



Defense for the Gospel of Mark's Authorship

The traditional view that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark is supported by strong historical, patristic, linguistic, and internal evidence. While modern scholars sometimes question Mark's authorship due to the anonymous nature of the gospel text, a thorough examination of early church testimony, internal textual clues, and Mark's historical role affirms that the Gospel of Mark was indeed written by John Mark, the companion of Peter and Paul.

1. Early Church Testimony

One of the strongest pieces of evidence for Markan authorship comes from the early church fathers. Multiple sources from the 2nd century onward explicitly attribute the Gospel to Mark. These include:

Papias of Hierapolis (c. 125 AD)

Papias, an early bishop of Hierapolis, is quoted by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15) as stating that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that he accurately recorded Peter's teachings, though not necessarily in chronological order. Papias writes:

"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord, but not in order. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but later, as I said, he followed Peter."

This testimony is significant because Papias claims to have received this information from sources who knew the apostles directly. If Mark had not written this Gospel, we would expect early Christians—especially those with apostolic connections—to refute such claims.

Irenaeus (c. 180 AD)

Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies* (3.1.1), explicitly names Mark as the author of the second Gospel, writing:

“Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing what Peter preached.”

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. His testimony therefore carries significant weight, as it likely comes from firsthand knowledge within the apostolic tradition.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 AD)

Clement affirms that Mark wrote the Gospel at the request of early Christians in Rome who desired a written account of Peter’s teachings (*Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14.5–7).

Tertullian (c. 200 AD)

Tertullian also affirms Mark’s authorship and his connection to Peter (*Against Marcion*, 4.5).

Origen (c. 250 AD)

Origen includes Mark in his list of divinely inspired Gospel authors, stating that Mark wrote what was preached by Peter (*Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.5).

Eusebius (c. 300 AD)

Eusebius repeats the tradition that Mark was Peter’s interpreter and wrote down his teachings for the benefit of believers, particularly in Rome.

The Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 AD)

This early canonical list explicitly attributes the second Gospel to Mark, confirming that early Christians widely accepted Markan authorship.

The overwhelming consensus of early church fathers—spanning from the 2nd to 4th centuries—consistently attributes the Gospel of Mark to John Mark. There are no competing traditions claiming another author.

2. Mark's Connection to Peter

Since early testimony consistently states that Mark recorded Peter's teachings, it is essential to examine Mark's relationship with Peter in the New Testament:

- **1 Peter 5:13** – Peter refers to Mark as “my son,” a term often used to denote a close disciple.
- **Acts 12:12** – Mark's mother hosted prayer meetings attended by early believers, including Peter.
- **Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13** – Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on missionary journeys.
- **Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11** – Mark was later associated with Paul as a useful ministry companion.

These references confirm that Mark was active in the apostolic community, making him a plausible candidate for writing a Gospel based on Peter's teachings.

3. Internal Evidence from the Gospel of Mark

Several features within the Gospel itself support the claim that it was written by Mark:

Peter's Influence

- The Gospel of Mark is disproportionately focused on Peter's experiences.
- Peter is mentioned early and frequently (Mark 1:16; 1:29-31; 5:37; 8:32-33; 9:2-6; 10:28-31; 14:29-31, etc.).
- The narrative includes seemingly embarrassing details about Peter, such as his rebuking of Jesus (Mark 8:32-33) and his denial of Christ (Mark 14:66-72). If Peter himself was the source, this willingness to highlight his own failures suggests authenticity.

Latinisms and Roman Context

Mark includes several Latin words and phrases (e.g., *denarius* in Mark 12:15, *centurio* in Mark 15:39) and explains Jewish customs, suggesting it was written for a Roman audience—consistent with early traditions stating that Mark wrote for Christians in Rome.

Vivid, Eyewitness-Like Detail

- Mark's Gospel contains more vivid descriptions than the other Synoptics (e.g., Mark 6:39 describes the people sitting on “green grass”).
- The frequent use of the Greek word *euthys* (“immediately,” used over 40 times) gives the account a sense of urgency, resembling oral preaching—suggesting it was based on Peter's spoken accounts.

4. Objections and Responses

Objection 1: The Gospel is Anonymous

Like the other Gospels, Mark does not explicitly name its author. However, early manuscripts and church tradition unanimously attribute it to Mark. Unlike later apocryphal gospels that falsely claim apostolic authorship (e.g., the *Gospel of Thomas*), Mark's association with a non-apostle suggests an authentic tradition rather than an attempt to create false credibility.

Objection 2: Why Would an Apostle Use a Secretary?

It was common for apostolic figures to dictate their teachings. For example, Paul used an amanuensis (Tertius) to write Romans (Romans 16:22). Peter, who was a fisherman by trade, may have relied on Mark to record his teachings accurately.

Objection 3: Differences from Matthew and Luke

Some argue that Mark's Gospel is too simplistic to come from Peter. However, if Mark was recording Peter's oral sermons, this explains the Gospel's brevity and fast-paced style.

Conclusion

The traditional authorship of the Gospel of Mark is well-supported by external and internal evidence:

1. **Early church testimony** unanimously attributes the Gospel to John Mark.
2. **Mark's historical role** as Peter's interpreter aligns with the Gospel's content.
3. **The internal evidence** suggests Peter's influence and eyewitness details.
4. **The objections to Markan authorship** are insufficient to overturn the strong historical case.

Given the weight of historical and textual evidence, it is reasonable to affirm that John Mark, under the guidance of Peter, wrote the Gospel of Mark.



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