

# LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing  
encounter with God's Word*

# MARK

*Jesus upsets our expectations  
in order to give us something better  
than we could imagine.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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NAVPRESS 

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### *Mark*

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# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

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## Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals.

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

## Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

*Optional Application.* Nearly all application questions are optional; do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

*For Thought and Discussion.* Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

*For Further Study.* These include (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

## Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of Mark. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1, you will lay the foundation for your study of Mark by asking yourself, *Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?*

In lessons 2 through 18, you will analyze successive passages of Mark in detail.

After you have completed the final lesson, you may want to review Mark, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

## Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do you want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you remember.

## Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 169. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

## Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

## Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then return to your passage as often as you can during the day for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

## For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, and youth groups. Both new and experienced Bible students will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn’t understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called “For the Group.” These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each “For the Group” at least a week ahead so he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God’s guidance, help one another resist temptation, assure each other that the other’s growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another’s commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

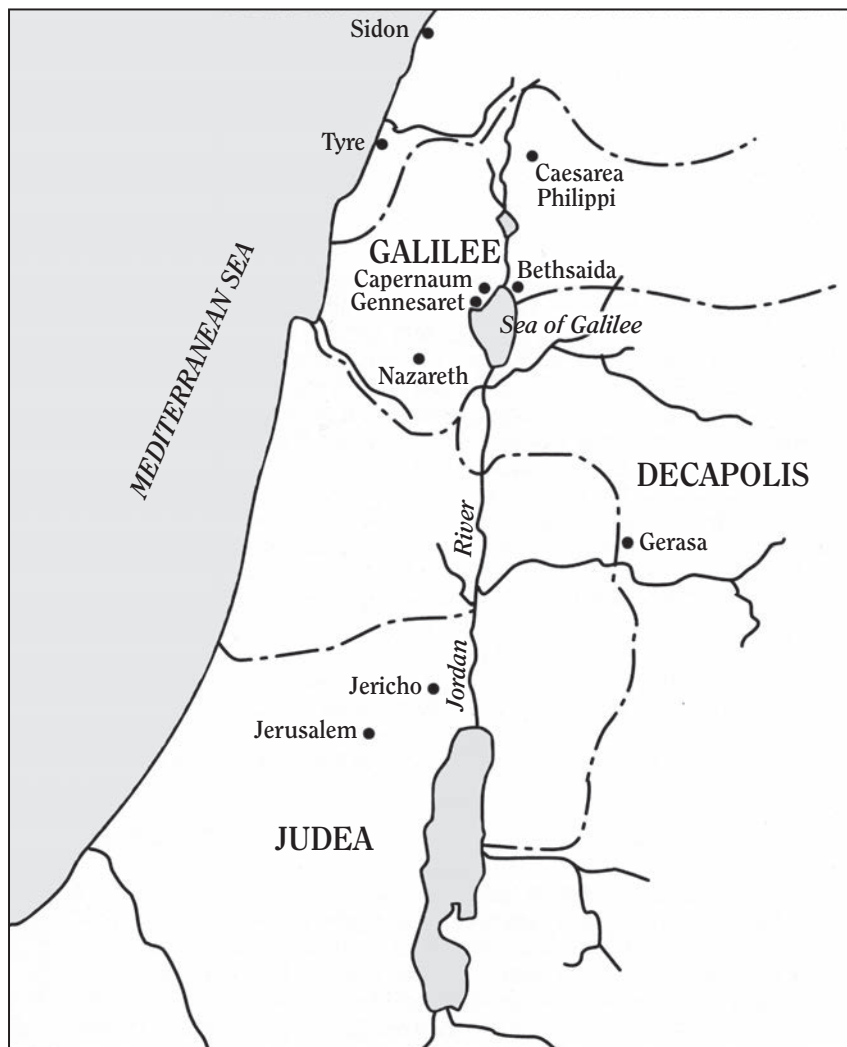
If you write down each other’s applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don’t let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 171–172 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.



## Key Places in the Book of Mark





# BACKGROUND

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## Mark and His Gospel

### Who was Mark?

Tradition ascribes the gospel of Mark to a first-century Jewish Christian named John Mark. That is, John was his first name, and Mark (or Marcus) was his surname. His Latin surname may indicate that he, like the apostle Paul, was a Roman citizen. His mother was a Christian woman named Mary, who lived in Jerusalem and was well-acquainted with the apostle Peter (see Acts 12:12). John Mark was also cousin to Barnabas, Paul's earliest missionary companion (see Colossians 4:10).

We do not know whether the author of this gospel was an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. If John Mark was indeed the author, he would have had opportunity as a resident of Jerusalem to see Jesus. But whether or not he was in fact an eyewitness (as some believe Mark 14:51-52 implies), his connections with Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13), Paul, and Barnabas gave him a firsthand knowledge of the apostolic traditions about Jesus. Indeed, the second-century church historians Papias and Irenaeus wrote that Mark's gospel was basically a record of the preaching material of Peter. More recently, the late T. W. Manson theorized that Mark was Peter's interpreter or aide-de-camp during Peter's ministry in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

While the gospel of Mark does not identify its author, John Mark's background and training, combined with the early-church tradition, which names this gospel after him, make it likely that the man whom Peter called "my son" was indeed the author of the shortest of our four gospel accounts.

### Date and audience

Modern scholars are virtually unanimous in viewing Mark as the earliest of the four Gospels. Many historians believe that Mark wrote his gospel account after the death of Peter but before the fall of Jerusalem—i.e., between AD 64 and 70.

The text of Mark's gospel makes it virtually certain that he was writing to a Gentile audience. For example, the fact that Mark explains certain Jewish

practices to his readers means they must have been unfamiliar with them (see 7:3-4; 15:42). In addition, Aramaic forms that remain in the text are interpreted (see 5:41; 7:34; 14:36).

Although it is less certain where Mark wrote his gospel, Rome seems the most attractive alternative (see, for example, the note on Mark 12:42 as well as other notes throughout the study guide). Other suggested venues include Egypt and Syria.

## Purpose

Mark seeks to explain to Gentiles, whether Christians or non-Christians inquiring about Jesus, how the Jewish Messiah was rejected by His own people because He came in a way they did not expect: not as a glorious warrior-king but as a suffering servant. In this way, Mark grounds the gospel message in history so that his readers might know (1) that the message they have heard is true, despite its being rejected by the Jewish nation and (2) that the gospel is the fulfillment of God's promises through and to Israel and cannot be understood apart from that historical context. Mark's emphasis on suffering and persecution may also be relevant to his readers' situation if they were Roman Christians during Nero's persecution (about AD 65).

## Mark's relationship to Matthew and Luke

*Gospel* is an Old English word that means "good news." It translates the Greek word *euangelion* (*eu-*, "good" and *angelion*, "message"), which also gives us words like *evangelist* and is related to words like *angel*.

When the first Christians wanted to record the "good news" about the Man who was God, none of the familiar forms of literature seemed suitable. The Christians didn't write the kinds of biographies or sacred texts common in Greek, Roman, or Jewish culture. Instead, they created a new form: the gospel.

One need not be a scholar to recognize the strong resemblance between the gospel of Mark and the gospels of Matthew and Luke. John's gospel, while preserving a few of the traditions present in the other three, is written from a much different perspective. Hence, Mark, Matthew, and Luke are called the *synoptic* gospels (from the Greek word meaning "to see together").

Because the gospel of Mark is much shorter than either Matthew or Luke, Christian writers from the second century onward tended to neglect it in favor of its lengthier counterparts. Matthew's gospel was generally the most popular; for example, Saint Augustine believed that Matthew was written first, with Mark being a sort of *Reader's Digest* condensed version.

Within the last two hundred years, biblical scholars have generally argued that Mark is the earliest of the four gospel accounts. Among the points of evidence they cite are the following:

- Mark may be divided into 105 sections. Of these, 93 occur in Matthew and 81 in Luke.

- Mark contains 661 verses, compared to Matthew's 1,068 and Luke's 1,149. Of these 661 verses in Mark, Matthew includes 606 (with some variation), while Luke includes 320. Only 31 of Mark's verses do not occur in either Matthew or Luke.
- Matthew occasionally varies Mark's order of events. So does Luke. Matthew and Luke together, however, *never* vary Mark's order. One of them always agrees with Mark's order of events; most often, both do.
- Matthew and Luke frequently smooth the rough edges off Mark's rather coarse Greek. Matthew tends to simplify the language of the Markan accounts he uses, while Luke often improves them stylistically. At other times, however, Matthew and Luke—particularly Matthew—reproduce Mark's language exactly.

On the basis of these considerations, among others, it is reasonable to believe that both Matthew and Luke had at least portions of Mark's gospel at their disposal when they wrote their own. A few modern scholars hold out for Matthew's being the earliest written gospel account, but this view is not generally accepted. Thus, it appears that John Mark, cousin of Barnabas and companion to both Peter and Paul, was the creator of the gospel format.

1. T. W. Manson, "The Foundation of the *Synoptic Tradition*," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* xxviii (1944), 132–133. Cited by F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 305. See also the Rev. Msgr. Michael J. Wrenn's article in *Fidelity* (November 1957: 8–13), which contends that Mark's gospel is a Greek translation of Peter's account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, written originally in Hebrew.



# OVERVIEW

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## Mark

Before beginning an in-depth study of Mark's gospel, one should get a general overview of the book by reading it straight through. This should not take much more than one hour, provided that you do not spend too much time pondering difficult passages (save that for a later reading!). Your first reading should be a time to gain first impressions, as though you were reading a novel.

As you read, consider the following:

### First impressions

1. The very first words a person says often give us a clue as to what he or she will be talking about.
  - a. What are Mark's first words (see 1:1)? What do they tell us about his gospel?

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- b. What are the first words of Jesus (see 1:15)? What is the main theme of His preaching?

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**For Thought and Discussion:** What new insights have you received from your initial reading of Mark?

**Optional Application:** Choose one of the key ideas you found while reading through Mark and pray that God will give you wisdom as to how you might apply it to your life in the weeks to come.

2. Repetition of key words or phrases is also a clue to finding out what the author is trying to communicate. As you read through Mark's gospel, jot down:

a. The references where he repeats the key words and phrases referred to in question 1.

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b. Other words or phrases you see as being key terms. (Do not take too long to do this during the first reading; you can come back and add to your list as you proceed through the study guide.)

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3. Perhaps the most important element of interpretation is discerning the flow of the author's thought. The chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles were created long after the books were written and are sometimes even obstacles to following the author's train of thought. Don't read the gospel of Mark as a collection of proof texts to be repeated in isolation from one another. Rather, read Mark as you would any other book: a story consisting



of sentences and paragraphs that relate to one another.

1:1 Title

1:2-13                      Preparing the way

1:14–10:52                Jesus and the kingdom of God

1:14–4:34 \_\_\_\_\_

1:14-15 \_\_\_\_\_

1:16-45 \_\_\_\_\_

2:1–3:6 \_\_\_\_\_

3:7-35 \_\_\_\_\_

4:1-34 \_\_\_\_\_

4:35–9:29 \_\_\_\_\_

4:35–5:43 \_\_\_\_\_

6:1-6 \_\_\_\_\_

6:7-13 \_\_\_\_\_

6:14-29 \_\_\_\_\_

6:30-56 \_\_\_\_\_

7:1-23 \_\_\_\_\_

7:24–8:10 \_\_\_\_\_

8:11-21 \_\_\_\_\_

8:22-26 \_\_\_\_\_

8:27–9:13 \_\_\_\_\_

9:14-29 \_\_\_\_\_

9:30–10:52 \_\_\_\_\_

9:30-50 \_\_\_\_\_

10:1-12 \_\_\_\_\_

10:13-31 \_\_\_\_\_

10:32-45 \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional Application:**  
If the life and ministry of Jesus are indeed only the “beginning” of the gospel, how does this apply to you?

10:46-52 \_\_\_\_\_

11:1–16:20 \_\_\_\_\_

The Final Week

11:1-11 \_\_\_\_\_

11:12-26 \_\_\_\_\_

11:27–12:44 \_\_\_\_\_

13:1-37 \_\_\_\_\_

14:1-42 \_\_\_\_\_

14:43–15:15 \_\_\_\_\_

15:16-47 \_\_\_\_\_

16:1-8 \_\_\_\_\_

16:9-20 \_\_\_\_\_

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## The beginning of the gospel (1:1)

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**Messiah** (1:1). A translation of the Hebrew *mashiach*, which is related to the greek *christos*, meaning “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, kings of Israel were anointed with oil as a sign of their spiritual authority, with the oil representing the Spirit of God. See, for example, 1 Samuel 16:13.

**Son of God** (1:1). In the Old Testament, this title usually refers to the people of Israel or the king of Israel. Thus, the ideas of being chosen (as were God’s people) and of deserving obedience (as the king did) are present. The title “Son of God” does not refer to the coming Messiah in the Old Testament but was probably just coming into use as a messianic title when Jesus arrived on the scene.

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4. Mark 1:1 is either an introduction to verses 2-8 or a title for the entire gospel of Mark.
  - a. Compare Mark 1:1 with Acts 1:1. Does this help you decide whether the word *beginning*

refers to John the Baptist (see Mark 1:2-8) or the life and ministry of Jesus (the entire gospel of Mark)? If so, why?

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- b. If the word *beginning* is a title for the entire book, what does this tell us about the “gospel about Jesus Christ”?

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## For the group

This “For the Group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know the gospel of Mark in general and the people with whom you are going to study it.

If you read through the entire gospel of Mark this week, this may be the most time-consuming lesson for you to prepare. The group leader should warn members to allow several hours for reading Mark and doing the lesson. If reading the whole book is an impossible demand on someone’s time, he or she could probably get a general impression of the gospel by skimming portions of it for the story line and repeated ideas.

**Worship.** Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some pray only briefly for God’s guidance at the beginning but leave extended prayer until after the study.

**Warm-up.** The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, getting comfortable with one another, and encouraging a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your

group—out of your study of Mark and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You can include what you hope to give to the group as well. If you have someone write down each member's hopes and expectations, you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. You can then plan more time for prayer or decide to cover Mark more slowly if necessary.

You may decide to take about fifteen minutes at the beginning of your discussion of lesson 1 to talk about goals. Or you may prefer to take a whole meeting to hand out study guides, introduce the study, examine the "How to Use This Study" section, and discuss goals.

**First impressions.** From lesson 1 you should get, above all, first impressions of the book's themes and purposes on which to build deeper discoveries later. To focus your discussion, each group member might choose one event or teaching that was especially meaningful to him or her and explain why. Ask the group to describe Jesus briefly. This open sharing could help introduce members who do not know each other well.

You need not compare the outlines of Mark's gospel that people might have made (question 3); these are for each student's personal use. You will want to share briefly first impressions (question 1), key terms (question 2), and the meaning of Mark 1:1 (question 4).

**Application.** If application is unfamiliar to some group members, choose a sample paragraph from the gospel of Mark and discuss possible ways of applying it. Try to state specifically how the passage is relevant to you and how you might act in light of it. Think of responses you might actually do, not just ideal responses (or something that "someone else" should do!). Do not forget that praying for ability, courage, discipline, or guidance to do something is an appropriate application of a passage.

Give the group a chance to voice any questions about the book or its historical background. You may decide to postpone answering some questions until you deal with the relevant passage, but you can keep the group's questions in mind.

As you go through each lesson, you will notice that although a few application questions

are included (as well as the “Optional Application” questions), most questions deal with the content of the gospel. If there is no application question that relates to a question or concern that interests you, don’t let that stop you from doing your own application. The relative scarcity of application questions in some lessons is not meant to de-emphasize the need to apply Scripture to our lives but rather to emphasize that we need to come to terms with the content of the gospel before we can apply it.

**Wrap-up.** The wrap-up is a time to bring the discussion to a focused end and make any announcements about the next lesson or meeting. For example, some lessons cover more material and include more questions than others. Prior to such a longer lesson, you may wish to decide whether you should cover it in two meetings.

**Worship.** Praise God for His wisdom in giving us four Gospels, and especially the gospel of Mark, almost certainly the first of the four written. Praise Him for what He reveals about Himself in this book. Ask Him to help you “see Him more clearly, follow Him more nearly, and love Him more dearly” in all you do through your study of Mark’s gospel.

### **The Kingdom of God: Already but Not Yet**

“One dare not think he or she can properly interpret the Gospels without a clear understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> This may sound like strong language, but it is true.

The Jews whom Jesus addressed believed they lived at the brink of the end of “this age” and the beginning of “the age to come.” They were waiting for the Messiah, who would usher in the age to come, the prophesied time when God would defeat all evildoers and rule the world with peace, justice, health, and prosperity. This time of God’s rule was called “the Kingdom of God.”

*(continued on page 22)*

(continued from page 21)

When John the Baptist announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, people were on pins and needles waiting to see the Messiah appear and bring on the end. They expected the Messiah to be a warrior-king who would overthrow the evil Romans. When Jesus did the prophesied signs of the Messiah and the kingdom—healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons—His disciples thought this was it: The age of righteousness was beginning. His crucifixion crushed them, but His resurrection restored their hope that now, surely, He would bring the kingdom to fulfillment.

However, by only a few months after the Resurrection, the disciples realized that Jesus had come to usher in not the “final” end but rather the “beginning” of the end, as it were. Thus, they came to see that with Jesus’ death and resurrection and with the coming of the Spirit, the blessings and benefits of the future had already come. In a sense, therefore, the end had already come. But in another sense, the end had not yet fully come. It was *already* but *not yet*.

The key to understanding Jesus’ ministry and teaching is this tension between *already* and *not yet*. The kingdom of God—the time of God’s rule on earth—has come, but it has not fully come. The King has come, but He will come again. The citizens of the kingdom live by the values and example of the King in a world where people live very much by their own rules. They enjoy a foretaste of the kingdom’s peace, health, and freedom from sin, but await fulfillment of those benefits.

1. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981, 1993), 131. The discussion that follows is based on Fee and Stuart, 131–134.