



Mark

Announcing the New Community

BY JEFF REED

**A 6-SESSION STUDY FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND THE SCRIPTURES**



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THE INTENTION OF MARK 1

After having studied the general intent of the Gospels in book one, we now turn our attention to each Gospel, beginning here with the Gospel of Mark. As we will see, at one level, the intent of the Gospel of Mark is simple and probably contained in the very first sentence of the book. Yet, at another level, to grasp the intent of Mark, we need to hold the entire book in our minds at one time and all that has gone on with the churches since they were formed after the exit of Jesus in Acts 1. We need to understand the place of this Gospel in the unfolding story of the progress of the gospel and where this writing fits with the documents written by the Apostles and their co-workers.

Remember, Jesus promised to deliver the teaching to the Apostles. This teaching was delivered to the churches as letters from the Apostles, especially from Paul. Then, after all of that, the Gospels were written to the churches. In this first session, we will focus on getting a handle on Mark's intention in writing his Gospel, by examining the essence of Jesus' big announcement, which was preceded by John the Baptist, and then by reflecting on the author, the author's situation, and the situation of the churches it would be circulated amongst.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: MARK; MARK 1:1–14

Think Through the Questions:

1. What was being stated in the first sentence of the Gospel—Mark 1:1? What does this tell us, generally, about Mark's intention in writing?
2. In light of what we know about the kerygma (the proclamation) from Peter's sermons in Acts and from kerygmatic statements in the Apostles' letters to the churches, in what sense is Mark structured as a kerygmatic document? In what sense is the storyline kerygmatic?
3. How do the following circumstances affect your understanding of Mark's intention in writing, at least to his first readers: Mark's close relationship with Peter, the fact that Mark wrote after Peter wrote his letters, and the situation of Peter's churches?

4. How might Mark be written with the intention of stabilizing Jewish churches in the gospel story, while at the same time be written to be circulated broadly amongst all the churches?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage:

Write a paragraph below that summarizes Mark's intention in writing his Gospel and how he accomplished that intention in the way he shaped the story. Also mention the broad kerygmatic themes and events he used to fill in essential details.

Record your summary below.



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on the Intention of Mark:

Mark begins with a very simple statement in 1:1: “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.” This statement is, in essence, the heart of the gospel message, which the early churches called *the kerygma*, the proclamation of the good news. The word *beginning* has a range: it refers to the first but also to foundational and authoritative. The phrase *good news* is literally “euangeliou,” which means good news or gospel. So this gospel that the churches embraced began here—this is the heart of the story. The text goes on in 1:4 and 1:14 and speaks of both John and Jesus “proclaiming” a message: John a baptism of repentance and

Jesus “proclaiming the good news.” The Greek word *kerusso* means “to proclaim.” *Kerygma* has the same root, meaning the “proclamation,” which is why the early churches called the proclamation of the good news *the Kerygma*. Thus Mark is a gospel-long narrative of the proclamation of the gospel—the kerygma. And it is authoritative, the first of its kind. Three more Gospels would follow. So at an elementary level, it is the first treatment of the kerygma story, intended to be an authoritative statement that the churches could rely on.

We also know, from book 1 in this series (*The Gospels: Solidifying the New Kerygmatic Communities*), that the book of Mark is a Graeco–Roman form of biography known as bios, the Greek word for “lives.” From Burrige’s work *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, we saw the book of Mark taking the shape of a Graeco-Roman biography, but also the shape of a kerygma story. Burrige’s outline is as follows:

1:1–13	Preparation and beginnings
1:14–3:6	Ministry in Galilee
3:7–6:6	Call of disciples and ministry
6:7–8:26	Mission and blindness of disciples
8:27–10:52	Journey to Jerusalem
11–13	Ministry in Jerusalem
14–16.8	Last Supper, Passion, and Resurrection

At one level, Mark is simply an expansion of the kerygmatic statement, shaped by Peter and the Apostles (Peter’s five sermons in Acts) and received by Paul and others in statement form (as seen in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6).

Within the kerygmatic storyline of his Gospel, Mark weaves several themes that we will visit in the following sessions. They include the following:

- the kingdom, with its mystery element,
- the coming death and resurrection,
- the new community.

All of this teaching on the kingdom and its fulfillment, Jesus’ coming death and resurrection, and the new community He was building, all fall within the intent of making the kerygma story an official eyewitness-based testimony that would carry Peter’s authority—an official account.

Yet at another level, getting at the intent of the Gospel of Mark and interpreting it correctly is a complex matter that assumes an accurate understanding of all that transpired between the time of Jesus and the writing of this Gospel. It assumes many complex things: the formation of the “kerygma” (gospel) statement; all the teaching Jesus delivered to the Apostles, which they delivered to the churches in letters; and the cultural situation of the new community—the Church—emerging from Judaism with the pressure on Jewish churches to return to Judaism. It assumes reading Mark through this lens. And to understand Mark especially, we must read it through the lens of the letters Peter wrote to his

churches near the end of his life. Why especially Peter? A little Early Church history is needed here. Papias, an early 2nd century bishop from Heiropolis, identifies Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, as Peter's interpreter, while Peter attempted to record his significant eyewitness accounts of Jesus. In addition, Peter refers to Mark as like a son to him. Evidently Mark was to Peter what Timothy was to Paul. (That makes new sense out of the Paul-Barnabas conflict in Acts 15, which was over taking Mark along.)

Peter appears everywhere in Mark's Gospel, and those accounts are written from Peter's perspective again and again. Besides his constant appearance all the way through the Gospel, Richard Bauckham, in his chapter "Eyewitnesses 'From the Beginning,'" refers to a concept called *inclusio* of eyewitnesses. In both the beginning of the Gospel, when Jesus calls the disciples (Mark 3:16) and at the end of the Gospel (16:7), Peter is marked out as the main eyewitness source. This device is called *inclusio*. Peter is clearly the main source, or the lead witness for what Mark is including in his Gospel.

This all means that Mark must be read in light of Peter's letters to his Jewish churches, which were scattered about the eastern Roman Empire. Peter was concerned they would go back to Judaism under the pressure of persecution. Mark must also be read as an authoritative account of the historicity of the Jesus story that produced the kerygmatic statement (the gospel) they all received. It is sort of an eyewitness-based account, rooted in Peter's eyewitness accounts.

Putting it all together then, Mark's intention for his Gospel, though rather complex, looks like this:

Mark set out to write an eyewitness account based on Peter (yet in his own writing), in Graeco-Roman biographical form, which, in light of Peter's letters, was intended at first reading to stabilize the Jewish churches, with the clear prophetic awareness that this would be read by all churches (and used by those churches as an eyewitness apologetic as well), thus it ultimately had the wider audience in mind.

He did this...

by using a kerygmatic narrative structure (consistent with the Graeco-Roman biographical form, "bios."

See Burridge's Graeco-Roman "bios" outline above.

by integrating several theological kerygmatic themes clearly laid out by Jesus, though not understood until after the Spirit came, the Church unfolded, and all the clear teaching of Jesus was delivered:

- the kingdom, with its mystery element
- Jesus' coming death and resurrection
- the new community

The Gospel of Mark lays the first eyewitness account for establishing an authoritative foundation for the Jesus story for the post eyewitness churches. It was designed to preserve the gospel story, and thus the kerygma delivered by the Apostles to the churches, for all time and history, against the backdrop of the narrower intent of stabilizing Peter's Jewish churches at this critical time of impending destruction of Jerusalem and the emergence of the Church from Judaism.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote was taken from *Mark*, a commentary by Adela Yarbro Collins in the series *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. It sheds light on the relationship of Mark to Peter.

“Papias, who was bishop of the Christian community in Hierapolis, a city of Asia Minor, in the early second century, does not call the work that Mark wrote a Gospel or use a term indicating his understanding of the kind of writing that it was, as Justin did:

“And the Presbyter used to say this, ‘Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.’

“Although Papias gives no label to Mark’s work, the fact that he says that Mark wrote down the things said and done by the Lord suggests that it was a narrative work that included teaching, that is, something similar to the Gospel of Mark as we know it. Even though Papias does not quote the title of the Gospel, it is likely that he knew it, since he mentions a work attributed to Mark alongside one attributed to Matthew. A further important observation is that Papias has information about Mark as an author, not just from the title of the Gospel but also from oral tradition, which he claims to have at third hand.”¹

In his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Richard Bauckham wrote a chapter, “The Petrine Perspective in the Gospel of Mark,” that contributes to the argument that Mark was writing as Peter’s eyewitness interpreter.

“Mark’s Gospel not only, by its use of the *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony, claims Peter as its main eyewitness source; it also tells the story predominantly (though by no means exclusively) from Peter’s perspective. This Petrine perspective is deliberately, carefully, and subtly constructed. Mark’s Gospel is no mere transcript of Peter’s teaching, nor is the Petrine perspective merely an undersigned survival of the way Peter told his stories. While it does

correspond to features of Peter's oral narration, Mark has deliberately designed the Gospel in such a way that it incorporates and conveys this Petrine perspective. Several literary features combine to give readers/hearers Peter's 'point of view' (internal focalization), usually spatial and visual or auditory, sometimes also psychological. It is this literary construction of the Petrine perspective that has so far gone almost unnoticed in Markan scholarship. Not only has Mark carefully constructed the Petrine perspective; he has also integrated it into his overall concerns and aims in the Gospel so that it serves Mark's dominant focus on the identity of Jesus and the nature of discipleship. Thus, in deliberately preserving the perspective of his main eyewitness source through much of the Gospel, Mark is no less a real author creating his own Gospel out of the traditions he had from Peter (as well as, probably, some others).

"The perspective is that of Peter among the disciples, whether the inner group of three or more generally the Twelve. The perspective is Peter's 'we' perspective, the perspective of Peter qua member of the group of disciples, rather than an 'I' perspective, that of an individual relating to Jesus without reference to the others. (Only in the story of Peter's denials does the 'we' perspective narrow to an 'I' perspective, and even here Peter does not step outside his narrative role as one of Jesus' disciples.) Therefore there are no 'Private' reminiscences of Jesus, such as modern readers might expect in a work closely based on Peter's eyewitness testimony. Such expectations are inappropriate because it is Peter's *teaching*, not his autobiographical reminiscence, that lies behind Mark's Gospel. The Gospel reflects the way Peter, as an apostle commissioned to communicate the gospel of salvation, conveyed the body of eyewitness traditions that he and other members of the Twelve had officially formulated and promulgated. Even the story of Peter's denials, though it must have derived from Peter, was probably part of such a body of traditions that was not peculiar to Peter."²



Record your conclusions below.



Think Through the Issues

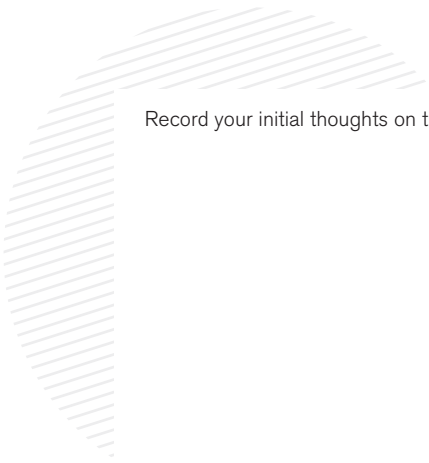
The *Gospel of Mark* is a valuable document—a very valuable document. It was obviously very timely for the churches of Mark’s day. And it is valuable for us today. In a sense, it lays the foundation for the other Gospels. We have the privilege of seeing firsthand what exactly Jesus was doing and why. We can see it through the eyes of the Apostles who now understood fully what Jesus was doing. We can now see clearly what the disciples themselves could not understand, until they received Jesus’ teaching through the Spirit, in the space between Jesus and these Gospels.

Yet today, most do not understand the value of Mark because we do not read it correctly or understand Mark’s intention. We use it in ways for which it was not intended. We need to learn to take full advantage of this amazing document. In this section, we will reflect on the value of Mark, on the ways we have misused it, and how to take full advantage of it in our churches and individual lives today.

ISSUE: The value of Mark’s eyewitness-based account

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:


1. What is the value of Mark’s eyewitness-based account as the first authoritative account of the Jesus story? What was its value to Peter’s community of Jewish churches?
2. What is its on-going value to churches everywhere?
3. How do we use the Gospel of Mark today other than how it was intended to be used? How is it misused in the Church at large?
4. How can we take full advantage of its value to us as churches today? within our movements of churches? in our individual lives?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion.

Discuss the Issue in Your Small Group.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion.





Apply the Principles

It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

Design an Application for Your Life.

Think through Mark's intention in writing his Gospel, as studied in this session, and reflect on its value. How can it be used more fully in your life and ministry? What do you need to do to ensure you are using it correctly?

Evaluate your own understanding and valuing of Mark. List how to get to the point of using it effectively in your life and ministry.