

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Session 1, Introduction to Mark's Gospel Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Jennings, Mark, Session 1, Introduction to Mark's Gospel, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mark Jennings' lecture serves as an introduction to the Gospel of Mark. He discusses the **genre of the Gospels as historical narratives with theological intent**, contrasting this with modern scholarly skepticism fueled by Enlightenment rationalism. Jennings outlines the **historical reliability of Mark**, citing eyewitness testimony, accurate transmission, and the absence of later church controversies. He addresses apparent contradictions as common historical practices like paraphrasing and thematic arrangement, including the "Markan Sandwich." Finally, Jennings previews **key characteristics of Mark's Gospel**, such as its fast pace, emphasis on Jesus' humanity and authority, and the ambiguous portrayal of the disciples, alongside themes of the kingdom of God and the servant Messiah, while also addressing authorship and the debated ending.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Jennings, Mark, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Mark).



Jennings_Mark_Session01.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Jennings, Mark, Session 1, Introduction to Mark's Gospel

Briefing Document: Introduction to the Gospel of Mark (Dr. Mark Jennings, Lecture 1)

Overview:

This lecture serves as an introduction to the Gospel of Mark, aiming to establish a foundation for understanding its genre, historical veracity, key themes, authorship, and historical setting. Dr. Jennings emphasizes the importance of understanding what a Gospel *is* and *is not* before delving into the specifics of Mark. He also addresses the challenges posed by modern biblical scholarship regarding the historical reliability of the Gospels and outlines his approach to studying Mark.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Defining the Genre of "Gospel":

- The term "Gospel" originates from the Old English "Godspell," a translation of the Greek "euangelion," meaning "good tidings" or "good news."
- "Euangelion" was used in the Roman world to announce victories or the inauguration of an emperor, signifying a public proclamation of good news.
- Similarly, Isaiah 52:7 ("How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news") uses the concept of "euangelion" in the context of proclaiming peace and salvation, with the statement "your God reigns."
- Initially a proclamation, the term "euangelion" evolved into a literary genre, likely due to Mark 1:1 declaring his work as a "euangelion."
- Gospels possess several characteristics:
- **Historical:** They present themselves as histories, drawing on traditions, sources, and eyewitnesses (e.g., Luke 1:1-4). They are set in a specific historical context (first-century Palestine) with dates and locations.
- **Narrative:** They are not merely collections of sayings but stories with plots, characters, conflict, themes, viewpoints, and settings.
- **Biased (with a purpose):** Gospels present a particular understanding of Jesus, but this bias does not necessarily negate their truthfulness. Authors purposefully select elements to convey their message about Jesus.

2. The Question of Historical Veracity:

- Modern biblical scholarship, particularly outside of evangelical circles, often questions the historical accuracy of the Gospels, viewing them as products of myth-making rather than reliable accounts of Jesus' life.
- **Rudolf Bultmann** is quoted as saying, "I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since early Christian sources show no interest in either, or moreover, fragmentary and often legendary."
- This skepticism arose with the Enlightenment and the emphasis on rationalism, leading to attempts to explain away miraculous elements and view Jesus as merely a human ethical teacher (the "first quest" for the historical Jesus).
- **Albert Schweitzer** critiqued the "first quest," noting that these studies often clothed Jesus in the values of the authors' own time.
- The "no quest" (associated with Bultmann) argued for radical skepticism, suggesting that little to nothing could be known about the historical Jesus beyond his existence and basic proclamation. This was influenced by the "history of religions school" which posited an evolutionary development of religious ideas.
- The "new/second quest" and the "third quest" represent attempts to move beyond this radical skepticism, with the "third quest" (1980s-present) emphasizing methodologies for understanding the historical Jesus within his first-century context. Dr. Jennings aligns himself with this optimistic view that the Gospels reveal much about Jesus.
- Our approach to the Gospels is influenced by our presuppositions (e.g., belief in miracles, the spiritual world) and existing beliefs. Dr. Jennings states he will approach Mark through an "analogy of faith" while still being ready to give a reason for his hope.

3. Arguments for the Historical Reliability of the Gospels:

- The Gospels present themselves as a specific type of ancient historical writing, similar to a "bios" (ancient biography), focusing on a central character (Jesus).
- Eyewitness testimony appears to be important to the Gospel writers, who saw themselves as transmitters of the story of Jesus.
- They include verifiable details like names, places, and dates, suggesting a claim to historical accuracy.

- The preservation of difficult sayings (e.g., Jesus not knowing something) and negative portrayals (e.g., disciples' failings, Judas' betrayal) argues against pure myth-making or idealization.
- The absence of later church controversies within the Gospels suggests they were written relatively early, before these debates became prominent.

4. Addressing Apparent Contradictions:

- Apparent contradictions should be viewed within the context of ancient historical writing practices, which differed from modern expectations of verbatim transcripts or videotapes.
- Common practices included paraphrasing ("abscissima vox" - actual voice vs. "abscissima verba" - actual words). Mark 15:34 (Jesus' Aramaic cry) is presented as an example of "abscissima verba," possibly due to its significance and the potential for misinterpretation (sounding like "Elijah").
- Gospel writers were authoritative interpreters of events, making choices about inclusion, omission, and the interpretation of Jesus' words and deeds.
- Selectivity and omission were common; not every detail was included in every Gospel.
- The differing accounts of Jesus' "seven last words" on the cross illustrate how individual writers focused on specific aspects relevant to their narrative themes.
- Ancient historians used rhetorical devices like **akraah** (digesting larger accounts into shorter, essential forms) and did not always adhere to strict chronological order. Topical arrangement was also common (e.g., Matthew's collection of parables).
- The **Markan Sandwich** is a specific rhetorical device used by Mark, where one story is inserted within another, allowing for mutual interpretation.

5. Introduction to the Gospel of Mark:

- Mark has a significant footprint in the New Testament, with many scholars believing Matthew and Luke used it as a source.
- **Literary Style:** Fast-paced narrative, using "immediately" (Greek equivalent) 42 times (compared to Matthew's 5 and Luke's 1).
- Frequent use of the present tense to create vividness.

- Grouping of events by theme or topic (e.g., exorcisms, miracles, conflicts with religious leaders).
- Fondness for triads (sets of three).
- Irony is a prominent feature (e.g., the suffering Son of God, religious leaders as outsiders, Gentiles as insiders).
- **Portrait of Jesus:** Emphasis on Jesus' **humanity**, showing a range of emotions (compassion, indignation, grief, love, anger, amazement, anxiety).
- Simultaneously portrays Jesus' **power and authority** in his teaching, healing, exorcisms, and miracles.
- The theme of the **messianic secret** (Jesus revealing and concealing his identity).
- Mark poses many questions about **who Jesus is**, culminating in Peter's confession and the centurion's proclamation.
- **Antagonists:** Satan's forces (demons) and religious leaders are presented as primary opponents.
- **The Disciples:** Portrayed more negatively in Mark compared to other Gospels, often misunderstanding Jesus and unwilling to accept the suffering Messiah. Their shortcomings highlight Jesus' faithfulness as the paradigm of following God.
- **Theological Themes:** The **kingdom of God** is a central message, with both present (the King is present) and future aspects.
- Jesus as the **servant Messiah**, the powerful Son of God who will die as an atoning sacrifice (potentially referencing Isaiah 53).

6. Authorship and Historical Setting:

- The Gospel of Mark itself is anonymous.
- Traditional identification points to **John Mark**, a companion of Paul and Peter.
- Early church historians like Eusebius (quoting Papias), Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Jerome largely agree on this authorship.
- Papias noted that Mark was Peter's interpreter and wrote down Peter's accounts of Jesus' sayings and deeds accurately but not in order.
- The prominence of Peter in Mark's Gospel is seen by some as supporting the connection to Peter.

- The early title "Gospel according to Mark" found in early manuscripts suggests an early and consistent identification of the author.
- The question is raised: why would Mark, a relatively minor figure, be chosen as the attributed author if it were a later fabrication?
- Historically, Mark is believed to have written to a **Roman church**, possibly from Rome.
- Dating is debated, ranging from the 50s and 60s to later dates (around Peter's martyrdom), potentially as eyewitnesses began to die and persecution increased. Dr. Jennings personally believes it was quite early, around 60-70 AD.

7. The Ending of Mark:

- Mark 16:9-20 is bracketed in many modern Bibles due to textual criticism.
- These verses are absent in some of the most reliable early manuscripts.
- The vocabulary and Greek style in these verses differ from the rest of Mark.
- Verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as if the reader doesn't know her, despite her earlier mention.
- Verses 9-20 seem to be a compilation of resurrection appearances from other Gospels.
- The absence of a clear resurrection appearance in the shorter ending (ending at 16:8) is a point of debate, given the centrality of the resurrection in early Christian belief.
- Dr. Jennings states that he will not include Mark 16:9-20 in his discussion due to textual doubts. He speculates that there was likely an original ending after verse 8 that has either been lost or was never completed.

Quotes:

- **C.S. Lewis:** "The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship, from a corkscrew to a cathedral, is to know what it is, what it was intended to do, and how it is meant to be used." (Regarding understanding the genre of a Gospel).
- **Rudolf Bultmann:** "I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since early Christian sources show no interest in either, or moreover, fragmentary and often legendary." (Representing the skeptical view of Gospel historicity).

- **Albert Schweitzer:** "[The] Jesus of Nazareth was clothed by modern theology in historical garb." (Critiquing the tendency to project modern values onto the historical Jesus).
- **Eusebius quoting Papias on Mark:** "Mark had been the interpreter or translator for Peter, wrote down as much as he, Peter, told of the sayings and deeds of Christ accurately, but not in order, which I find fascinating. For he was not a hearer or follower of the Lord, but as I said of Peter, this is the quote, who adapted his teaching as needed and did not arrange the sayings of the Lord in an orderly manner. So, Mark made no mistake in writing some things down as he recalled them."

Actionable Items/Further Considerations:

- Be mindful of the genre of the Gospels as ancient historical narratives, not modern biographies.
- Consider the potential biases and purposes of the Gospel writers.
- Approach the Gospel of Mark with an awareness of the historical debates surrounding its reliability.
- Recognize and analyze the literary devices used by Mark, such as the Markan Sandwich.
- Pay attention to the fast-paced nature and key themes of Mark's Gospel.
- Note the unique emphasis on Jesus' humanity and authority.
- Consider the ambiguous portrayal of the disciples and its significance.
- Be aware of the textual issues surrounding the ending of Mark's Gospel.

This briefing document provides a comprehensive overview of the key points raised in Dr. Jennings' introductory lecture on the Gospel of Mark, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the text in subsequent sessions.

4. Study Guide: Jennings, Mark, Session 1, Introduction to Mark's Gospel

Study Guide: Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Quiz

1. What does the term "Gospel" mean, and what was its original usage in the ancient world?
2. According to the lecture, in what ways do the Gospels present themselves as historical narratives? Provide at least two specific characteristics.
3. Explain the difference between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" as discussed in the lecture regarding modern biblical scholarship.
4. Describe the "no quest" phase of historical Jesus research and identify a key figure associated with it.
5. What is "akraah," and how might it have influenced the way the Gospel of Mark was written?
6. Explain the literary device known as the "Markan Sandwich" and its purpose in Mark's Gospel.
7. What are some key characteristics of Mark's literary style as highlighted in the lecture? Provide at least two examples.
8. Describe Mark's portrayal of Jesus, noting at least two seemingly contrasting aspects emphasized in his Gospel.
9. According to early church tradition, who is believed to be the author of the Gospel of Mark, and what was their connection to other key figures in the New Testament?
10. What is the textual issue surrounding the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), and what are some possible explanations for this phenomenon?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The term "Gospel" comes from the Old English "Godspell," a translation of the Greek word "euangelion," meaning "good tidings" or "good news." Originally, "euangelion" was used to announce significant victories, such as Roman battle

triumphs or the inauguration of an emperor, and is also found in the Old Testament (Isaiah) associated with proclaiming God's reign.

2. The Gospels present themselves as historical by acting like histories, drawing upon traditions, sources, and eyewitnesses (as Luke explicitly states). They are set in a specific historical context (first-century Palestine), providing dates and locations, and convey information as if the authors were presenting real events, not myths or fables.
3. The "Jesus of history" refers to the historical figure of Jesus as he lived in first-century Palestine, while the "Christ of faith" refers to the theological interpretations and beliefs about Jesus that developed in the early church. Modern biblical scholarship, outside of evangelical perspectives, often posits that the "Christ of faith" has obscured the ability to know much about the "Jesus of history."
4. The "no quest" phase, associated with scholars like Rudolf Bultmann, was a period of radical skepticism regarding the historical Jesus. Scholars in this period believed that little to nothing could be known about the actual life and personality of Jesus, seeing the Gospels as primarily theological expressions of the early church's faith rather than reliable historical accounts.
5. "Akraah" is an ancient rhetorical device of digesting a larger story, speech, or event down to a smaller form while retaining its essence. It could have influenced Mark by allowing him to simplify events or present them in a concise and memorable way, potentially explaining some of the selectivity and omissions observed in his Gospel compared to others.
6. The "Markan Sandwich" is a rhetorical device where Mark begins one story, inserts a second story in the middle, and then returns to complete the first story. This technique allows Mark to present two separate events in a way that they mutually interpret each other, often with the inserted "meat" providing insight or meaning to the surrounding "bread."
7. Key characteristics of Mark's literary style include its fast pace, evident in the frequent use of the word "immediately" (42 times). He also heavily utilizes the present tense to create a sense of vividness and action, and often groups similar types of events together thematically, such as miracles or confrontations with religious leaders.

8. Mark's portrayal of Jesus emphasizes both his humanity and his divine power and authority. His humanity is seen in his expression of a range of emotions like compassion, anger, and anxiety, as well as his apparent limitations, such as not knowing the time of his return. Simultaneously, Mark highlights Jesus' extraordinary teaching, healing abilities, exorcisms, and miracles, demonstrating his divine authority.
9. Early church tradition identifies John Mark, a companion of both Paul and Peter, as the author of the Gospel of Mark. Eusebius quotes Papias stating that Mark served as Peter's interpreter and wrote down Peter's recollections of Jesus' sayings and deeds, though not necessarily in chronological order.
10. The ending of Mark (16:9-20) is textually uncertain because these verses are absent from some of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. Possible explanations include that Mark originally ended at 16:8, that the original ending was lost, that Mark died before completing it, or that verses 9-20 were a later addition compiling resurrection appearances from other Gospels to address the lack of one in the shorter ending.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of understanding the literary genre of the Gospels for interpreting their content, referencing Dr. Jennings' discussion of history, narrative, and theology.
2. Analyze the impact of Enlightenment rationalism on the historical study of the Gospels, as presented in Dr. Jennings' lecture, and discuss the various "quests" for the historical Jesus that emerged.
3. Evaluate the arguments for the historical reliability of the Gospel of Mark based on the evidence presented by Dr. Jennings, considering both internal and external factors.
4. Explore the distinctive features of Mark's Gospel, such as its literary style, portrayal of Jesus, and the role of the disciples, and discuss how these contribute to Mark's overall message.
5. Consider the implications of the uncertain ending of Mark's Gospel (Mark 16:9-20) for understanding the author's intended message and the early church's reception of this Gospel.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Euangelion:** A Greek word meaning "good tidings" or "good news," which is the basis for the English word "Gospel." In the ancient world, it was used to announce significant victories or events.
- **Historical Veracity:** The truthfulness and accuracy of historical claims or accounts. In the context of the lecture, it refers to the question of whether the events and sayings recorded in the Gospel of Mark are historically accurate.
- **Rationalism:** A philosophical stance that emphasizes reason and logic as the primary sources of knowledge, often leading to skepticism towards supernatural or miraculous claims.
- **First Quest (of the Historical Jesus):** An 18th and 19th-century movement that sought to uncover the "real" Jesus behind the Gospels, often interpreting him as a mere ethical teacher within a liberal theological framework.
- **No Quest:** A 20th-century scholarly movement, notably associated with Rudolf Bultmann, that expressed radical skepticism about the possibility of knowing anything substantial about the historical Jesus based on the Gospel accounts.
- **History of Religions School:** A perspective that views religious development as an evolutionary process, where early forms are simple and later forms become more complex, often incorporating elements from other cultures and beliefs.
- **Third Quest (of the Historical Jesus):** A movement from the late 20th century to the present that takes a more optimistic approach to recovering historical information about Jesus from the Gospels, often emphasizing social, cultural, and literary contexts.
- **Bios:** An ancient literary genre similar to biography, focusing on the life and character of a central figure, often with a moral or rhetorical purpose rather than strict chronological accuracy.
- **Abcissima Verba:** Latin for "actual words." In the context of the lecture, it refers to the precise words spoken, as opposed to a paraphrase or summary.
- **Abcissima Vox:** Latin for "actual voice." In the context of the lecture, it refers to accurately representing the speaker's meaning and intent, even if not using their exact words.

- **Akraah:** An ancient rhetorical device of digesting a larger narrative or speech into a shorter, more concise form while preserving the essential meaning.
- **Markan Sandwich:** A literary technique used by Mark where he interrupts one story with another and then returns to complete the first.
- **Messianic Secret:** A theme in Mark's Gospel where Jesus often instructs those he heals or who recognize him not to reveal his identity.
- **Synoptics:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share a significant amount of material and have a similar perspective compared to the Gospel of John.
- **Textual Criticism:** The scholarly discipline of comparing ancient manuscripts to determine the most accurate original text of a document, such as the Bible.
- **Fideistic:** Relating to or involving blind faith, without the need for reason or evidence. Dr. Jennings clarifies he doesn't advocate for a purely fideistic approach but believes faith informs his interpretation.

5. FAQs on Jennings, Mark, Session 1, Introduction to Mark's Gospel, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Gospel of Mark

What is the fundamental meaning of the term "Gospel" as it relates to the book of Mark?

The term "Gospel" originates from the Old English "Godspell," which is a translation of the Greek word "euangelion." This word signifies "good tidings" or "good news." In the ancient world, "euangelion" was often used to announce significant victories, such as military triumphs or the inauguration of an emperor. In the context of Isaiah, it refers to the proclamation that "your God reigns." Mark's Gospel begins by declaring itself as a "euangelion" concerning Jesus, associating it with the proclamation that the kingdom of God has come, calling people to repent and believe this good news. Over time, this concept of "euangelion" as a proclamation evolved into the literary genre we know as the Gospels.

How does the Gospel of Mark present itself historically, and what are some arguments for its historical reliability?

The Gospel of Mark presents itself as a historical account, akin to ancient biographies (bios). It draws upon traditions, sources, and eyewitnesses, set within the historical context of first-century Palestine, providing details such as dates and locations. Arguments for its historical reliability include the apparent importance of eyewitness testimony within the Gospel and throughout the New Testament, the inclusion of verifiable details, the level of concrete detail in its depictions, and the preservation of difficult or potentially embarrassing events and sayings (e.g., the disciples' misunderstandings, Peter's denial). Furthermore, the absence of later church controversies within the Gospel suggests an earlier origin, predating those debates.

How does modern biblical scholarship generally view the historical accuracy of the Gospels, and what are some of the reasons for this perspective?

Outside of evangelical circles, a significant portion of modern biblical scholarship tends to be skeptical about the historical accuracy of the Gospels, including Mark. This perspective often views Jesus as primarily a human figure and the Gospels as products of a later process of myth-making, influenced by the "Christ of faith" overshadowing the "Jesus of history." This shift was significantly influenced by the Enlightenment emphasis on rationalism, which questioned events that could not be reasonably repeated, such as

miracles. The history of religions school also contributed by suggesting that early Christianity evolved and incorporated non-Jewish ideas, potentially altering the historical portrayal of Jesus.

What is the "quest for the historical Jesus," and how has it influenced the understanding of Mark's Gospel?

The "quest for the historical Jesus" refers to various scholarly attempts, beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, to uncover the "real" Jesus behind the biblical accounts. The "first quest" often sought to portray Jesus as a mere ethical teacher. The "no quest" (20th century) largely concluded that little could be known about the historical Jesus. The "new" or "second quest" reacted to this skepticism, arguing that the Gospels must contain some historical information. The "third quest" (1980s to present) emphasizes methodological approaches to understanding Jesus within his first-century context. These quests have significantly influenced how Mark's Gospel is interpreted, with debates focusing on the extent to which it reflects historical realities versus later theological developments.

What are some distinctive literary features of the Gospel of Mark?

Mark's Gospel is characterized by its fast-paced narrative, marked by the frequent use of the word "immediately." It employs vivid present tense verbs, groups events thematically (e.g., conflicts with religious leaders, miracles), and has a fondness for triads or sets of three. A notable literary device unique to Mark is the "Markan Sandwich," where one story is interrupted by another and then concluded, often allowing the inserted story to interpret the surrounding narrative. Mark also utilizes irony, such as portraying religious leaders as outsiders and Gentiles as insiders.

How does Mark portray Jesus, and what are some key themes related to his identity and mission in this Gospel?

Mark's portrayal of Jesus emphasizes both his humanity and his divine power and authority. His humanity is evident in the expression of a range of emotions, such as compassion, indignation, grief, love, anger, and anxiety. Simultaneously, Jesus speaks and acts with divine authority, performing extraordinary teachings, healings, exorcisms, and miracles. Key themes include the "messianic secret," where Jesus reveals but also conceals his identity, the central message of the kingdom of God (both present and future), and Jesus as the servant Messiah, the mighty Son of God who will die as an atoning sacrifice. Mark frequently poses questions about Jesus' identity, building towards Peter's confession and the centurion's proclamation.

What is the traditional understanding of the authorship and dating of Mark's Gospel, and what evidence supports this?

Traditionally, the Gospel of Mark is attributed to John Mark, a companion of both Paul and Peter. Early church leaders like Papias (quoted by Eusebius) indicated that Mark served as Peter's interpreter and wrote down Peter's accounts of Jesus' sayings and deeds, albeit not in strict chronological order. This early church consensus, including figures like Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, supports this authorship. The Gospel is generally believed to have been written relatively early, possibly in the 50s or 60s AD, potentially for a Roman audience, given Mark's connection to the church in Rome. The early dating is sometimes linked to the need to document eyewitness accounts as they began to pass away and during periods of early persecution.

What are the issues surrounding the ending of Mark's Gospel (Mark 16:9-20), and how does the lecturer approach this in the context of studying Mark?

The final verses of Mark's Gospel, 16:9-20, are a subject of debate among textual critics because they are absent in some of the most reliable and ancient manuscripts. Additionally, there are differences in vocabulary and Greek style compared to the rest of Mark. These verses also seem to summarize resurrection appearances found in other Gospels. The absence of these verses in key manuscripts raises questions about whether they were part of Mark's original writing. The lecturer indicates that due to this textual uncertainty, he will not include Mark 16:9-20 in his detailed discussion of Mark's themes and intentions. He personally suspects that there might have been an original ending that has been lost, finding it unusual for a Gospel to lack a clear resurrection appearance.