

# BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

**M A R K**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Gospel of Mark focuses on two things about Jesus—His mighty, decisive actions and the unbelief of the crowds. Mark often uses the word *immediately* to highlight the power behind Jesus' many miracles. But he also shows us the sad story of easily excited crowds who first flock around Jesus, amazed by His words and powerful deeds. But later these crowds slip away into unbelief.

## **AUTHORSHIP**

John Mark was a youth during Jesus' ministry. His mother's house served as a meeting place for the early Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), and some Bible scholars believe Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His apostles in Mark's house. They also wonder if Mark was the young man who appeared in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51–52).

Being a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), Mark accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, but then he abandoned the mission at Pamphylia. When Paul brought up the idea of returning to those churches, Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance and bring him along. But Paul did not think that would be a good idea. So Barnabas took Mark along to Cyprus while Paul took Silas on his second journey (Acts 15:36–40). Eventually, Mark found his way to Rome, where he met up with Peter and became his helper.

Early church historians tell us Mark composed this Gospel from his recollections of sermons he had heard Peter preach while in Rome. Around AD 130, Bishop Papias of Hierapolis wrote, "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, as many as he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he neither had heard the Lord nor followed Him, but at a later time, as I said, [he followed] Peter, who delivered his instructions according to the needs [of the occasion]."

## **PURPOSE**

Mark wrote his Gospel to convince Roman readers of what Peter had preached to them, that Jesus is God's Son, our only Savior.

## **OUTLINE**

Mark can be divided into two parts: Jesus' public ministry and His Passion. His public ministry began with John's Baptism (Mark 1:1–13), which was followed by Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the opposition He faced there from Jewish religious leaders (1:14–3:12). Then the crowds received Jesus with faith that often turned to unbelief (3:13–6:6). Finally as He prepared to go to the cross, Jesus withdrew from His public ministry in Galilee (6:7–8:30). His Passion began with Jesus predicting His Passion and teaching His disciples (8:31–10:52). Jesus then entered Jerusalem and confronted the religious authorities (chs. 11–13), which led to Jesus' Passion, death, and resurrection (chs. 14–16).

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## JOHN BAPTIZES JESUS

### **Read Mark 1:1–13.**

Unlike the other three Gospels, Mark does not write about the eternal Son of God becoming human, nor about Jesus' birth or childhood. It seems like Mark is so filled with the urgency of Jesus' mission to save the world that he wants to jump right into it and start with Jesus' Baptism and wilderness temptation.

### **Q 1: Read Mark 1:10 without the word *immediately*, then reread it with that word. What does the word *immediately* add to the account of Jesus' Baptism?**

- Mark uses this word to point out how Jesus' mission to save the world was His highest priority. The word spotlights His urgent, relentless march to the cross to accomplish that salvation. Mark uses the word *immediately* forty-one times in his Gospel; the word is used only ten other times throughout the entire New Testament.

### **Q 2: What do you think is the significance of the violent opening of the heavens in Mark 1:10?**

- Mark will use this same verb ("torn open") when describing the tearing of the temple curtain at Jesus' death. Both events show us that Jesus' mission is to tear down the barrier between sinful mankind and God by His life, death, and resurrection, giving us access to eternal life with our God.

# JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY AND OPPOSITION

Mark provides a brief summary of Jesus' temptation without listing each of the final three temptations (see Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13). This increases the sense of urgency as Jesus immediately began preaching the Good News and gathering His first disciples.

**Read Mark 1:14–45.**

**Q 3: In the account of Jesus calling His first four disciples, we twice read the word *immediately*. How does this word transform the gathering of these men?**

- It shows the successful work of the Holy Spirit, who so inspired these men that they did not hesitate to leave everything behind to follow Jesus, even though He was a stranger to them. Even more, James and John responded so immediately that they left their father and the hired servants in the boat with the work of fishing undone.

**Q 4: How do the words *immediately* and *at once* impact the casting out of demons and the healings that follow in the remainder of this first chapter?**

- They underline Jesus' unlimited power and authority as the Messiah, the Son of God. He merely speaks and illness and demons flee.

**Read Mark 2:1–3:12.**

This section presents many occasions where Jesus ran into opposition from the Pharisees, Jews who put all their confidence in their obedience to the traditions of the elders.

**Q 5: When you read the charges of the scribes and Pharisees in these four accounts (see 2:7, 16, 24, and 3:6), how would you summarize them?**

- They believed Jesus was a mere man who claimed equality with God, but their chief complaint was that He did not honor the Sabbath. Some Pharisees held that the Messiah could not come until all the Jews honored the Sabbath rules they set down. To them, Jesus was actually holding back the Messiah from coming. As a result, they went out and held counsel with the supporters of Herod to figure out a way to destroy Jesus. Already in the third chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' cross comes into view.

**Q 6: What did Jesus do to assert His divine authority?**

- He immediately healed the paralytic, He compared Himself to a physician who had come to heal the sick, and He explained that God established the Sabbath to serve mankind's benefit, not to be a burden to us. The immediacy of Jesus' words and miraculous signs served to reinforce His divine authority and expose the Pharisees' faithless hypocrisy.

# THE FAITH AND UNBELIEF OF THE CROWDS

In the following chapters, Mark shows us the reaction of the Jewish people to Jesus and His ministry among them. At first, the people were joyful and exuberant, but soon their faith and loyalty proved to be shallow and quickly dispelled.

**Read Mark 3:13–35.**

**Q 7: How would you explain the large crowds that gathered around Jesus?**

- Clearly word spread about the healings Jesus was working and the demons He was casting out. In a day without decent medical care, the presence of a divine healer made a huge impact on the crowds. In addition, Jesus' words were filled with love and compassion as He called sinners to repent and return to their loving God.

**Q 8: Why did the scribes (acclaimed experts in the law) accuse Jesus of driving out demons by Satan's power?**

- When the demons were being driven out, they shouted that Jesus was the Son of God and Jesus commanded them to be silent. The scribes were trying to turn the crowds against Jesus, to instill fear in them. It was obvious that it took a great supernatural power to drive out a demon, and they were not willing to concede that Jesus was the Messiah, or even a godly prophet who drove out demons by God's hand.

**Q 9: What did Jesus' family think about His ministry (see v. 21)?**

- Jesus' family by this time was composed of His mother, Mary (Joseph must have died by this time), and His brothers and sisters (either half-brothers and sisters born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus' birth, or stepbrothers and sisters who were Joseph's children through a previous wife who had died before he was betrothed to Mary). It is clear from verse 21 that these large crowds greatly concerned Mary and Jesus' siblings. They feared for Jesus' safety and thought He had lost His mind. In verse 31, they came to take custody over Him.

**Q 10: In what way did this serve as another rejection of Jesus?**

- Jesus' own mother and His family didn't trust His judgment and thought they needed to take charge of Him—even though He was God's own Son and filled with the Holy Spirit. By the way, Mark makes it clear that Mary was the leader in this—not one of Jesus' half-brothers or sisters.

**Read Mark 4.**

Jesus used parables to teach about heaven and then performed a great miracle to demonstrate His divinity to His Twelve.

**Q 11: What was Jesus' purpose for teaching through parables rather than straightforward words?**

- Because our thinking is darkened by sin, the truths of the Gospel are nonsense to us. We can only understand and believe as the Holy Spirit enlightens us. Parables are vivid and memorable. They use familiar earthly figures so we can understand and apply God's Law and promises to ourselves. At the same time, they are attractive mysteries to those who remain in unbelief, so instead of simply dismissing Jesus' claims outright without honestly considering them, they will try to figure out what Jesus was talking about, and perhaps the Spirit will break through their stubborn unbelief and enlighten them.

**Q 12: How did the miracle of Jesus stilling the storm deepen His apostles' understanding of who He was?**

- The Twelve had seen Jesus' power through His miracles and ability to drive out demons. Now He demonstrated His authority over the elements of His creation. Many of the Twelve grew up as fishermen on this very lake. They marveled at the immediate change from winds and waves to calm, something no mere person could ever do.

**Read Mark 5:1–6:6.**

In this reading, Mark amps up his accounts of Jesus' miraculous power even more. He drove out a seemingly super-demon, healed a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years, then raised a twelve-year-old girl from the dead. But at the end, His own hometown rejected Him.

**Q 13: Why do you think Jesus insisted that the man healed of the demon should stay and share what Jesus did rather than leave with Him?**

- The Gerasene people rejected Jesus and begged Him to leave their territory because they were afraid of Jesus' power. They weren't ready to believe He came to them in love; instead, they thought He had destroyed a large herd of pigs and feared He might destroy their whole economy. By keeping the man among his people, the Holy Spirit could work through the good news of Jesus' love and compassion to bring the people of his region to faith.

**Q 14: Why do you think Jesus' boyhood neighbors from Nazareth rejected Him and tried to kill Him?**

- Their familiarity with Jesus and His family acted as a barrier to faith. They let their own earlier perceptions of Jesus and how He



fit into the Nazareth community prevent them from being open to reconsider that He might possibly be the Christ, the Messiah. When He challenged their unbelief, their rejection turned murderous. Just as His family rejected Him in 3:21, now His hometown foreshadows His rejection and murder upon the cross.

# JESUS WITHDRAWS FROM HIS GALILEAN MINISTRY

We have seen Jesus' miracles grow more and more powerful—obvious signs that He is the promised Messiah. We have also seen growing rejection from the people of Galilee. Both reveal the urgency of His mission and the cross upon which He will complete that mission. In the coming chapters, Jesus concludes His Galilean ministry before turning toward His substitutionary death in Jerusalem.

**Read Mark 6:7–56.**

**Q 15: Why do you think Jesus sent the disciples out in groups of two?**

- Jesus realized His time in Galilee was concluding and there were still so many people to reach. So He intensified and multiplied His ministry outreach so His Word could reach seven places at once instead of just one. At the same time, He prepared His disciples for their work of founding the Church by the Holy Spirit's power after His death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

**Q 16: What might have led Mark to dedicate such a large number of verses to describe the death of John the Baptist?**

- In many ways, John's death foreshadowed Jesus' death. Both were executed by the political authority under pressure from enemies (for John, the enemy was Herod's wife; for Jesus, it was the Jewish religious leaders). Since Jesus' sacrificial death is the heart of the Gospel, it made sense for Mark to describe John's death so fully.

**Q 17: How did Jesus balance His concern for His disciples with the needs of the crowd in His feeding of the five thousand and His walking on water?**

- When Jesus' disciples returned, He withdrew from the crowds in boats, looking for solitude; instead, the crowds beat Him to the other side. Seeing the crowd filled Him with compassion, and He preached to them the whole day. Then He sent the disciples back across the sea and dismissed the crowds. After praying several hours, He walked to them on the water.

**Read Mark 7.**

When Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees and scribes for permitting His disciples to break the tradition of the elders by eating with hands that are not ceremonially clean, Jesus asked why they broke the commandments of God for the sake of their human traditions. After addressing them directly, He turned and exposed their hypocrisy to the crowds.

**Q 18: Why do you think Jesus chose to expose them in front of the Jewish crowds rather than simply keep it between Himself and them?**

- The false teachings of the Pharisees and scribes were keeping people from repentance and faith. And they were also trying to turn the crowds against Him. Of course, when Jesus exposed them their public shame only increased their hatred toward Him.

**Q 19: Why do you think Jesus withdrew from Galilee to spend time among the Gentiles?**

- This gave time for the confrontation to die down so Jesus could return to preach again. He wanted time alone with His disciples, and this gave Him the opportunity to help a Gentile woman and her daughter.

**Read Mark 8:1–30.**

Jesus fed another large crowd and then immediately withdrew with His disciples. From another Gospel, we learn that the crowds intended to come and make Jesus their king by force (John 6:15).

**Q 20: What was wrong with the exuberant reaction of the crowds?**

- Jesus had not come to rule in an earthly kingdom, but His urgent mission was to suffer and die to save the world. Those who would believe and become His disciples would have to face rejection and opposition as well.

**Q 21: What is significant about Peter's confession in Mark 8:29?**

- Peter, speaking for the other disciples, publicly acknowledged his belief that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah. Peter and the others expected the messianic kingdom to be a golden era on earth like the reigns of David and Solomon. Jesus knew differently. Now the door was open for Him to reveal His true mission to His Twelve.

# JESUS PREDICTS HIS PASSION TO HIS DISCIPLES

While the Twelve expected a life of glory, Jesus set about to teach them that saving sinners required His suffering, rejection, and death.

**Read Mark 8:31–38.**

**Q 22: How do we carry our own crosses—that is, share in Jesus’ sufferings?**

- Jesus’ suffering and death was the one complete sacrifice that forever takes away sins. Our sufferings for the sake of the kingdom do not add a thing to that. Instead, when we follow Jesus’ teachings, persecution rises as the sinful world’s response.

**Read Mark 9.**

In this chapter, Jesus was transfigured, revealing His glory as the Son of God before three disciples. He also predicted His suffering and death a second time.

**Q 23: How did Jesus’ transfiguration fit in with Mark’s emphasis on the urgency of Jesus’ mission to save the world on the cross?**

- The transfiguration visibly demonstrated Peter’s confession that Jesus was God’s Son, the promised Christ, and reminds us of His divine power to overcome sin, death, and hell, and to crush the devil’s head on the cross.

**Q 24: How does Jesus’ second prediction of His suffering and death (9:31) compare with His first (8:31)?**

- In the first prediction, Jesus mentioned the suffering and rejection along with the death and resurrection. But the second time He focused on His being killed and rising again—and drew His description out to emphasize not just the fact that He would be killed, but that He would rise again.

**Read Mark 10.**

While Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, He gave a third prediction of His suffering and death.

**Q 25: What difference do you see between the first two predictions of Jesus’ Passion and this third (10:33–34)?**

- Jesus added a lot of details He had left out previously. He unpacked the handing over He had mentioned before. First He would be betrayed or handed over to the Jewish authorities (by Judas’s

betrayal). Then when they condemned Him, they would betray Him or hand Him over to the Gentiles (Pontius Pilate). He added the mockery He would suffer from the Roman soldiers and the Jewish leaders and people when He was crucified. He mentioned how they would spit on Him, and He added the brutal flogging, which hadn't been mentioned before.

# JESUS CONFRONTS RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN JERUSALEM

Jesus' final week on earth began with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It continued with His confrontations with the Jewish authorities.

## **Read Mark 11.**

Jesus not only entered the city in grand procession, He took charge of the temple, driving out the sellers and money-changers.

## **Q 26: How did Jesus answer when His authority was challenged by the Jewish religious leaders?**

- He answered their question with one of His own, asking if the Baptism of John was from heaven or from man. They refused to answer the question for fear of the crowd's reaction against them if they claimed it was from man. They feared Jesus' words if they said from heaven, since they refused to be baptized by him. But as the religious overseers of Israel, they embarrassed themselves by saying they did not know. Jesus then refused to answer their question directly.

## **Read Mark 12.**

Jesus did not directly answer the Jewish leaders' challenge to His authority in 11:28. But in chapter 12, He answered their question through a parable.

## **Q 27: How did Jesus assert His authority in the parable of the tenants (vv. 1–11)?**

- He showed that He is the beloved son the owner sent to gather fruit from his vineyard. Jesus not only asserted His authority, but He also predicted their rejection and the murder they would commit when they condemned Him to death.

## **Q 28: How next did the Jewish leaders try to overcome Jesus?**

- They asked two questions that were meant to be traps. After Jesus cleverly and easily answered them, He asked a question of His own that exposed the reason they rejected Him—they didn't understand that the Messiah would be both God and man in one person.

**Read Mark 13.**

Jesus concluded His public ministry and preaching. Sitting on the mount opposite the temple (see Mark 13:3), He predicted the destruction of the temple and taught His followers about His second coming on Judgment Day.

**Q 29: Read Jesus' description of His second coming in 13:24–27. What is the connection between Jesus' second coming and His mission to suffer and die on the cross for us?**

- No sinful human would be able to escape the judgment and wrath to come at Christ's return if Jesus had not completed His work of salvation. Christ's boundless love for fallen humans compelled Him to the cross in the light of the fierce, powerful judgment He will render when He returns on Judgment Day. In a sense, we can say Judgment Day is the reason Jesus' earthly mission was so urgent.

**Q 30: What comfort can believers take from Jesus' powerful description of His return?**

- Jesus Christ has the power to restore all of creation, raise us from death, and heal all our sicknesses of body, heart, mind, and spirit. He will drive out all sources of evil from His creation and make us perfect, spotless, and sinless forever in the new heaven and new earth. Our place in that paradise was won by Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection alone.

# JESUS' PASSION, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION

Now Mark turns to the reason Jesus came to earth—the completion of His mission through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

**Read Mark 14:1–11.**

**Q 31: In what sense was Jesus the only one who knew His sacrificial death was drawing near?**

- The Jewish religious leaders were determined to put Jesus to death, but His popularity with the crowds thronging Jerusalem for the Passover convinced them that they would have to wait until after the feast. Then an unforeseen opportunity came along as Judas offered to betray Jesus for money. They were unaware of God's plan to provide Jesus, the ultimate Passover Lamb to save the world from hell.

**Q 32: How did Jesus make the woman's offering of the perfume even more significant than it already was?**

- This woman poured the perfume on Jesus to show her love and devotion to the Son of God. But Jesus gave it far greater honor by connecting it to His supreme act of love—His sacrifice on the cross. The fragrance of that perfume would be with Him throughout His Passion, trials, and crucifixion.

**Read Mark 14:12–31.**

Jesus' Last Supper was a heavy thing for His disciples, permeated with thoughts of Jesus' coming suffering and death.

**Q 33: Point out specific verses where Jesus spoke of His coming suffering and death.**

- In verse 21, Jesus says, "The Son of Man *goes* as it is written of Him." In verse 24, He says, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is *poured out* for many." In verse 27, He quotes the prophecy from Zechariah 13:7, "I will *strike* the shepherd."

**Read Mark 14:32–52.**

In the Upper Room, Jesus showed no hesitance in fulfilling His mission, but in the garden, overwhelmed with sorrow, He appeared hesitant to continue on His quest, even looking for a way out of it.

**Q 34: How can we understand Jesus' seeming hesitance to complete His mission compared to the urgency He had shown throughout His ministry?**



- This was far more than a man's fear of physical suffering or the torturous agony of crucifixion. After all, tens of thousands of people were crucified just like Jesus, and there may well be worse, more painful ways for a human to die. Jesus was recoiling from the spiritual suffering He was about to endure—the staggering burden of suffering His Father's wrath for all of our sins. That is the only sense in which we Christians can say that Jesus suffered more in His death than any other human has ever suffered or will ever suffer.

Jesus' prayer reminds us that sometimes God's will for us in this broken world is hard, and it is okay to ask God to deliver us from the present difficulties we are enduring. Just as God sent an angel to strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43), God will strengthen us through our prayers to Him and the promises in His Word and in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

**Read Mark 14:53–72.**

Jesus remained silent throughout the great majority of His trial before the Jewish high court. In fact, the only time He spoke was to acknowledge that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

**Q 35: Why did Jesus go on to speak of His return on Judgment Day (v. 62)?**

- Jesus was here to atone for our sins and make us worthy by faith to stand before Him when He returns on that great day. If they were to continue in their rejection of Him, they would be unprepared for Him to come again. By reminding them of that day, He was removing any excuse they might be able to make that God had not warned them.

**Read Mark 15:1–20.**

Jesus' silence is perplexing. A Roman judge would consider His silence an acknowledgment of guilt, and Jesus could easily have defended Himself. But despite Jesus' silence, Mark makes it clear that Pilate knew Jesus was not truly guilty of any crime worthy of execution. He knew the Jewish leaders were envious of Jesus' popularity. Again, Mark is quickly driving us to the cross. But he does point out something no other Gospel writer states. Mark shows us the seriousness of the crime for which Barabbas was imprisoned. He had committed murder during a recent insurrection against the Romans.

**Q 36: How do you think the chief priests were able to stir up the crowd against Jesus when He had been so popular through the early part of the week?**

- It is possible this was a different crowd of people, that the crowds favorable to Jesus were still in outlying towns and villages where they had spent the night. These would be the crowds coming into the city and seeing Jesus already on the cross. But even if it was the

same people, we have seen how quickly people turned against Jesus throughout Mark.

**Q 37: As Jesus had prophesied, Judas betrayed Him into the hands of the Jews, and the Jews handed Him over (betrayed their Messiah) to the Gentiles. In what sense did Pilate, the Roman governor, also betray Jesus?**

- Pilate knew Jesus was not guilty of the crimes leveled against Him, yet he ordered Jesus to be crucified anyway.

**Read Mark 15:21–47.**

**Q 38: What is ironic about the taunt of the Jewish rulers, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself” in verse 31?**

- In order to fulfill His mission, to truly save others, Jesus had to sacrifice Himself to suffering and death. Their taunt rose as a play on the name *Jesus*, which means “the Lord saves”—and Jesus was doing exactly that.

Mark records only one of Jesus’ seven statements from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (v. 34).

**Q 39: How is this statement fitting for Mark’s theme of Jesus and His great saving mission on earth?**

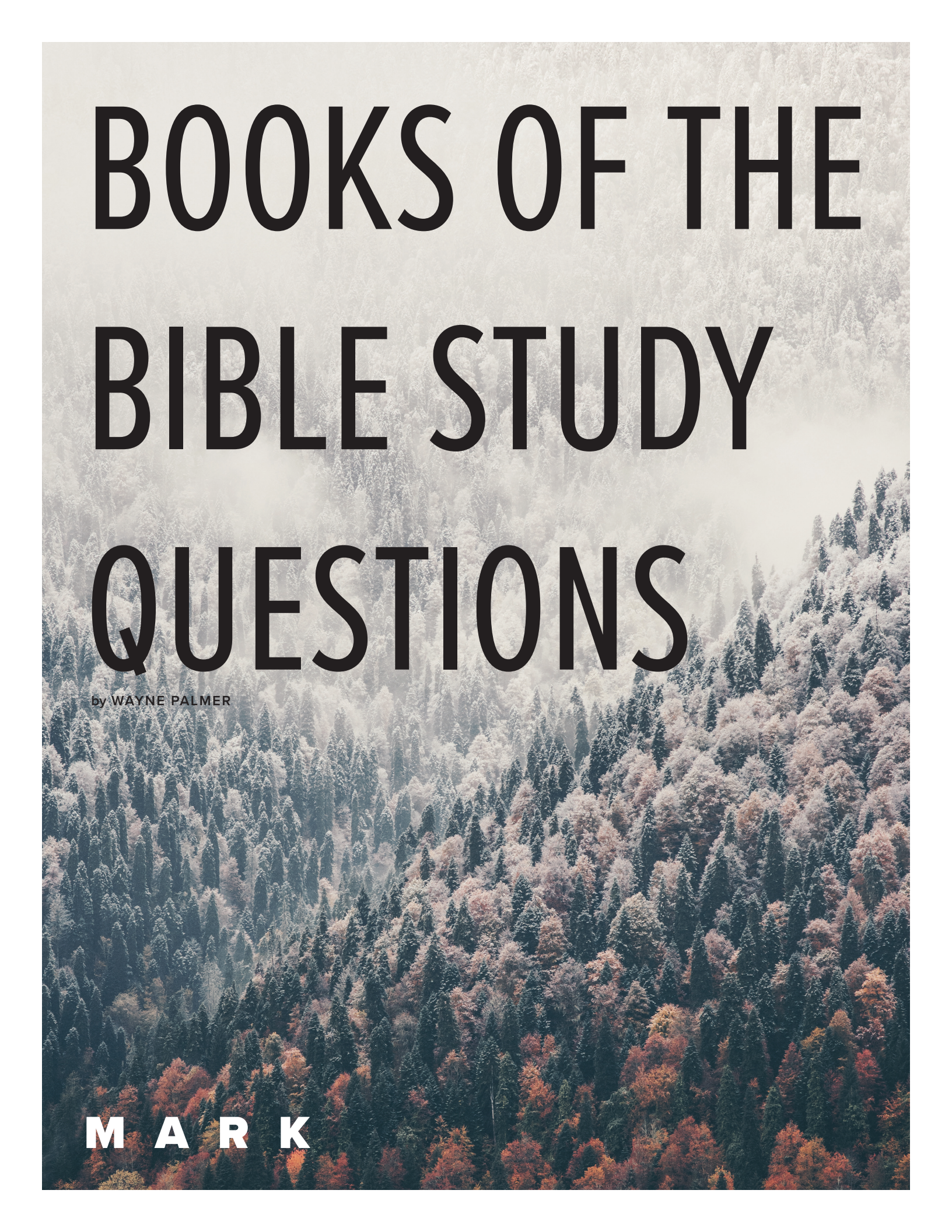
- God the Father forsook Jesus on the cross so that He might be able to pardon and forgive all people.

**Read Mark 16.**

There is much confusion over the last chapter of Mark. Scholars agree that verses 1–8 are genuinely from the pen of Mark, but verses 9–20 appear to have been added later by a different writer. The language and word choice is far different from that which is found in the earlier parts of this Gospel. It seems more like a summary of Easter events recorded more completely in the other Gospels. It is likely that Mark’s original ending was lost and this was written to replace it, or even possible that Mark chose to end his Gospel after verse 8, though that sounds incomplete without a genuine resurrection appearance of Jesus Himself.

**Q 40: Even if Mark’s ending is not as satisfying as that of the other three Gospels, what great comfort can we find in it?**

- Even if we aren’t given an eyewitness account of the risen Christ (which Peter would certainly have preached about frequently and Mark would have heard a number of times), we do hear the witness of an angel. Jesus clearly completed His mission and saved all believers from the wrath of God at our sins.



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