



The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark

By Dennis R. MacDonald

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In this groundbreaking book, Dennis R. MacDonald offers an entirely new view of the New Testament gospel of Mark. The author of the earliest gospel was not writing history, nor was he merely recording tradition, MacDonald argues. Close reading and careful analysis show that Mark borrowed extensively from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and that he wanted his readers to recognise the Homeric antecedents in Mark's story of Jesus. Mark was composing a prose anti-epic, MacDonald says, presenting Jesus as a suffering hero modeled after but far superior to traditional Greek heroes. Much like Odysseus, Mark's Jesus sails the seas with uncomprehending companions, encounters preternatural opponents, and suffers many things before confronting rivals who have made his house a den of thieves. In his death and burial, Jesus emulates Hector, although unlike Hector Jesus leaves his tomb empty. Mark's minor characters, too, recall Homeric predecessors: Bartimaeus emulates Tiresias; Joseph of Arimathea, Priam; and the women at the tomb, Helen, Hecuba, and Andromache. And, entire episodes in Mark mirror Homeric episodes, including stilling the sea, walking on water, feeding the multitudes, the Triumphal Entry, and Gethsemane. The book concludes with a discussion of the profound significance of this new reading of Mark for understanding the gospels and early Christianity.

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The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark By Dennis R. MacDonald Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2331586 in Books
- Published on: 2000-05
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .89" h x 6.36" w x 9.59" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 272 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

"MacDonald shows parallels between Homer and Mark so extensive that a relationship of dependence, conscious or unconscious, must be assumed. This is a radical thesis with great implications for the understanding of the gospels." William Hansen, Indiana University "MacDonald's conclusion that the author of the gospel of Mark in many significant places is imitating Homer poses a profound challenge to current scholarship on the history of early Christianity and the historical Jesus." Mary A. Tolbert, Pacific School of Religion

About the Author

Dennis R. MacDonald is John Wesley Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Claremont School of Theology and co-director of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at the Claremont Graduate University. He is the author of Christianizing Homer and The Legend and the Apostle.

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