left the stage to make room for the Lord's appearing.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist's main role was to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Bible does tell us other things about him. Luke 1 records the birth narrative of John. His mother Elizabeth was related to Mary the mother of Jesus. His father Zechariah was a priest. The Gospels also tell us the story of John's gruesome death at the hands of Herod Antipas. John's ministry was extensive, and his movement continued even after his death.

In some ways Christians still have the role John had. We are not the star of the play, but we do have a role in pointing to the star of the play. We are still heralds, preparing people for the coming of the Lord. Every word we speak can flatten some mountains that may stand in the way of the Lord

coming to someone. Every action we take may fill in some valleys to help another person see Jesus clearly. We are still messengers preparing the way of the Lord.

Being Ready (1:4-5)

So what does it look like to be prepared for the coming of the Lord? You cannot just wake up on Christmas morning having done nothing to be prepared. There are gifts to buy, lights to put up, and trees to trim. All of this happens days if not weeks before the big day.

John the Baptist had some ideas about getting prepared for the Lord's coming. First, he preached about repentance. To repent a person must recognize they are going in the wrong direction and turn around and go in the other direction. It is a difficult thing to recognize you are going in the wrong direction. Most people do not appreciate someone telling us we are going in the wrong direction. But people who tell us we are going in the wrong direction are often the best friends we have.

John the Baptist was a friend to people because he told them they were going in the wrong direction. They were sinners. John was courageous enough to tell them the truth. John was that irritating friend who dared to tell them they needed to turn around before they ran off the cliff. He knew they could not be ready for the coming of the Lord until they repented.

Presumably John succeeded in convincing a lot of people. The Bible says, "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him." Mark indicates they confessed their sins. Confession is an outward sign of repentance. Sometimes that confession may be a public event, other times it may be to another individual. But it is always an act that involves others. We can and should confess our sins to God. But confession to another person is vitally important in the act of repentance. Confession helps us reconcile to the people our sins have injured. Confession makes us publicly accountable for our actions. Inward repentance without outward confession leaves relationships damaged and justice undone. Confession helps us get ready for the coming of the Lord.

A public sign of repentance and confession is baptism. Baptism was already being practiced as a religious ritual in Judaism, so it was not a complete-

ly novel concept to the people. In Judaism, Gentile converts were baptized into the Jewish faith as a sign of their conversion, but it was not necessarily accompanied by repentance and confession of sin. So in this sense, John's baptism had different theological meaning than the baptism of Judaism. John's baptism was a sign of repentance accompanied by confession.

Today baptism is still an important ritual of our faith. In one sense our practice of baptism still signifies repentance and confession. We believe a person must repent of sin and confess that sin when they decide to trust Christ. When we are baptized, we are making a public pronouncement of our repentance and confession. The act of being buried in water symbolizes the death of the person we were before we came to Christ, and a new person emerges from the water.

There is a difference, though, in John's baptism and Christian baptism. John himself will speak to this later. In Acts 19:1-7, Luke records a story about some Ephesian believers who had received John's baptism but not Christian baptism. Paul seems befuddled they had not received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized. They explain they only knew about John's baptism of repentance. Something was missing in John's baptism. Therefore, it seems we cannot stop with repentance and confession. There is more.

When the Lord Comes (1:6-8)

John was not your ordinary Baptist preacher. He came out of the wilderness, and some scholars think he might have been part of the Essene movement that cloistered itself in the desert away from society. If this is the case, John has broken away from strict Essenes to engage society with his message.

His wardrobe left something to be desired. Camel hair and a leather belt were unusual and humble even for his day. His clothing harkens back to Elijah. In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah is described as wearing "a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." Mark mentions John's wardrobe because he wants us to make the connection to Elijah. Popular tradition believed that Elijah would return to the earth immediately preceding the coming of the Messiah. By describing John's clothing, Mark is signifying that Elijah has come in the form of John, and the Messiah would follow soon afterward. John's wardrobe is just another sign pointing to Jesus as the Messiah.

John's diet left something to be desired too. Most of us are happy to eat honey, but locusts? Locusts were permitted in the dietary laws of Judaism, but they were not normal fare. They probably signified John's protest against the luxurious lifestyles of the privileged in society. John's life was a life of self-denial as a way of speaking out against the oppressive practices of the wealthy.

But John's wardrobe and diet were not the only ways he spoke. He also used words. In other gospel records, his words were more harsh than is recorded in Mark. He accused people of being "a brood of vipers" and threatened to cut them out by the roots (Luke 3:7-9). In Mark, his words point people to Someone who is coming who will be greater than he is.

We know the one who came after John was Jesus. It was John's task to point to Jesus and not to himself. Many people thought of John as a mighty man, but John wanted people to understand Jesus was mightier. In fact, Jesus was so mighty John indicates he was not even worthy of performing the most menial task for Jesus.

At this point, John told the people what was missing in his baptism. John's baptism was simply a baptism of repentance and confession. These things could have been undertaken by human means of self-discipline and willpower. But Jesus would bring the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian baptism in and of itself does not confer the Holy Spirit on a person. But Christian baptism is an outward sign of the grace of God on a person who has come to faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit is a gift of God that is conferred on us when we come to know Jesus.

Baptism

Think back upon your baptism. The pastor (or whoever baptized you) probably said something like, "Buried by baptism into death, raised to walk in newness of life." Research where that saying comes from. What does it mean? Does it make any difference in your Christian life?

Some Christians understand the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" as a separate, or second, blessing God gives to some people. It is often evidenced by speaking in tongues, and is understood as a gift that comes to someone after

they have put faith in Jesus. Most Baptists do not understand the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” in this way. We generally believe that when we put our faith in Christ the gift of the Holy Spirit is simultaneous with the grace we have received by faith.

John’s pronouncement that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit was his recognition that Jesus was greater and mightier than he was. He was anxious to deflect attention away from himself and point to Jesus.

Implications and Actions

You may or may not be studying this lesson during the Christmas season. Either way, it is always the season to be ready for the coming of the Lord. We ought always to be in a posture of repentance and confession. We ought always to remember our baptism and know that God’s grace has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit. And like John, we should always be a voice pointing to Jesus.

You may not be at all ready for the Lord’s coming. If you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ, the best way to be prepared for the coming of the Lord is to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and the promise of new life.

Questions

1. Read other gospel stories about John’s ministry. What do you think John would have to say to our society concerning repentance and confession?

2. Consider things in your life from which you should repent.

3. What do you think John meant when he talked about Jesus baptizing people with the Holy Spirit? How is this different from the baptism of John?

4. How are you pointing people away from yourself and toward Jesus?

5. Have you made a decision to follow Jesus?