

e-concepts

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Who Wrote the Gospel of Mark?

By David DeWitt

The Gospel is anonymous because the name of the author does not occur on or anywhere in the book. The title *Kata Markon* "according to Mark" was added by some unknown scribe between when it was written and the year A.D. 125. But the unanimous testimony of the apostolic fathers of the second century is that John Mark composed and wrote the book.

The earliest known statement about the authorship of Mark comes from a man named Papias (ca. A.D. 110). Papias quoted someone he called "John the elder," which is probably a designation for the Apostle John. The quotation from Papias named Mark as author with the following claims (my wording, not direct quotes).

- (1) Mark was not an eyewitness follower of Jesus.
- (2) Mark accompanied the Apostle Peter and heard his preaching.
- (3) Mark wrote down accurately all that Peter remembered of Jesus' words and works but not necessarily in chronological order.
- (4) Mark was Peter's "interpreter." [This probably means he translated Peter's messages into Latin. It is likely Peter spoke Aramaic and Greek, but not Latin.]
- (5) Mark's account is wholly reliable.

[This information is confirmed by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3. 39. 15), Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 106. 3; ca. A.D. 160), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3. 1. 1-2; ca. A.D. 180), Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 4. 5; ca. A.D. 200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 195) and Origen (ca. A.D. 230). So the evidence for the above five comments is confirmed by various sources of early Christianity from Alexandria, Asia Minor, and Rome.]

It is reasonable to understand that John Mark composed and wrote this gospel. But it is also reasonable to conclude that the majority of the content of the book came from the Apostle Peter. In that sense, it may be more of a gospel according to Peter than a gospel according to Mark. But it is right to call it the Gospel of Mark because even if that's the case, it was Mark who took the information from Peter's teaching, composed it, and wrote it in the text we know as the *Gospel of Mark*.

The significance of the Gospel of Mark is that it focuses us on the person of Jesus Christ. Mark leaves out Jesus' genealogy, His birth, much of His history and His resurrection appearances. Even the gospel message is hard to find. **What we have in Mark is Jesus Himself, His healing, His teaching, His character, His heart and feelings.** In Mark, we meet Jesus as a person, the divine Son of God who lived among us.

As you study the gospel of Mark, the most significant thing is to learn about Jesus. So regularly ask yourself:

- What does this incident tell me about Jesus?
- What was important to Jesus and what was unimportant for Him?
- How did Jesus live? How did He want His disciples to live?
- What did He think about the religious and social institutions of His day?
- Who did Jesus like and feel compassion for?
- Who did He dislike, who was He critical of, and how did He express anger?

Also it's a good idea to **draw a map of the area** and mark the spot [locate on a map] where Jesus is as you move along in your study of the book.