

## Section 2 - Chapter One

### Introductory Video Transcript

Like many people, when I was growing up, I wasn't very interested in school. I started working when I was fifteen years old. My first job was at an ice-cream store, Baskin-Robbins 31 flavors. Then I got a job at a computer store called The Software Tree. I would work ten, fifteen hours a week during the school year and more in the summer. The rest of the time was for hanging out with friends and for playing with the computer stuff I bought with the money I had earned. So, there wasn't much time left over for school and I just did as little as possible to get by.

I regret that now. I am 53 years old and I only recently started to learn to play the piano. I am not very good at it, but I have a lot of fun and I wish I had started at a younger age. Also, my interests have changed. If back then computers were my great passion, today it is reading, studying, and teaching the Bible. I therefore wish I had paid more attention in class, especially literature class. Why? Because reading the Bible is like reading the great works of literature.

The books of the Bible are the Word of God, but they are also works of literature written by human beings. God speaks to us through the words they chose to write down. So, if you want to understand what God is saying to you through the Gospel of Mark, you have to study it like we study the great works of literature at school. I am thinking of Shakespeare, Homer, Jane Austin, Charles Dickens, and Dostoyevsky; just to name a few.

In this section, we are going to start reading the Gospel of Mark. Are you ready? Remember, our goal is to come to know Jesus so that we can grow in our relationship with him. Have you prayed? If not, stop this video right now and take some time to pray to God to ask him to open up your heart and mind so that you can understand what he is saying to you through the words Mark chose to write down 2000 years ago.

In this section we will study the first chapter and I have divided it into three parts. In the first learning unit, we will look at the opening verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." I think you will be surprised to learn how much Mark can pack into just eight Greek words. In the second learning unit, we are going to go a bit faster and look at verses 2 to 13. And in the third learning unit we will study the rest of the first chapter. As you go through the material I have prepared for you, please keep the following ideas in mind.

First of all, always read the biblical text we are studying. Only it is the inspired Word of God. There is nothing I can say, there is no Bible commentary you can read that's on the same level. We are going to study the first chapter. That's not a lot of text, but read it. You might think you already know it. You may even have memorized it, but read it. Only the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. As you read the text, remember what we said about Mark's writing style. It is clear and direct. His vocabulary is simple. He writes in a straightforward manner, so it is easy to

read his gospel. No one would feel overwhelmed by the text. But at the same time, it is very profound. It is amazing how much meaning Mark can pack into so few words.

Second, we are studying Mark chapter 1, which is the beginning of the gospel. As with any story, the beginning is very important. A good beginning will draw the reader in so that they will want to continue reading. Authors do this by introducing their readers to the main characters, to the setting, and to the plot.

What do you think about Mark's beginning? To answer this question, try to put yourself into the shoes of his intended audience; that is, first century Christians living in Rome who were suffering persecution because of their faith. How would they respond to the text? What did words like "gospel" mean to them? For this, you have to know something about Roman history. I hope you paid more attention to your history classes than I did.

You also have to know the Old Testament. Everything that Jesus does has something to do with the Old Testament. There is nothing that is completely new. Why does Mark bring John the Baptist onto the scene? Why is he in the wilderness? Why is Jesus baptized in the Jordan River? The answer is in the Old Testament. So, you have to know the Old Testament and the more details the better. Reading it should be part of your Bible reading plan. Why? Because the Bible isn't just a collection of separate books. The Bible is also one book which tells an ongoing story, a story which points to Jesus.

Finally, try translating Mark's gospel into our modern-day cultural context. Mark wrote using words and images that were understandable to his intended audience but are not so relatable today. If God were calling you to write a gospel for your family and friends, what words and images would you use?

Well, I hope you enjoy this study and I pray that God may bless you.