

*The Gospel  
to the Romans*

THE SETTING AND RHETORIC

OF MARK'S GOSPEL



BY

BRIAN J. INCIGNERI

BRILL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION SERIES

## THE GOSPEL TO THE ROMANS

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VOLUME 65



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*For the many faithful people  
who went before us,  
and who were prepared to give their lives  
for the sake of Jesus  
and for the sake of the gospel*

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An audiotape series by Richard Rohr over twenty years ago first stirred in me a sense of the rhetorical power of the biblical texts. This awareness grew through reading the Bible and by teaching church groups about it. But it was only when I commenced the formal study of Mark's Gospel in 1993 that I began to appreciate the particular power to move and persuade that lies within that revolutionary text.

I had the advantage of coming to the text afresh, exposed at the outset to newer appreciations of the biblical texts as pieces of literature within their ancient literary context, and the rhetorical world in which they were created. Nevertheless, this book would not have been possible without the inspiring efforts, exegetical techniques and encyclopaedic knowledge of several generations of devoted biblical scholars. Particularly inspiring for me was the detailed and judicious work of the late Raymond Brown, who helped me realise the need to integrate historical and biblical studies.

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Brian J. Incigneri  
*East Burwood, Victoria, Australia*  
*19 January 2003*

## ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
AJAH	<i>American Journal of Ancient History</i>
Ant.	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>
AJT	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
E.H.	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
GR	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, Byzantine Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBS	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
Inst.	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenistic Studies</i>
JLT	<i>Journal of Literature and Theology</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNT Sup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</i>
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSP Sup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JW	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NZSTR	<i>Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionphilosophie</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>

PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
TBT	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

## CHAPTER ONE

### READERS OF FLESH AND BLOOD

#### RELATING MARK'S GOSPEL TO ITS PARENTS

##### CONCEIVING THE GOSPEL

*To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune . . . To lose both seems like carelessness. (Oscar Wilde)*

Genes determine our physical nature, the way our bodies operate, and what we are capable of doing. Although the uses to which we might put this body are affected by its environment and its interaction with others, its essential physical composition is already there in its genetic makeup, and if we wish to understand the body at its most fundamental level, we turn today to the science of genetics.

So it should be with *The Gospel according to Mark*. It has a 'genetic origin' that determines its nature and the way it operates within itself, one part complementing others, working together in a unity of diverse organs and processes that enable it to function as it does. Its 'genes' are inherited from its two parents—the author and his community—both of whom, in their own way, determined its composition. Accordingly, if its essential identity and characteristics are to be appreciated, it is necessary to take into account both the author who fathered it, and the community that mothered it. The text is a child of both, and it will not be understood other than in relation to them.

Justice is only done to this text if it is seen above all as an act of communication between its writer and its intended recipients, and as one that reflects the experiences, beliefs and feelings of both. Accordingly, the importance of identifying the Gospel's first readers and their concerns will be emphasised here, as their perceptions of their situation, both intellectual and emotional, shaped this Gospel as much as those of its author.<sup>1</sup> The child is an expression of both parents.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'first readers' of this Gospel are often considered to be a general audience of first century Christians, and the term is even applied to those who heard or read it in the decades after its writing, but here this term, usually abbreviated to "readers," will refer to the local Christians for whom Mark intended his work.



The genesis of Mark's Gospel is the subject of this study. It is proposed that it had its origin in Rome, and was composed in the latter months of 71 in response to the stressful situation that existed for the Christians of that city. The aim is to show that recognition of this social, political and religious context and its effects on the local Christians is the key to understanding the Gospel's design, and provides explanations for many literary features that have long puzzled scholars.

The Gospel will be treated as a rhetorical text, crafted to persuade. Unhappily, important aspects of ancient rhetoric have often been overlooked in biblical studies, largely because historically focused studies have been driven by the question of the reliability of the Gospel for revealing the life of Jesus and by interest in the traditions of the very early Church. Even now, long after it has been recognised that the Gospel addresses the needs of a later church,<sup>2</sup> and that there are considerable difficulties in using it to identify Jesus' precise words and deeds,<sup>3</sup> a continuing focus on pre-Gospel material still veils the rhetorical nature of this document.<sup>4</sup> Its rhetorical context and design have also been ignored by a second stream of scholarship now using literary critical methods to focus on the text's effects on readers today, thus, for the most part, rejecting historical investigations altogether.

Here, no attention shall be paid to uncovering earlier texts or traditions. Rather, the focus will be solely on the moment when the Gospel came to be born. However, as historical-critical methods have

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<sup>2</sup> As early as 1892, Martin Kähler saw the Gospels as sources for the beliefs of the Christian community rather than for the words and deeds of Jesus, according to Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: A. & C. Black, 1991) 9. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968 [Orig. 1921]) 4, emphasised that the Gospels should be seen as the kerygma of early Christianity. His focus was on the way in which the early tradition took shape, and he sought to identify the church setting according to the 'form' of particular units of the Gospel. Citing Dibelius, Bultmann said the aim of form criticism is "to discover the origin and the history of the particular units [of tradition] and thereby to throw some light on the history of the tradition *before* it took literary form."

<sup>3</sup> The "fatal blow" to the quest for the historical Jesus was dealt by Albert Schweitzer (1911), according to Heikki Räisänen, *The 'Messianic' Secret in Mark's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990) 2. However, long afterwards, the prime interest was still directed towards the identification of what Jesus had said and done. See, for example, Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 135.

<sup>4</sup> There are different ideas of the goals of "historical criticism." For example, Craig A. Evans, "Source, Form and Redaction Criticism: The 'Traditional' Methods of Synoptic Interpretation," in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Approaches to New Testament Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 19 n. 8, has said recently that the method only seeks to determine the material from the period of Jesus, and how it should be understood.

long dominated biblical studies, and the investigation of pre-Markan traditions is still seen as an essential step by many scholars, it will be argued first that such an approach has meant that there has been an unwarranted focus on the grandparents of the text, and that the community that gave birth to it has been largely forgotten. Moreover, it will be shown that, in the more recent literary methods of biblical criticism, its father, too, has been given little or no role. The child has been separated from its parents.

### MARKING OUT MARK

Red: *This information is virtually certain.*

Pink: *Probably reliable. Grey: Unreliable.*

Black: *Improbable. (The Jesus Seminar)*<sup>5</sup>

Willi Marxsen was the first to speak of the “third” *Sitz im Leben*—the setting of the community or communities for which the Gospel was written.<sup>6</sup> With him, a new form of historical criticism was applied to Mark’s Gospel—redaction criticism, or “history of redaction,” as Marxsen preferred to call it.<sup>7</sup> But he was entering uncharted territory by trying to perform redaction criticism on a text for which there are no extant written sources.

Mark, who had been treated previously as a rather passive collector of existing traditions,<sup>8</sup> was now seen in a more creative editorial

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<sup>5</sup> Colours assigned by the members of the Jesus Seminar to different parts of the Gospel text, representing its degrees of historical reliability. See the example in “The Jesus Seminar: Voting Records (The Passion Narrative),” *Forum New Series* 1.1 (1998) 227–31.

<sup>6</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies in the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abindon Press, 1969 [Orig. German: 1956, 1959]) 23. Marxsen cited Joachim Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1954) 20, for the identification of the first two *Sitze* as the life of Jesus and the situation of the primitive church. But Jeremias refers to C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1936) 111, and it is clear there that these first two settings were fundamentally identified by the concept of form criticism.

<sup>7</sup> Marxsen used the term *Redaktionsgeschichte*, and followed Günther Bornkamm, a pupil of Bultmann, who compared Matthew to Mark (1948), and Hans Conzelmann on Luke (1954), according to Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) 25. For a useful history of source, form and redaction criticism, see William S. Vorster, “Through the Eyes of a Historian,” in J. Eugene Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus: Essays in Biblical Language, Gospel Narrative and the Hellenistic Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 61–85.

<sup>8</sup> In 1919, K. L. Schmidt compared Mark’s role in assembling fragments, stories

role.<sup>9</sup> Interest moved to identifying his redactional work—how he joined traditions, added comments and summaries, and so composed a coherent story and theology.<sup>10</sup> Marxsen's main concern was to show that Mark was in a "central position among the theologians of primitive Christianity,"<sup>11</sup> as he had concluded that Mark created the unity of the account, and this could only be explained by "taking into account an individual, an author personality who pursues a definite goal with his work."<sup>12</sup>

It has been said that the aims of redaction criticism are twofold: an understanding of the Gospel in view of its historical context and the community or communities for which it was written, and the shedding of further light on the oral and literary history of the texts.<sup>13</sup> However, redaction critics have had difficulty balancing the two: like form and source criticisms before it, redaction criticism, although to some extent looking at the author, has been more interested in the process of change of the tradition. Perrin gave this definition: "Redaction criticism is concerned with the interaction between an inherited

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and sayings to that of a child threading pearls on a string. See Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1975) 6. This concept has never been completely abandoned, as Mark is still often seen primarily as a collector of traditions; cf. Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990) 286, 289, and Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 1048: "The Gospel of Mark presents only a loose disposition of materials."

<sup>9</sup> Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, "Introduction: The Lives of Mark," in Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (eds), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1992) 6, point out that Marxsen only completed what Wrede began in 1901, as Wrede had demonstrated the creativity of Mark by showing that the motif of secrecy had originated with him. From that moment, they comment (9), exegesis had to "appreciably modify its previous view of the type of authorship that we have in Mark." Perrin (*Redaction Criticism* 8) has said that Wrede showed Mark's work to be "permeated through and through with a theological conception."

<sup>10</sup> Redaction critics looked for seams, 'Markan insertions,' 'Markan summaries,' and explanatory comments. These aspects were chosen because "Mark had to create or compose them," and the other text "did not require the amount of creativity comparable to the creation of the various summaries." Robert H. Stein, *Gospels and Tradition: Studies in Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991) 53.

<sup>11</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 216.

<sup>12</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 18. Marxsen applied his method to only four aspects of Mark's Gospel (John the Baptist, the Galilee/Jerusalem motif, *euangelion* and Chapter 13).

<sup>13</sup> C. Clifton Black, "The Quest of Mark the Redactor: Why Has It Been Pursued and What Has It Taught Us?" in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (eds), *New Testament Interpretation and Methods* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 205, 208. The dual aims are also expressed by Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New*

tradition and a later interpretive point of view.”<sup>14</sup> The earlier focus on ‘what really happened’ in the life of the historical Jesus had merely shifted to ‘what really happened’ in the handing on of the tradition.<sup>15</sup> In his highly influential work that proposed a Syrian setting for the Markan community, Howard Kee, as his final words, appeals for the wider use of this “method in the historical analysis of primitive Christianity.”<sup>16</sup>

Although redaction critics considered that they were looking at the Gospel holistically compared with source and form critical practitioners, the method had the unhappy result of fragmenting it even further, as exegetes now ‘marked out’ the text, attempting to identify which pieces belonged to Mark, and which were from the pre-Markan traditions. Scholars divided the text into three ‘parts’ for each *Sitz im Leben*: sayings and story components from the time of the historical Jesus, parts composed in the early church, and editorial changes and additions by Mark. Colour coding really began long before the recent Jesus Seminar.

Often, such investigations have employed a high level of imagination by positing the existence of particular early Christian communities for which there is no external evidence, as well as by reconstructing supposed pre-Markan written and oral sources and by imagining with some precision how the author of the Gospel went about his work. Although highly speculative, such studies often confidently describe the content of these ‘reconstructed’ pre-Markan texts or oral traditions, and the way Mark then used these ‘texts’ to construct his sentences and pericopes. For example, although Marxsen admitted that we cannot have “final certainty” in determining Mark’s sources

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*Age: Studies in Mark’s Gospel* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983 [Orig. 1977]) 12, and Marxsen, *Mark* 24.

<sup>14</sup> Perrin, *Redaction Criticism* vi. This focus on the process is seen in his expression of hope for the method: “It may well be that redaction criticism itself will ultimately produce a theological history of earliest Christianity such as it has not yet been possible to write” (39).

<sup>15</sup> Redaction critics turned away from identifying aspects of the text that came from the time of the historical Jesus. Marxsen (*Mark* 23) said that “what really happened is excluded from the outset.” Kee (*Community* 12) adopts the same attitude. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 355, removes all such considerations by arguing that “Mark created the story,” and that “the reason Mark wrote the story of Jesus in this way had little to do with the historical Jesus.” For a discussion and critique of source, form and redaction criticism as it relates to research into the historical Jesus, see Craig A. Evans, “The Life of Jesus,” in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook of Exegesis of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 427–76.

<sup>16</sup> Kee, *Community* 177.

and the extent of his revision, his confidence is striking: “Very little manipulation [of the John the Baptist text] is required to undo Mark’s arrangement, or at least to dismantle or unravel it,” facilitated by “his slight reworking of the material.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Perrin states: “This saying [8:38] has a history in the tradition prior to Mark that can be traced with comparative certainty. In its very earliest [Aramaic] form it probably ran . . .”<sup>18</sup> Ernest Best declares:

Faced with a piece of tradition Mark altered it internally as little as possible . . . even where it would have suited his purpose to do so he has not altered their content nor has he abbreviated them. . . . It is perhaps fair to say that in this respect he was more careful than Matthew or Luke.<sup>19</sup>

It is not clear why he should imagine that Mark worked in a different way than the other Gospel writers.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it is highly questionable whether the way *any* author composed his or her work can be reconstructed with accuracy even if all of the source material used was known, given that an author operates within a whole host of remembered textual resonances at the point of writing and re-writing, and may be quite free in employing these sources.

And yet Kee’s first step is to imagine how Mark assembled his text. Relying on Achtemeier’s study of Markan sources, he claims that the “degree of probability in favour of written collections [of miracle stories] is high.”<sup>21</sup> He then asks, “What sort of setting should be supposed for a collection of materials such as this? . . . the answer is obviously to be found in some group informed by Jewish apoca-

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<sup>17</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 52–53. He also confidently relied on Mark having “complexes and a passion narrative” at his disposal (18, 19, 26).

<sup>18</sup> He concludes, after “much wrestling,” that 9:1 is a “Markan product.” Perrin, *Redaction Criticism* 46. All Scripture references without a book name will be from Mark’s Gospel. The NRSV translation is usually adopted.

<sup>19</sup> Ernest Best, “Mark’s Preservation of the Tradition,” in William R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995) 163. Some of his criteria for identifying the pre-Markan traditions are “inconsistent titles of Jesus” (a title other than ‘Son of God’ indicates a pre-Markan tradition), “non-Markan words,” “superfluous information,” repeated words, the “unnecessary retention of names,” and “irrelevant logia,” such as 11:22–25 (153–68). He argues (160) that 11:22–25 are non-Markan as “they do not fit into the larger context and commentators struggle to explain them in it. (We might say that wherever we see commentators in confusion this is a sign of the preservation of tradition!).”

<sup>20</sup> Markan priority is assumed in this study; the arguments for it are very strong. See Evans, “Life of Jesus” 429–33; Kee, *Community* 14–16; Christopher M. Tuckett, *Synoptic Studies: The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984) 187.

<sup>21</sup> Kee, *Community* 33.

lyptic views.”<sup>22</sup> Citing “transitional passages” and “summaries” that are “clearly the work of Mark,” Kee concludes that this pre-Markan material was redacted in a social setting that matched Gerd Theissen’s picture of a rural Syrian community influenced by “itinerant charismatics” (see Chapter 2). But his conclusions are founded on assumptions about the way Mark altered supposed written sources, and his criteria for identifying these sources are of doubtful reliability.<sup>23</sup> It is the text prior to Mark that is in sharp focus, and he claims to see it with great clarity. Moreover, Kee seems to have reached his conclusions with a prior conception of a Syrian rural church in mind.

The redaction critical approach was eagerly adopted in Markan scholarship, but there has been a high degree of speculation inherent in it, allied with imaginative views of the early church. For example, Rudolf Pesch sees Mark in Rome, collecting traditions about Jesus, and conservatively redacting them for catechetical purposes in church services, as well as using them as *Missionschriften*.<sup>24</sup> But he thinks of Mark as a good clergyman collecting useful material for his congregation in an apparently peaceful church environment.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kee, *Community* 38. He also pays attention (51) to vocabulary and style, and “distinctive Markan phrases”—criteria that have since been considered unreliable by critics; see William R. Telford, “The Pre-Markan Tradition in Recent Research (1980–1990),” in F. Van Segroeck et al. (eds), *The Four Gospels 1992* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 2.706–7. For Kee, Mark was primarily an assembler of traditions.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Kee assumes (*Community* 56) that interpolations result from Mark’s arrangement of existing material rather than being an aspect of his own method of composition. Again, he claims that 8:12 is “almost certainly pre-Markan” because it includes a Semitism (40). Such a focus seems to rule out other explanations—Mark could simply have been a Jew born in Palestine.

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976, 1977) 1.1–2.

<sup>25</sup> The impression that Mark worked as a clergyman, catechist, scribe or scholar in a peaceful setting often appears in Markan studies. Mack (*Myth* 322–3, 324 n. 4) visualised the Gospel as “composed at a desk in a scholar’s study lined with texts and open to discourse with other intellectuals. . . . One might imagine Mark’s study as a workshop where a lively traffic in ideas and literary experimentation was the rule. . . . Colleagues may well have contributed ideas and experimental drafts . . . A lively, intellectual atmosphere.” He never mentions the verses that refer to persecution. Bernard Orchard, “Mark and the Fusion of Traditions,” in Van Segroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.783, 800, in arguing that the Gospel is the word-for-word transcript of Peter’s discourses taken down by professional stenographers using shorthand, speaks of these “writers” sitting near the “rostrum” and, although stenographers were expensive and normally only afforded by politicians or the wealthy, “we may also be certain that Peter’s church had the resources to command such services whenever necessary.” See also Bernard Orchard, “The Publication of Mark’s Gospel,” in Camille Focant (ed.), *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993) 519.

Towards the end of the eighties, there was a sense that this method had not been helpful. C. Clifton Black wondered why it should have persisted for so long “despite manifold uncertainties surrounding its execution,” and “the enormous theoretical and practical problems entailed by [its] practices.”<sup>26</sup> He added:

[A redactional critic] is compelled to engage in highly speculative conjectures about the history of traditions *behind* the evangelist, assumptions unamenable to empirical analysis yet invariably determinative of that researcher’s exegetical or methodological results.<sup>27</sup>

Disillusionment has been widespread.<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert laments that, by attempting to determine theological concerns “on the rather dubious assumption that the writer appears most clearly in those pieces of connecting material,” redaction criticism had reduced the Gospel to “fragments.”<sup>29</sup>

This dissatisfaction partly arose because of a growing awareness that Mark’s Gospel showed the literary style of a single author throughout.<sup>30</sup> This was given special impetus by Frans Neirynck’s 1988 study in which he concluded:

<sup>26</sup> Black, “Quest” 201.

<sup>27</sup> Black, “Quest” 217. In a further study, he noted that there had developed a wide diversity of opinion about criteria for identifying Markan redaction, with no two results being identical, and concluded that redaction criticism “does not work when applied to the Second Gospel”—it is a “rather hopeless, if not misbegotten, enterprise,” with exegetes reaching conclusions that mirror their preconceptions. C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 249. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983) 112, makes similar observations.

<sup>28</sup> See John R. Donahue, “Redaction Criticism: Has the *Hauptstrasse* Become a *Sackgasse*?” in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (eds), *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 27–57, and Luke Timothy Johnson, “So what’s Catholic about It? The State of Catholic Biblical Scholarship,” *Commonweal* 125 (January 16, 1998) 15.

<sup>29</sup> She considers that these methods had acted as a “transitional discipline” leading to broader literary methods. Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary and Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 22–23. For a further critique of redaction criticism, including its failure to see the whole text, see Stanley E. Porter, “Literary Approaches to the New Testament: From Formalism to Deconstruction and Back,” in Porter (ed.), *Approaches* 81–82.

<sup>30</sup> See Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). Both Robert M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) and Joanna Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Technique, Concentric Structure and Theology in Mark 2:1–3:6* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1980) have shown that Mark was responsible for the formation of large sections of the text that had been thought to be mere collections of earlier stories. Frank Matera, *What Are They Saying about Mark?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 56–73, discusses how these studies have established Mark “as a literary figure.”

There is a sort of homogeneity in Mark, from the wording of sentences to the composition of the Gospel. After the study of these data one has a strong impression of the unity of the Gospel of Mark. . . . No pericope in Mark can be treated in isolation.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, studies that rely on the separation of tradition from redaction have persisted, and attempts have been made to determine new criteria for identifying Markan redaction.<sup>32</sup> Some scholars have attempted to integrate redaction, source and form criticisms with tools of literary criticism.<sup>33</sup> William Telford argues that the earlier tools, allied with literary methods, are essential for an understanding of the text.<sup>34</sup> He claims that there is a “striking and often unacknowledged consensus on the minimal [pre-Markan units],” with “divergence only over their precise nature.”<sup>35</sup> Further, he contends, “discrepancies, ambiguities and awkwardnesses” are only explained by the existence of pre-Markan sources, and redaction criticism must be employed to determine these sources, which are revealed by a “close reading.”<sup>36</sup> Despite

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<sup>31</sup> He found this homogeneity in vocabulary and grammar in both individual sayings and collections of sayings. He also proposed that duality should not be regarded as an indicator of indebtedness to tradition or sources, but reflects “the author’s own manner of writing.” Frans Neiryck, *Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of Markan Redaction* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988) 37, 71–72.

<sup>32</sup> David Barrett Peabody, *Mark as Composer* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1987) 14, suggested a criterion of “recurrent language” for identifying “what comes from the author of Mark.” This would lead to the preferring of some words or phrases over others, based on frequency. See also Hans Klein, “Zur Methode der Erforschung vormarkinischer Quellen,” in Focant (ed.), *Synoptic Gospels* 503–17, and Philip Sellew, “Composition of Didactic Scenes in Mark’s Gospel,” *JBL* 108 (1989) 614–16, who proposes a “composition criticism” that marries source and redactional concerns to a more literary approach. However, in demonstrating this method, he claims that Mark continued to use the form and language of earlier traditions in those parts he composed, such as 8:14–21 (“without doubt from the evangelist himself”), and does not consider the possibility that Mark might have written *all the pericopes*. Thus, in finding a document that appears to have the same style throughout, he looks for what was written by someone else, and concludes that Mark copied their style.

<sup>33</sup> In the latest Markan commentary, John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), use literary tools, but have the view that the Gospel “bears the imprint of earlier stages of composition” (46). Thus, they repeatedly see Mark altering earlier texts. An example of this approach can be seen in their comment on 13:10: “That Mark himself has inserted this sentence is suggested by the characteristically Markan vocabulary, the fact that the verse interrupts the smooth flow of thought from 13:9 to 13:11, and the unlikelihood that Jesus spoke so clearly about the Gentile mission” (370).

<sup>34</sup> William R. Telford, “Tradition” 2.693–723; “Mark and the Historical-Critical Method: The Challenge of Recent Literary Approaches,” in Focant (ed.), *Synoptic Gospels* 491–502; *Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Telford, “Tradition” 2.711; “Method” 502.

<sup>36</sup> Telford, “Method” 491; *Mark* 46–47, where he proposes that redaction is



his claim to integrate redaction criticism with a more holistic literary analysis, Telford still calls redaction criticism the “principal method.”<sup>37</sup>

Like other scholars who follow this method, Telford’s imaginative construction of Mark’s setting and method arises from his attempt to resolve apparent anomalies in the Gospel, ascribing them to a tension with the traditions that Mark was obliged to use.<sup>38</sup> His literary analysis of the text comes only *after* highly speculative judgements about Mark’s sources have been made, undermining the exploration of possible literary or historical reasons for the seeming anomalies.<sup>39</sup> Other scholars, too, have attempted to combine redaction criticism with newer approaches, often analysing motifs and themes throughout the whole of the Gospel,<sup>40</sup> and there seems to be a preference for this mixed approach among German scholars; examples are Folkert Fendler,<sup>41</sup>

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revealed by the “obvious insertions,” a “lack of logical coherence” in certain passages (including 11:22–25), and “repetition” (such as two feeding accounts, three passion predictions, repeated references to Judas in the passion story)—“inconsistencies and discrepancies abound at every level.” It will be argued here that there are sound rhetorical reasons for these “inconsistencies and discrepancies.” In his latest work (*Theology* 22, 25–28), he concedes that Mark “in some cases even created the material,” but it is clear that he views Mark primarily as a collector and connector.

<sup>37</sup> Telford, *Theology* 9; see also 2. Perceiving a conflict between Mark’s views and earlier traditions he identifies, Telford concludes that Mark wrote a polemic against the Twelve (see Chapter 7).

<sup>38</sup> Craig Evans observes that redaction criticism has tended to exaggerate differences in perspective between source and redaction, leading to the perception of a conflict between Mark and his tradition. Evans, “Traditional Methods” 17–45, especially 18; “Life of Jesus” 427–41.

<sup>39</sup> Cilliers Breytenbach, “Das Markusevangelium als traditionsgebundene Erzählung? Anfragen an die Markusforschung der achtziger Jahre,” in Focant (ed.), *Synoptic Gospels* 83–86, is another who argues that Mark’s dealings with his sources cannot be ignored, claiming that “a narrow way in the dark world of pre-Markan tradition” can be found by drawing on such ‘documents’ as Q, the Oxyrhynchus papyri, the Gospel of Thomas sayings and by observing Mark’s use of the LXX. For example, on 6:1–6, he assumes Mark took some sayings from *Gos. Thom.* 31/P. Oxy. 1.30–35 about Jesus as a tradesman, and interprets the whole six verses from this premise. To do this, he must make assumptions about the early date of those documents, their availability to Mark, the form in which he had them and, in the case of Q, the contents of that ‘reconstructed’ text.

<sup>40</sup> Edwin K. Broadhead, *Prophet, Son, Messiah: Narrative Form and Function in Mark 14–16* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 14–25, attempts to combine tradition history with synchronic analysis, in a mix of methods that includes narrative and linguistic analysis. He sees the Gospel as having been produced by a community over a period of time, as he regards it to have too much depth for an individual author (290).

<sup>41</sup> Folkert Fendler, *Studien zum Markusevangelium: Zur Gattung, Chronologie, Messiasgeheimnistheorie und Überlieferung des zweiten Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991).

Christof Dahm,<sup>42</sup> Thomas Söding,<sup>43</sup> and Hans-Joachim Eckstein.<sup>44</sup> However, their interpretations still rest on problematic premises.

#### EDITOR OR AUTHOR?

*I decided to write . . . an orderly account for you. (Luke 1:3)*

Adding to the doubts that redactional or compositional approaches are helpful for Mark's Gospel, there has been a growing understanding that ancient writers did not copy their sources slavishly, but felt free to quite substantially alter and shape their material for the sake of their rhetorical presentation.<sup>45</sup> Recently, too, there has been considerable doubt about the accuracy of long-held beliefs about the transmission of oral tradition and the idea that there was one 'form' of an oral saying that had been handed on.<sup>46</sup> Barry Henaut has examined at length the question of how oral traditions are used in written texts, concluding that "Mark's purposes have shaped the tradition

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<sup>42</sup> Christof Dahm, *Israel in Markusevangelium* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990); see 1–15 for a discussion on the developments in method and the need for synchronic and diachronic approaches to be used together.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Söding, "Der Evangelist in seiner Zeit," in Thomas Söding (ed.), *Der Evangelist als Theologe: Studien zum Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995) 11–62, sees Mark as being bound by his tradition, and argues that the Gospel can only be understood in view of its history of development. He takes for granted that there is a "little apocalypse" behind Mark 13, as well as the existence of other written collections. However, he does ascribe a fair degree of creativity to Mark in the way he used his traditions, and does emphasise the importance of the original addressees of the Gospel throughout.

<sup>44</sup> Hans-Joachim Eckstein, "Markus 10,46–52 als Schlüsseltext des Markus-evangeliums," *ZNW* 87 (1996) 33–50.

<sup>45</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures: A Response," *Semeia* 65 (1994) 82–88, has shown the different ways in which oral or written tradition was transformed by new wording, or recontextualised when new rhetoric was required. Paul J. Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1993) 27, has shown that the alteration of references was very common in antiquity by writers such as Seneca and Dio Chrysostom, as they were quoted from memory, rather than checked in a scroll.

<sup>46</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: the Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) xv, argues: "Verbatim memorization as a key factor in oral transmission has been abandoned by the majority of experts, who now admit the inevitability of change, flexibility and degrees of improvisation." He speaks of the "misconceived search for the original form of oral materials" (27). David E. Aune, *The New Testament and its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987) 50, has reached the same conclusion.

at virtually every point,” and that it is impossible to trace a text’s transmission through various strands of tradition—the assumption by form critics that there was a fixedness of oral traditions is not borne out by the evidence.<sup>47</sup> Similar flexibility has been shown in the use of Scriptural texts.<sup>48</sup> Raymond Brown complained:

Too often scholars transfer their desk situation with Gospel copies propped up before them into the ancient church. Nor is the parallel of the trained bard reciting oral tradition with great exactitude appropriate. A better analogy would be that of an intelligent Christian today whose knowledge of the Gospel story does not come from reading a Bible but from hearing Sunday pericopes read in church.<sup>49</sup>

Breytenbach argues, however, that a listener who “knew about the story of Jesus and the episodes of the life of Peter heard the text differently,” so that diachronic questions cannot be left out of consideration.<sup>50</sup> Against this, Christopher Stanley has compared Paul’s use of Scripture with contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman techniques, and concluded,

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<sup>47</sup> He argues that oral tradition usually involves many people and many variations in accounts heard and fused together. Groups of sayings may not have any earlier source, but the evangelist may have joined them. Barry W. Henaut, *Oral Tradition and the Gospels: The Problem of Mark 4* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 30–32, 58, 62, 120, 304–5.

<sup>48</sup> F. Gerald Downing, “Redaction Criticism: Josephus’s *Antiquities* and the Synoptic Gospels,” in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 161–99, shows that Josephus used Scripture very freely, and argues that the evangelists adopted a similar approach to their source material. On the free use of Scripture by Mark, and his lack of respect for the original context, see also William S. Vorster, “The Function of the Use of the Old Testament in Mark,” in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 149–60; “The Production of the Gospel of Mark,” in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 471–74. Kee (*Community* 47) noted that Mark “is not concerned at all about the literal details or the original import of the [Scriptural] text he finds fulfilled in Jesus.” Yet, he does not consider that Mark might have had the same freedom with his non-Scriptural traditions.

<sup>49</sup> In these circumstances, Brown suggested, a writer’s vocabulary would only be “an approximation” of what he had heard or read. He pointed out how a study of the Dead Sea Scrolls *pesharim* shows that writers selected and dramatised incidents that were capable of echoing the Scriptures. He concluded that the transmission of the text of the Old Testament illustrated at Qumran shows remarkable freedom on the part of the early scribal copyists. Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *NTS* 33 (1987) 326, 334, 336. Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 131–32, in a study of scribes in Israel, warns that we should not view ancient scribes as if they were medieval copyists or modern scholars. See also Raymond F. Person, “The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer,” *JBL* 117 (1998) 601–9. L. W. Hurtado, “Greco-Roman Textuality and the Gospel of Mark: A Critical Assessment of Werner Kelber’s *The Oral and the Written Gospel*,” *BBR* 7 (1997) 104, points to the evidence of scribes often making “all sorts of changes” in ‘copying’ written texts.

<sup>50</sup> Breytenbach, “Traditionsgebundene” 93.

from observing a wide range of writers, that they all “presuppose” that a reader will not be disturbed by their obvious alterations of known texts. The authors obviously “felt no concern that the readers would accuse them of dishonesty or impugn their integrity”—such adaptation was clearly acceptable. Use of prior texts, such as the Homeric poetry, “showed a high degree of literacy artistry and appeared to function in direct subservience to the later author’s rhetorical purposes.” With Paul, the overriding concern was “the pastoral needs of the people being addressed.”<sup>51</sup> In view of this finding, it is doubtful that the original Christian recipients of the Gospel would have been closely examining Mark’s story for comparison with what they had previously heard if the basic events were the same, particularly if the document was perceived as having authority behind it.<sup>52</sup>

Often concerned to demonstrate the reliability of the traditions found in the Gospels, practitioners of historical-critical methods have been reluctant to accept that Mark had control over his material, perceiving him to have been constrained to use his sources just as they were, although he may have disagreed with their points of view.<sup>53</sup> However, studies have shown that, in addition to uniformity of style, the ‘point of view’ of the author is consistent through the whole of the Gospel.<sup>54</sup> It is likely, then, that Mark exercised a high degree of authorial freedom, and the origin of his basic stories and sayings should be regarded as far less important than their new rhetorical use.

The majority of commentaries on Mark in the twentieth century

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<sup>51</sup> Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); quotations from 290, 336, 337. Such studies argue strongly against the view of Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1964) that Jesus trained his disciples to memorise his teaching, and that there was a very high degree of accuracy in the traditional material.

<sup>52</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, “Progymnastic Rhetorical Composition and Pre-Gospel Traditions: A New Approach,” in Focant (ed.), *Synoptic Gospels* 116–18, 120, observes that “source analysis in New Testament texts has been guided . . . by textual criteria that imagines a rhetorically disengaged scribal culture as the context of the production of the New Testament Gospels,” criticising a copying culture “imagined by literary-historical critics” that envisions “non-extant sources,” and arises from a twentieth century printing-press mentality. His examination of chreiai from the first century (Theon’s *Progymnasmata*) shows that sources were very freely used, with extensive variation in wording. People knew, he said that “all traditions, whether oral or written, need to be composed anew to meet the needs of the day.”

<sup>53</sup> Typical of this view is Stein (*Gospels* 58), who argues that Mark may have chosen some pericopes, not because he agreed with the material, but because they were well known, and that others were in complexes and could not be “excised.”

<sup>54</sup> Beginning with Norman R. Petersen, “‘Point of View’ in Mark’s Narrative,” *Semeia* 12 (1978) 97–121.

approached the Gospel from a form, source or redaction critical perspective,<sup>55</sup> and many of the major claims about the setting and purposes of Mark have been based on assumptions about pre-Markan sources. Nevertheless, redaction criticism has been important in establishing an awareness of the creativity of the evangelist, the need to take into account his beliefs and aims, and the environment in which the Gospel was written. Kee was correct in saying that attention has to be paid to the “cultural setting” and “social dynamics” in order to “avoid reading unwarranted or at least highly dubious meanings into this Gospel.”<sup>56</sup>

But if the first step, as Marxsen proposed,<sup>57</sup> is to attempt to separate tradition from redaction, even if literary methods are later incorporated in their analysis, the resulting interpretation is prejudiced by ‘reading’ those constructed traditions first, and treating part of the text as if it is not Mark’s rhetoric, sometimes because it contains a word only used once in the Gospel. Redaction and composition critics argue that insights into the way the evangelist has “made” his text “deepens the understanding of the Gospel,”<sup>58</sup> but even if identification of pre-Markan traditions could be reliably performed, the resulting analysis would still only be an examination of the way Mark arranged his material. On the other hand, if we see the Gospel as having been constructed as rhetoric for a particular time and place, we can better see how the text was meant to work to achieve its meaning. Its coherence, its interconnections, its allusions, its irony, its mood, its intended effects on readers—all will be apparent from an examination of the final text. If the focus is on the materials used, the final construction is not seen.

In directing our view towards what supposedly existed before Mark wrote, the process of interpretation has already lost sight of the Gospel in its setting. It is a ‘restrained’ view, and loses sight of the Gospel’s rhetorical function at the time it was conceived, carried and born.

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<sup>55</sup> Craig S. Mann, *Mark* (New York: Doubleday, 1986); Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989); Anderson, *Mark*; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich: Neukirchener, 1979); Pesch, *Markusevangelium*; William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). In his recent commentary, Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), sees Mark largely as a collector and redactor. For example, on 3:20–35, he comments: “It is probable that Mark has been active in arranging and shaping these stories” (277).

<sup>56</sup> Kee, *Community* 2.

<sup>57</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 28.

<sup>58</sup> Breytenbach, “Traditionsgebundene” 99.

## LEARNING TO READ

*To read well, that is, to read true books  
in a true spirit, is a noble exercise . . . It  
requires a training such as the athletes  
underwent. (Henry Thoreau)*

During the last twenty years, many biblical scholars have turned to the methods of literary criticism, concluding that historical criticism had resulted in a “neglect of reading,”<sup>59</sup> as it was no longer the final text that was being examined.<sup>60</sup> The critical tools long employed in the analysis of literature were applied to biblical texts, paying attention to such aspects as plot development, setting, characterisation and point of view.<sup>61</sup> Naturally holistic in its outlook, this move provided freshness to the reading of the Gospels and an appreciation of the narratives, with a new sensitivity to the way the story was told, the interrelationships between their parts, and the resulting effects upon the reader. The focus became the world of the story, rather than the world that produced the text.

Beneficial as this move was for an appreciation of the literary nature of the biblical text, the rush to embrace these literary methods overlooked certain methodological issues.<sup>62</sup> Many biblical critics welcomed the possibility of the derivation of a very wide range of meaning from the text, taking up the idea that the author was irrelevant to interpretation long after the New Criticism movement in the field of literature had declared the author ‘dead.’ W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley had raised ‘the intentional fallacy’ in 1946, that we cannot really know whether the author had successfully

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<sup>59</sup> F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” *BibInt* 7 (1999) 235.

<sup>60</sup> “New Testament practitioners who have been frustrated with the endless stream of seemingly unanswerable questions posed by historical criticism” have thus found literary criticism attractive, according to Brook W. R. Pearson, “New Testament Literary Criticism,” in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 251.

<sup>61</sup> Kort adopts an approach of myth criticism (plot), structural analysis (character), critical hermeneutics (atmosphere) and composition criticism (tone). Wesley A. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988) 134; *Take, Read?: Scripture, Text and Cultural Practice* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 50–96.

<sup>62</sup> “We turned to [New Criticism] enthusiastically, though somewhat unreflectively.” Werner Kelber, “Narrative as Interpretation and Interpretation of Narrative: Hermeneutical Reflections on the Gospels,” *Semeia* 39 (1987) 124. See Stanley E.

embodied his or her intention in the text. Although they were merely discussing the problem of relating external indications of a poet's intentions to the poem actually produced, the maxim was soon widely accepted that the author's intentions must be disregarded in interpretation.<sup>63</sup> This rush to kill off the author may have been a reaction to an imbalance of earlier approaches to literature that looked more at the author's 'great mind' than to the text itself.<sup>64</sup>

Paul Ricoeur has been influential, arguing for the "semantic autonomy" of the text, that is, a text becomes independent of its author as soon as it leaves his or her pen. He asserted: "What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it."<sup>65</sup> This separation of the reader from the author, according to Sandra Schneiders, "potentially enriches a text by enabling it to transcend the coordinates of its production and function in very different later situations." She adds: "appeal to the meaning intended by the author is not only impossible in fact but undesirable in principle, since it would greatly limit the potential richness of meaning in the text."<sup>66</sup> In an age increasingly rejecting authority, 'authorial control' was denied.<sup>67</sup> The text was seen to have a life of its own, and it could speak for itself.

This development has raised a number of questions: if a text has an unlimited number of meanings according to the number of possible readers, does the text have any inherent meaning at all? What

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Porter, "Literary Approaches" 112–19, for a discussion of the strengths and limitations of literary criticism.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion on how it became a literary standard, see Peter Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," in David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (eds), *Characterisation in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 19–20. Both Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 8, and E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 1–2, 12, argue that the 'intentional fallacy' has been misunderstood and misused. Against the proposal that the author may not have successfully embodied his intention in the text, Ben Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Allison Park, Pa: Pickwick Publications, 1989) 17–19, argues that the meaning to be recovered is what "the writer has managed to objectify in words."

<sup>64</sup> See J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993) 14–15, Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 72, and Donahue, "Redaction Criticism" 41.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) 30; also 92–93. He emphasised the metaphorical, mythical and symbolic power of the text to give rise to many meanings.

<sup>66</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 144, 162.

<sup>67</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New

are the effects of this approach upon the interpretation of a biblical text, and the resulting effects upon Christian belief? Although literary critics have responded that the text itself provided limits to interpretation,<sup>68</sup> such a control has been shown by poststructuralism to be weak: Roland Barthes spoke of the indeterminability of meaning, extending “as far as the eye can reach.”<sup>69</sup>

In the place of the now absent author, the text itself has often been personified. For example, Wesley Kort, noting that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE matches aspects of the second half of Mark’s Gospel, concludes: “Perhaps the narrative had specific reasons for creating this effect.”<sup>70</sup> This type of language has become common.<sup>71</sup> Such personification seems to become necessary in order to explain why the text is arranged or designed as it is. In the place of a human author, the text not only speaks for itself, but also has a mind and a will of its own, and seems to have created itself.

When a literary method is applied, it should use a language that works. Any method that attempts to ignore the human designer of a text has an artificiality, even an unreality about it. The idea of removing the role of the author from interpretation goes against ordinary human understanding of literary communication. Meyer complains that theorists have adopted a view “removed from common experience and common sense” that the reader, not the author, gives meaning to a text, contrary to the understanding “among ordinary readers everywhere.”<sup>72</sup>

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York: Paulist Press, 1991) 60, speaks of “emancipation from authorial intention.”

<sup>68</sup> Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory* 79) argued that not all interpretations are equal: “The text presents a limited field of possible constructions.” H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 120, spoke of the “binding nature of the work.”

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Temma F. Berg, “Reading In/To Mark,” *Semeia* 48 (1989) 193. However, William A. Beardslee, “Poststructuralist Criticism,” in Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie (eds), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 232, has rightly observed that language is not “as fluid and bereft of any determinate meaning as deconstructionists have claimed.”

<sup>70</sup> Kort, *Take, Read* 45.

<sup>71</sup> As another example, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?” in Anderson and Moore (eds), *Mark and Method* 24, asks: “How do various literary patterns enable the text to communicate meaning to its hearers and readers?” In the commentary by Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 20), this rule is adopted: “The concept of the implied author focuses on the ‘intention’ of the text rather than on the conscious intent of the flesh-and-blood author and composer. In this commentary ‘Mark’ generally designates the implied author and narrator rather than the historical composer of the Gospel, and functions as a virtual personification of the text.”

<sup>72</sup> He suggests that the success of this theory “is hardly explicable apart from the



A major difficulty for the literary theories taken up by biblical scholars is that they were all founded upon quite different types of texts. Influential have been works by Wayne Booth, Paul Ricoeur, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Seymour Chatman, as well as the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Booth, Iser, Fish and Ricoeur wrote about works of fiction or poetry,<sup>73</sup> while Gadamer developed a hermeneutical theory with an emphasis on aesthetics, addressing also music and works of art.<sup>74</sup> Chatman's theory was based on the analysis of fiction and film.<sup>75</sup> Norman Petersen, in his important work applying literary criticism to biblical studies, quoted Rene Wellek and Austin Warren: "The total meaning of a work of art cannot be defined in terms of its meaning for the author and its contemporaries,"<sup>76</sup> but in doing so saw the biblical text as a work of art. He argued that the text is a world in itself, in which the reader becomes involved.

But Mark's Gospel should not be considered like a literary work of art.<sup>77</sup> The Gospel writers adopt a very particular style of writing

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reaction against the simplistic notion of reading that it replaced." Ben Meyer, *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 2.

<sup>73</sup> Their key works are: Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed.: 1983; 1st ed.: 1961); Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). Booth (*Fiction* xiii) had said: "In writing about fiction, I am not primarily interested in didactic fiction, fiction used for propaganda or instruction." In his second edition, however, he claims that his book equally applies to histories, myths, journalism and any other text (407).

<sup>74</sup> Gadamer (*Truth* 306–7) has been a popular authority: he argued that the text has a world of its own which is not the world of the author, and that the reader must enter into dialogue with the text until the world of the reader and the world of the text 'fuse.' He built on Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory* 93) picked up Gadamer's idea of the 'fusion of horizons.'

<sup>75</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) 9, 15, 28, distinguished between the content and form of a narrative, which he called "the story" (the "what") and "the discourse" (the "way," or "how"). He built on Russian formalism that dealt with folk tales and myths, French structuralism and Aristotelian poetics. For Chatman, "the author, the ultimate designer of the fable, must be ignored" (33). Although he recognised that his own book was a piece of rhetoric, and "persuasiveness itself is a profoundly conventional notion" (265), his literary theory does not consider rhetoric, demonstrating that the texts he has in mind are essentially non-rhetorical in nature.

<sup>76</sup> Petersen, *Literary Criticism* 28. He drew on Boris Upensky's 1973 work, *A Poetics of Composition*, that discussed works of art ("Point of View" 98–99).

<sup>77</sup> "The Gospels are not art for art's sake." Merenlahti and Hakola, "Reconceiving"

that builds on the biblical tradition and that employs a language of faith. Robert Alter has pointed out that biblical literature is different, and argues that we cannot apply literary critical categories to the Bible, as the biblical texts are “theologically motivated [and] historically oriented”; such texts “have their own dynamics, their own distinctive conventions and characteristic techniques.”<sup>78</sup> The biblical text is designed to change the reader and to move him or her to new beliefs and thus to action. Moreover, a reader of a novel knows none of the characters or events beforehand, and has not had them preached to him for years. Nor are the Gospels fiction; they are narratives based on history, portraying historical persons and events, shaped for rhetorical purposes. The very special nature of the text demands special considerations.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, for Christians, interpretation is linked to an understanding of divine revelation. It has, in a particular way, an ‘author-oriented’ objective, as revelation through Scripture occurs through a human author.<sup>80</sup> The author, as well as the events and people surrounding his writing, and the theological issues being addressed, not only form an integral aspect of the text, but are also key aspects of its interpretation for those who look to perceive the human experience of God behind the text. Mark’s Gospel is human experience communicated.

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34. Some critics have called current methods in literary criticism the “aesthetic-literary approach.” Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) vii.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 15, 23. Sternberg (*Poetics* 12) agrees. See also the argument by Henry Jansen, “Poetics and the Bible: Facts and Biblical Hermeneutics,” *NZSTR* 41 (1999) 32, that the Gospels are in a different category of literature.

<sup>79</sup> Merenlahti and Hakola (“Reconceiving” 34) argue: “Any critical treatment of the Gospels must deal with the fact that these narratives contain truth claims that exceed those made in pure fiction.” Further, both the author and the reader of the Gospels adopt different attitudes than when reading fiction; it is not a game of ‘make-believe’ as in fiction, but “a game of commitment and belief,” and to read the text without recognising its inherent faith experience and call to faith is to approach the text on the wrong basis from the outset (35–39, quote on 36). Even Ricoeur recognised the distinction between rhetorical and non-rhetorical literature, and the necessity for bringing the author into play in the former: “Poetry is not oratory. Persuasion is not its aim. . . . Poetry does not seek to prove anything at all.” Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 9.

<sup>80</sup> Robert M. Grant, “Literary Criticism and the New Testament Canon,” in Porter and Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric* 93–98, has pointed out that the early traditions consistently stress the Gospels’ human authorship, rather than divine inspiration. This does not deny inspiration, but shows that the human situation is what first came to the mind of the Church fathers in writing of the origins of the Gospels.

## DISTANCING THE READER

*The only living works are those which have  
drained much of the author's own life into them.  
(Samuel Butler)*

In line with debates in literary theory, literary criticism of the Gospels divided into two approaches in the eighties—a text-centred narrative criticism that focused on the story world and the way the story is told,<sup>81</sup> and a reader-centred ‘reader-response’ criticism.<sup>82</sup> However, there is a significant blurring of boundaries between the two, as narrative criticism is also aware of the effects on the reader, and reader-response criticism is necessarily concerned with the elements of the story.

In both of these sub-streams, the literary model of real author—implied author—implied reader—real reader has been widely adopted from Booth and Chatman.<sup>83</sup> The model emphasises that there is no direct connection between the real author and the real reader in a written act of communication. Rather, “the real author, when writ-

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<sup>81</sup> On Mark, the principal works are: Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stephen Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel (Second Edition)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> For Mark, the leading proponent is Robert M. Fowler, *Loaves*; “Who is ‘The Reader’ in Reader-Response Criticism?” *Semeia* 31 (1985) 5–23; “The Rhetoric of Direction and Indirection in the Gospel of Mark,” *Semeia* 48 (1989) 115–35; *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); “Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader,” in Anderson and Moore (eds), *Mark and Method* 50–83; “Characterising Character in Biblical Narrative,” *Semeia* 63 (1993) 97–104. Also concentrating on the reader have been John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); Bas M. F. Van Iersel, *Reading Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991); *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); James S. Hanson, *The Endangered Promises: Conflict in Mark* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997).

<sup>83</sup> Booth (*Fiction* 74, 138, 422) introduced the concepts of ‘implied author’ and ‘implied reader.’ See also Chatman, *Story* 31, 147–55. For a good discussion of

ing, is reaching out for the implied reader (as no other reader is present at the moment). The real reader, when reading, is reaching out for the implied author (as no other author is present).<sup>84</sup> However, this literary model has had the effect of significantly over-emphasising the distance between the author and the reader, and the use of the notional concepts of implied author and implied reader has created a gulf between modern interpreters and the original environment of the author that is more serious than the one produced between readers and the text by traditional historical-critical methods.<sup>85</sup>

A further element that has added to this distance is the notion of the narrator, the 'voice' that tells the story, standing between the implied author and the implied reader. Narrative critics discuss the narrator as if this construct is a living person who designed the text and tells the story, and has beliefs and aims.<sup>86</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie argue that "it is helpful to think of the narrator as a figure with strategies and beliefs who addresses readers."<sup>87</sup> However, the motives and intentions that critics assign to both the narrator and implied author are really those of the real author of Mark's Gospel.<sup>88</sup> Narrative criticism has dehumanised the text: although demonstrating

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these, see William S. Vorster, "The Reader in the Text: Narrative Material," in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 361–65.

<sup>84</sup> Bernard C. Lategan, "Coming to Grips with the Reader," *Semeia* 48 (1989) 10.

<sup>85</sup> This study will show that there was not such a gap between the original readers and the author, so that the text was not meant to be read in the way that Booth's theory proposes.

<sup>86</sup> The narratee is rarely mentioned. Sternberg (*Poetics* 75) defines the narrator as "the plenipotentiary of the author holding the same views, enjoying the same authority, addressing the same audience, pursuing the same strategy." Merenlahti and Hakola ("Reconceiving" 37) say that, in non-fictional narratives, the reader regards the narrator as a real person.

<sup>87</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 39. Elsewhere, however, they speak of the narrator as "the way the story gets told . . . the overarching beliefs and ethical norms of the narrative" (6). Other examples of the personalisation of the narrator (among many possible) are: "a narrator's . . . attempt to impose a story-world," in Moore, *Literary Criticism* 56; "the narrator constructs a narrative world," in Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation: Vol 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) 8; "literary strategies on the part of the narrator," in Telford, "Tradition" 2.708; "the effects which the narrator probably intended his story to have on the readers," in Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 28.

<sup>88</sup> Moore (*Literary Criticism* 12) points out that, despite the rejection of the author's intention, sentences that attribute "the author" or "the writer" as intending to have certain effects on the reader "abound" in Rhoads and Michie's *Mark as Story*. Kort (*Story* 42) similarly says that the *narrator* seems to have a pastoral "solicitude toward the reader," rather than admit that the concern he observes derives from a human author.

the consistency of the point of view throughout the text, it assigns it to either the implied author or narrator.<sup>89</sup>

In this study, an aim is to re-humanise the text and to assign those beliefs and judgements to a human being—Mark the evangelist. The focus, however, is not the genius of Mark, but the aims of his rhetoric. Nor is any attempt made to identify the evangelist either as John Mark or another Mark who may be a disciple of Peter. Although knowing his background might help us appreciate the rhetorical setting, the endless discussion on his identity has, no doubt, resulted in discouragement among critics.<sup>90</sup> However, he cannot be completely ignored as a human being, because part of him lies in the text.<sup>91</sup>

### THE FORGOTTEN READERS

*With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. (Sir 7:27)*

With reader-centred criticism, the modern-day reader became the locus of authority, but also the subject of much debate—to what extent is the meaning of a text determined by the reader and by what she or he brings to the text?<sup>92</sup> On the one side, Iser argued that mean-

<sup>89</sup> “Booth shows that the implied author’s beliefs and judgements are always present in every aspect of a work.” Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 164. See also Petersen, “Point of View” 97–121.

<sup>90</sup> For discussion on the evidence for the identity of the author of the Gospel, see Gundry, *Mark* 1026–43; Söding, “Evangelist” 19–26; Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SCM Press, 1985) 47–53.

<sup>91</sup> Paul Joyce, “First among Equals? The Historical Criticism Approach in the Marketplace of Methods,” in Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce and David E. Orton (eds), *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 21, 24–27, has argued that a text has rights, and that there is a moral obligation to recover “as accurately as possible the original meaning,” which may, in fact, spur our imagination. “What did these words cost those who originally produced them?”

<sup>92</sup> There are several reader-response theories. For a discussion, see Edgar V. McKnight, “Reader-Response Criticism,” in Haynes and McKenzie (eds), *Meaning* 197–201. For a strong criticism of reader-response studies for their lack of consistent methodology, even a confusion of methods, see Stanley E. Porter, “Why Hasn’t Reader Response Criticism Caught On in New Testament Studies?” *JLT* 4 (1990) 278–92; “Reader-Response Criticism and New Testament Study: A Response to A. C. Thiselton’s *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*,” *JLT* 8 (1994) 94–102; “Literary Approaches” 90–106. See also Moore’s discussion and critique (*Literary Criticism*

ing resides in the text, but is only fully determined in an interaction between the reader and the text.<sup>93</sup> Fish, however, proposed that meaning is entirely derived by a reader's response, and there is no meaning inherent to the text in the absence of a reader: "The reader's response is not *to* the meaning: it *is* the meaning."<sup>94</sup>

But which reader? Rashkow comments: "'Who is the reader?' is a common question: is he the 'Actual Reader' (Van Dijk, Jauss), the 'Superreader' (Riffaterre), the 'Informed Reader' (Booth, Iser, Chatman, Perry), or the 'Encoded Reader' (Brooke-Rose)?"<sup>95</sup> Other concepts of the reader used in literary criticism have been listed by Darr: the ideal reader, the fictive reader, the mock reader, the authorial reader, the competent reader, the average reader, the hypothetical reader, the optimal reader, the zero-degree reader and the literate reader.<sup>96</sup> To these, Moore adds the literent reader, the inscribed reader, the subjective reader, the newreader and the wilful misreader.<sup>97</sup>

Such considerations of the reader fail to adequately distinguish between the potential embodied in the text through the design of its author, and the subsequent *use* of the text.<sup>98</sup> The focus on the way many possible readers might 'interpret' the text is really a focus on the way in which the text becomes 'significant' for them personally

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71–107), where he points out (72) that reader-response is not "a conceptually unified criticism . . . [but] a spectrum of contrasting and conflicting positions."

<sup>93</sup> Moore (*Literary Criticism* 101) argues that Iser's reader is "neither wholly actual nor wholly ideal," since an ideal reader would be completely manipulated by the text, whereas his implied reader brings a socio-cultural and personal history to the text. "Iser's implied reader is in part a creation of the text and in part a real individual."

<sup>94</sup> Fish, *Text* 3. He proposed (2–17) that the context of the interpretive community is what determines how meaning is derived, and that interpretation can never occur outside some "institutional or conventional structure." Against this view is Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 537–50.

<sup>95</sup> Ilona N. Rashkow, "In Our Image We Create Him, Male and Female We Create Them: The E/Affect of Biblical Characterisation," *Semeia* 63 (1993) 108.

<sup>96</sup> He points out that some readers look like modern critics. John A. Darr, *Herod the Fox* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 59–61. Fowler (*Reader* 32–33) uses the ideal reader concept, defining the implied reader as "the reader the text invites us to be. . . . The implied reader is the reader we must be willing to become, at least temporarily, in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure."

<sup>97</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism* 71.

<sup>98</sup> Fish (*Text* 349) describes the affective fallacy, also raised by Wimsatt and Beardsley, as "a confusion between the poem and its results, what it is, and what it does." According to Fish (344), they complained that investigation of the responses of readers results in the disappearance of the poem itself as the object of criticism, and the variability of readers makes an investigation of their responses "ad-hoc and relativistic." He regards this second fallacy as also having been influential in literary criticism.

or, alternatively, on the way the text is used by them for particular purposes.<sup>99</sup>

Reader-oriented methods are valuable for appreciating how today's reader derives meaning from the text, and is moved in their reading of the story. However, although supposedly focused on the reader, reader-response criticism is really a study of how the *text* makes the reader respond. Ultimately, most reader-responses are driven by the author, who intends the reader to make certain intratextual, intertextual and extratextual connections. If biblical criticism is to determine the response inherent in the text's design, it should pay close attention to the text's original situation, and focus on the responses that the author could have expected from his intended readers.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, much of recent biblical interpretation has forgotten those readers.<sup>101</sup>

In literary criticism, the author has become "a textual concept," and the reader "a theoretical construct that represents the responses the implied author intends or assumes on the part of his audience"<sup>102</sup>—a notional bundle of responses that is quite divorced from the real human beings involved in the production of this text. Malbon has written widely on Mark, adopting Chatman's theory.<sup>103</sup> She speaks

<sup>99</sup> Hirsch (*Validity* 255) has made the distinction between the *meaning* of a text and the *significance* of that meaning in a present situation, a "fundamental distinction overlooked by Gadamer."

<sup>100</sup> Drawing on Bakhtin's theory, Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983) 117, has pointed out that "that there was no language which was not caught up in definite social relationships." Sternberg (*Poetics* 2) complains of the consequences of the ahistorical tendency of much of literary biblical criticism: "Elements thus get divorced from the very terms of reference that assigned them their role and meaning."

<sup>101</sup> For example, Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), has no regard to Mark's intended readers at all and, although positing a New Exodus motif that has Jesus as the deliverer Isaiah called for, never considers what this might mean for readers at that time.

<sup>102</sup> Heil, *Model* 1, 2. Tolbert (*Sowing* 51, 53) also calls the reader in Mark a "theoretical construct," and even the "authorial reader" is a "heuristic literary construct." Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 10, claims: "Attention to the way Mark constructed his readers may help us to make sense of his rhetorical and theological strategies." But Mark did not construct his readers.

<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983) 29–48; *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); "Mark: Myth and Parable," *BTB* 16 (1986) 8–17; "Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Marcan Characters and Readers," *NovT* 28 (1986) 104–30; "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterisation," *JBL* 108 (1989) 259–81; "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 589–604; "Criticism" 23–49; "Echoes and Foreshadowings in Mark 4–8 Reading and Rereading," *JBL* 112 (1993) 211–30;

of “the rhetoric of the narrative,” in which “the implied author and implied reader interact,” defining the implied author as “a hypothetical construction based on the requirements of knowledge and belief presupposed in the narrative. . . . [and] the implied reader is the one who would be necessary for this narrative to be read or heard.”<sup>104</sup> Eco speaks of a “model reader” that is “a textually established set of felicity conditions . . . to be met in order to have a macro-speech act (such as a text) fully actualised.”<sup>105</sup> Literary criticism has excised the real people associated with the text, replacing both the author and the reader with theoretical concepts.<sup>106</sup>

Darr observes that “the real reader is only an enchanted observer” in the dialogue between implied author and implied reader, and considers that the weakness of Booth’s theory is the loss of the flesh-and-blood author and flesh-and-blood reader.<sup>107</sup> What caused this text to be designed and written were flesh-and-blood readers, not literary constructs.<sup>108</sup> For the biblical text, Ricoeur was wrong when he said that “the text has escaped its author and its situation; it has also escaped its original addressee.”<sup>109</sup> It cannot do so, as these people, not modern-day readers, are embedded in the text.

Stanley Porter notes that one form of reader-response criticism confines itself to a particular reader, that is, the first century one. He says this is really ‘audience criticism,’ but argues that “to privilege

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“Text and Context: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark,” *Semeia* 62 (1993) 81–102; “The Major Importance of the Minor Characters in Mark,” in Malbon and McKnight (eds), *New Literary Criticism* 59–86.

<sup>104</sup> Malbon, “Criticism” 26–27. She even assigns motives to these constructs: “It seems likely . . . that the implied author creates ambiguity” (3), and is forced to use terms such as: “The implied author persuades . . .”, “Mark’s rhetoric . . .”, and “The implied reader cannot forget the presence of Peter warming himself . . .” (34).

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Lategan, “Reader” 7.

<sup>106</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 29) declares: “The reader is a formal function rather than a flesh-and-blood reader.”

<sup>107</sup> Darr, *Herod* 30. Booth himself (*Fiction* 415) has come to some recognition in his second edition of the need to remember the real reader: “For some purposes I must make problematic the sharp distinction I once made between flesh and blood authors and implied readers, and between the various readers we become as we read and the actual breathing selves we are within our shifting cultures.” Booth was brought to his view by the insights of Bakhtin, and his observation that authors had to have certain beliefs in order to write as they did, and that they also must have certain beliefs about their potential readers, even when writing for a general audience.

<sup>108</sup> Garrett (*Temptations*) works with a confusing mixture of implied author/implied reader, and the flesh-and-blood reader, claiming (9–10) that shifting between the two concepts is “an especially useful strategy” but, as a result, fails to identify the rhetorical thrust of the Gospel.

<sup>109</sup> Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* 93.



the first reader is entirely arbitrary,” and “reintroduces historical reconstruction.” He contends that such an audience is even more difficult to construct than the author’s intention.<sup>110</sup> But Sternberg rightly argues: “The discourse supplies a network of clues to the speaker’s intention,”<sup>111</sup> and there are many subtle and not so subtle indicators of Mark’s aims and of the rhetorical setting scattered through the text. As Kee correctly observed, the language employed reveals the social situation, and “the common assumptions that the writer shares with his reader.”<sup>112</sup> As long as the first readers can be identified with a high degree of probability, then they should be privileged, as they are a key component in the design of the text. In any case, it is difficult to see why the intended reader (a real person) is any more difficult to adopt as the reader focus than the ‘implied reader’ (a theoretical construct).<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, the text keeps compelling interpreters to look at the situation of those readers: Petersen shows that Mark requires us to take into account ‘local knowledge’ that is assumed for the reader of the text.<sup>114</sup> Robert Tannehill, in his influential narrative study, finds himself forced to refer to the first readers, conceding “there are similarities between the problems of the disciples and problems which the first readers faced.”<sup>115</sup> At one point, Fowler speaks of the way in which Mark 13 addresses “the narrator’s audience of assembled narratees.”<sup>116</sup>

Narrative critics thus find themselves at odds with their own methods: Malbon, for instance, claims that interpretation must occur without “cultural information about the real reader,” but asserts that

<sup>110</sup> Porter, “Literary Approaches” 107.

<sup>111</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics* 8. He further commented (10–11): “From the premise that we cannot become people of the past, it does not follow that we cannot approximate to this state by imagination and training.”

<sup>112</sup> Kee, *Community* 50.

<sup>113</sup> It may not be possible to sufficiently identify the first readers of all biblical texts, and it is not claimed that the method employed in this work can necessarily be applied to the other Gospels.

<sup>114</sup> Norman R. Petersen, “The Reader in the Gospel,” *Neot* 18 (1984) 35–51; in his “*Literarkritik*, the New Literary Criticism and the Gospel according to Mark,” in Van Segroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.935, he notes that, with the mention of the opponents in Mark 13, the Gospel forces us to consider that Mark is “saying something to his audience about events in their time.” Even when Petersen adopted a strictly narrative critical approach, he still felt compelled to note (“Point of View” 110) that the Markan explanations bring the “original readers” into play in the interpretation framework.

<sup>115</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role,” *JR* 57 (1977) 393.

<sup>116</sup> Fowler, “Rhetoric” 122.

“basic information about the cultural context is essential.”<sup>117</sup> The assumption seems to be that the ‘ideal’ implied reader is not just anyone at all, but someone who lived in the ancient world and possessed this cultural information. There is a recognition in this admission that Mark forces us to place the narrative in its historical context; it cannot be treated like a novel, as the author assumes the reader to know some very important pieces of information. Thus, narrative critics, despite attempting to be free of authorial control, must admit that the author requires them to seek out certain information.

This is where the adoption of a theory like Chatman’s goes particularly wrong for such a text: in considering a narrative divorced from its social context, only one aspect of the flow of communication is considered—the telling of the story—but it is only one part of the whole rhetorical situation, which also includes the background and environment of the readers into which this narrative is ‘inserted,’ and for whom it was designed.<sup>118</sup> This text was meant to interact with their prior knowledge, their questions and their emotions. The evangelist did not have to ‘construct’ his reader. Rather, he built on the knowledge, values, beliefs and emotions of an audience of real people that he knew, and designed his text accordingly, like any ancient rhetorician. The *how* of the text, stressed so much by literary critics, was constructed to interact in a particular way with those readers.

In narrative criticism, it has been said, point of view “denotes the rhetorical activity of an author” who attempts to impose a story-world upon a reader,<sup>119</sup> and the method often assumes a reader who moves completely into the story world while reading. Petersen speaks of the narrator who “leads the reader on an imaginative journey into the past, plucking him out of his time and place.”<sup>120</sup> But Mark did not intend the reader to leave his or her own time and place, because he designed the text to continually relate, consciously and

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<sup>117</sup> Malbon, “Criticism” 27. She adds (28): “Narrative critics are wary of interpretations based on elements external to the narrative—including the intentions (known or supposed) of the real author.” But surely “cultural information” is “external to the narrative.” The only information that is taboo for the narrative critic seems to be the intentions of the author, for some reason that is not explained.

<sup>118</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 59, defines a text in this way: “The literary text is an act of communication from writer to reader. The text is the message.” Those who adopt a reader-centred or narrative critical approach rarely speak of the text as a vehicle for communication.

<sup>119</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism* 26.

<sup>120</sup> Petersen, “Point of View” 101. See also Kingsbury, *Conflict* 1.

subconsciously, to the reader's own experience.<sup>121</sup> If the reader was intended to leave their own world, irony or allusion that relies on knowledge of contemporary events would not work.<sup>122</sup> Rather, Mark sought to engage people *in their own world*, as they related the story to their own life situations. Moreover, Mark's goal was not the acceptance of the story, as narrative critics often claim, but the acceptance of the rhetoric.

The focus on the modern reader and on the text as an autonomous subject has meant that the historical context has often been ignored or minimised.<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately, the break from historical-critical methods by literary critics has led to an either/or perception, as many see a dichotomy between literary and historical criticism.<sup>124</sup> There is no reason, however, why a study of the text cannot have a strong

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<sup>121</sup> Although they assume an "ideal reader" in their narrative study, Rhoads, Dewey and Michie (*Mark (Second Edition)* 145), admit in their concluding remarks: "The rhetoric of Mark's story makes most sense addressing followers who are under the threat of persecution . . . These people would have listened to this story with intense involvement, because the story would be about them."

<sup>122</sup> Darr (*Herod* 39, 60–61) is of the opinion that "certain dimensions of meaning are apprehended only when a literary work is placed within its original historical setting (satire is an especially apt example)." In the end, however, he identifies his 'reader' as an "interpretive construct," one "of my own construction," who is familiar with ancient conventions, and is thus an "ideal reader . . . as I reconstruct my own reading experience." Fowler ("Figuring" 67) defines dramatic irony as "the incongruity between what the characters on the stage know or understand and what the audience knows or understands." But irony works not only in relation to a reader's knowledge of events in the text, but also of events in their own world. For example, the jibe at the "rulers who lord it over" people in 10:42 is an allusion directed primarily against the Roman powers at the time of the reader, not the Jewish authorities in the story.

<sup>123</sup> Fowler (*Loaves* 182) says that it is "refreshing" to discuss an "implied community of the Gospel" that was not "the supposed historical community out of which the Gospel came or to which it was addressed." Mary Ann Beavis, "The Trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53–65): Reader Response and Greco-Roman Readers," *CBQ* 49 (1987) 582, remarks: "It is clear that, for him, literary and historical criticism do not mix." For other criticisms of Fowler's method, see Pearson, *Literary Criticism* 254; Porter, "Study" 102; "Literary Approaches" 109. Oddly, Fowler ("Figuring" 57) claims that this ahistorical reading helps us appreciate "the temporal experience of the first-century oral performance of Mark." He is correct, however, in noting ("Rhetoric" 115) that the Gospel is "designed less to *say* something to the reader than to *do* something to the reader."

<sup>124</sup> For example, Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989) 16, 32, regards historical investigations to consist only of the reconstruction of pre-Markan traditions or heresies in the church, and says that he prefers to "follow the contours of Mark's story. . . . In doing this, we shall be using the method of literary criticism." For similar views, see Garrett, *Temptations* 6 n. 9, and Malbon, "Criticism" 24, who describes "the move from historical to literary questions" as "a paradigm shift in biblical studies."

historical awareness without relying on diachronic methods,<sup>125</sup> one that is fully cognizant of the social context, while being sensitive to literary and rhetorical considerations such as narrative construction, character portrayal, mood, point of view, and the reader responses that the author hoped to engender.<sup>126</sup> This would provide a blend of historical and literary approaches that builds on the strength of the historical awareness and philological tools of historical-criticism, without (for Mark) hypothesising the nature of sources.<sup>127</sup>

For the modern reader, the first step, then, should be to establish how the Gospel was designed to move its intended readers. Application of this text to a modern situation then becomes easy, indeed automatic, when the implications of the text become apparent, and the situation of those readers is compared. The biblical interpreter does enter another world, but it has to be the world of the original situation of the text to discover the ways in which the rhetoric was shaped to operate on the imagination and feelings of the first readers.

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<sup>125</sup> A number of narrative critics have recently claimed that they pay attention to historical events. For example, although Rhoads and Michie (*Mark as Story* 3–4) argued that Mark's story "is complete in itself . . . apart from reference to the historical events. . . . a closed and self-sufficient world," the revised edition—Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 4, 6—states that we "must construct" knowledge that the "first-century audience" possessed. The enclosed story world has apparently developed windows, at least. See also David Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing the Boundaries," in Anderson and Moore (eds), *Mark and Method* 135–36; "Practices and Prospects," in Rhoads and Syreeni (eds), *Characterisation* 265–66, where he argues that narrative criticism seeks to analyse "how the readers may have experienced" the text, taking into account its first-century social context (269). However, he still regards the concept of the ideal reader as useful, defined as "a construction of the possible implied responses of an ideal reader" (273). It is difficult to see how a reader can be a construction of his or her own responses. He argues (282) that we can imagine the responses of "imaginary readers" from that society, such as elites, a slave, peasants, a Roman soldier, a leper and a Pharisee.

<sup>126</sup> For a plea that literary criticism be linked with historical criticism to achieve its potential, see Porter, "Literary Approaches" 112, 120–21, who says that "the kind of half-way house that most reader-oriented critics live in is a shaky structure"; also, Pearson, "Literary Criticism" 264. Adele Berlin, "The Role of the Text in the Reading Process," *Semeia* 62 (1993) 144, considers that more and more literary critics are coming to appreciate the need for historical investigation into the original context from which a work emerged.

<sup>127</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp ("Historical Criticism" 254) argues for New Historicism, a concept which espouses a new focus on the historicity of the text, but with the aim of 'reoccupying' the reader roles generated by the text carrying the "cultural baggage" of today, so that there is "potential for the construction of new meaning." However, this project seems to be a re-reading of the text with a modern political and ideological agenda. For further critiques of its poststructuralist and political ingredients, see Stephen D. Moore, "History after Theory? Biblical Studies and the New Historicism?" *BibInt* 5 (1997) 291, 295–296, and Anderson, "Introduction" 19.

Reader-response and narrative critical methods have helped us to appreciate the design of the text. They have taught us to read well. But perhaps the ‘intentional fallacy’ should be redefined as the strange belief that the *how* and the *why* of the text can be understood without any regard for the reasons behind its design, and the ‘affective fallacy’ redefined as the belief that the reader responses intended to be triggered by the text can be understood without regard to the actual people that they were intended to affect.

### A MARKAN COMMUNITY?

*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)*

A number of interpreters claim that Mark’s Gospel was not written for a particular audience at all. According to some, the Gospel was intended for missionary purposes, and so the audience may have consisted of non-Christians.<sup>128</sup> Although Beavis recognises the importance of the intended readers, she concludes that the Gospel was directed to, and was attractive for, potential converts, written by “an early Christian missionary/teacher” as “a handbook for missionaries.” It resembles a five-part Hellenistic play to be performed in missionary preaching “before interested hearers.”<sup>129</sup> However, although she is critical of Fowler’s approach, saying that his implied reader is “a sort of trans-historical entity, unaffected by factors of place, time and culture,”<sup>130</sup> her own view of the first century readers is weak.

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<sup>128</sup> Gundry (*Mark* 45, 1023–26) claims that “a parenetic purpose with regard to Christian discipleship would explain only one small element in the contents of Mark,” and concludes that it is apologetic in nature and aims particularly at the middle rank of the Roman aristocracy (“Caesar’s knights”), following Clement of Alexandria. He further claims that the Gospel assumes no prior knowledge, as it “takes for granted little if any knowledge of Jesus,” arguing that a non-Christian would easily understand terms like “baptism,” “gospel,” “the Spirit,” and “Isaiah,” all of these terms being made clear by the opening verses. He asserts that the audience did not need to know the Old Testament to appreciate quotations of it; although “allusions from that book may escape them,” they may only reflect the background of the author or of “an early traditioner” (1019, 1026). “He may have been writing for non-Christian ignoramuses rather than Christian know-it-alls” (18).

<sup>129</sup> Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark’s Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11–12* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 42, 172–76.

<sup>130</sup> See Beavis, *Audience* 16; also “Trial” 581.

She underrates the Gospel's rhetorical nature, describing it merely as "not without rhetorical merit" and of a level similar to Greek romances.<sup>131</sup> She seems to assume a peaceful catechetical or public preaching environment, and never addresses the likely situation of the readers, only mentioning the references to persecutions twice, and then only in a discussion of apocalyptic language.

It is unlikely that a Gospel that so strongly emphasised the possibility of crucifixion for followers of this new religious way was likely to appeal to converts. It is far more probable that Mark was explaining persecution to Christians who had already witnessed the martyrdom of others, and who still feared for their own lives. Mark's call to commitment is not so much a call to initial conversion as an exhortation to understand why persecution has been directed at followers of Jesus, and to recommit to his mission. Further, a general missionary text would likely have stressed the benefits far more than this Gospel does, and done so right at the beginning, rather than speak of trials and arrests. Again, the fact that the text appears to be designed so that certain features only become clear on a re-reading indicates that Mark aimed at an audience that would read or hear the text several times, and not one that would hear it read out once in a public place.<sup>132</sup> Söding has concluded that Mark assumed a high level of knowledge of the Christian tradition by his readers, and took for granted that they were familiar with some of his key theological terms, the characters in the Gospel, and the key places mentioned.<sup>133</sup> Heil, in addition to noting the reader's knowledge of the Scriptures, observes that they already knew about Palestine, the synagogue, the Sabbath, the Temple, Jewish feasts, religious law and practice, and knew the basic story about Jesus.<sup>134</sup> The evidence indicates that Mark's readers were already members of a Christian community.

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<sup>131</sup> Beavis, *Audience* 170. Porter ("Caught On?" 281) has commented that Beavis' "ideal reader of the first century" is just "as ahistorical and as difficult to establish."

<sup>132</sup> Joanna Dewey, "Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 224, sees the Gospel as an "interwoven tapestry," which suggests that re-readings were expected.

<sup>133</sup> Söding, "Evangelist" 27. In addition, Van Iersel (*Reader-response* 55–67) argues that they were Christians with a good knowledge of the Septuagint. See also Vorster, "Reader" 373; Watts, *New Exodus* 379; Ernest Best, "Mark's Readers: A Profile," in Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.847–857. Against Gundry, Watts (*New Exodus* 94) argues that the Old Testament had clearly been the catechism of the reader.

<sup>134</sup> Heil, *Model* 3–11. John the Baptist can be added to his list. Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 133–37, observes that Mark and his audience apparently shared more than a general knowledge of the Scriptures as it extends to their usage in contemporary debates in

According to others, the Gospel was a general tract for Christians of all the churches. Tolbert sees Mark writing for a general audience using the genre of the popular romance novel, appealing to those interested in Christianity, but at the same time writing for persecuted Christians.<sup>135</sup> She claims that Mark's audience could not be a particular community, asserting: "While a letter may have been an effective medium for directly challenging a community's practice or correcting its theological views, a narrative purporting to relate the actions, words and views of characters from an earlier time is not."<sup>136</sup> In doing so, she overlooks the transforming power of this Gospel narrative upon communities for nearly two thousand years.

Bauckham has argued that all of the Gospels were written with a general Christian readership in mind.<sup>137</sup> His starting point is that, since Matthew and Luke encountered Mark's Gospel, Mark must have intended a wide audience.<sup>138</sup> However, that is an argument about intention based on the text's ultimate use. He claims, too, that scholars simply read the Gospels as if there was a particular audience, rather than identifying specific features only explainable by a local reader-

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Judaism, and is good enough to recognise allusions; they also know the structure of the Jewish community, and its different groups. Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 177–78, points out that they seem to have known the identities of Mary and "James the Younger" in 15:40.

<sup>135</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing* 53, 304. However, there is considerable doubt that the genre of the romance novel intended for popular consumption was available at the time that Mark wrote, as has been pointed out by Ronald F. Hock, "The Greek Novel," in David E. Aune (ed.), *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 128; William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) 227–28; Christopher Bryan, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in its Literary and Cultural Settings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 17–21. Chariton's *Callirhoe*, on which she bases much of her argument, may not have been written until the second century. The earliest papyrus fragment is dated 160 CE. R. Hunter, "History and Historicity in the Romance of Chariton," *ANRW* II, 34.2 (1994) 1055; see also Ronald F. Hock, "Why New Testament Scholars Should Read Ancient Novels," in Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance and Judith Perkins (eds), *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 124 n. 14. In discussing the Gospel genre, Kee (*Community* 19) remarked: "The intention of Mark seems to be far more serious than the romance's typical delight in the bizarre and the fantastic."

<sup>136</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing* 303.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were The Gospels Written?" in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels For All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 9–48.

<sup>138</sup> He argues that his assumption is "confirmed by the results," that is, the wide dissemination of the Gospel. Bauckham, "For Whom" 12, 22. This argument is repeated by Richard A. Burridge, "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences," in Bauckham (ed.), *Gospels* 140.

ship.<sup>139</sup> Further, he observes that early evangelists normally travelled between Christian communities and, with good communications between them, it is likely that each evangelist had many churches in mind.<sup>140</sup> In addition, he asserts that a Gospel is an un-likely vehicle for addressing one's own community, where there was the opportunity for "oral teaching," noting that Paul only wrote when absent from a community.<sup>141</sup>

Bauckham's arguments rely on the assumption that all of the evangelists were identically situated and motivated, and he fails to consider whether Mark's Gospel might have arisen in a different environment.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Mark receives little special mention in his discussion, which seems to be strongly influenced by his view of the general readership of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Moreover, an assumption that Mark was a traveller like Paul or members of his team is mere conjecture—there must also have been settled community teachers.

The genre of Gospel has been proven over time to be a powerful rhetorical form. It is most unlikely that Mark would have written a letter to his own church. However, producing an account of the life of Jesus could have been a very effective way of modifying community attitudes, without being confrontational. What appeared to be the story of the life of Jesus and the first disciples was in reality a piece of rhetoric designed to subtly move his readers. Moreover, he may not have been able to address at length other house-churches scattered throughout his city or district, and his views may not even have been welcome in some.

Bauckham says that he cannot envisage that Mark would have written such a Gospel "merely for a few hundred people."<sup>143</sup> It

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<sup>139</sup> Bauckham, "For Whom" 24. Like Burridge ("Audiences" 124–25), and Stephen C. Barton, "Can We Identify the Gospel Audiences?" in Bauckham (ed.), *Gospels* 183–84, Bauckham ("For Whom" 19–20) blames Weeden's interpretation of Mark's discipleship motif on a false focus on a local community, but they all ignore the possibility that Weeden just misread Mark's situation.

<sup>140</sup> Bauckham, "For Whom" 36–37. Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 2000) 94–107 has also argued that the Gospels were written for a general audience. He contends that Mark's use of *euangelion* shows that he intended a widespread audience. "Mark has in view the idea of world-wide mission" (98). But, in using this word, Mark could just have had the local mission in mind.

<sup>141</sup> Bauckham, "For Whom" 28–29. Burridge ("Audiences" 124–25) argues that the Gospels are "about a person, not theological ideas," so that they do not address the problems of particular local communities.

<sup>142</sup> For further criticisms of Bauckham's position, see Marcus, *Mark* 25–28.

<sup>143</sup> Bauckham, "For Whom" 30.



depends how much Mark cared. The analysis of Mark's rhetoric in this study will show that the evangelist was very involved in a local situation, and was not just a spectator, but was deeply moved by his readers' predicament.

Telford has listed a number of indications that point to a particular community rather than a general audience, including the types of issues addressed: legal and cultic, social and doctrinal issues,<sup>144</sup> and, as noted earlier, there is Petersen's observation that Mark's double reference to false messiahs and prophets in Mark 13, points to a "concrete social situation."<sup>145</sup> It is notable, too, that none of the patristic references to the Gospel's origins claim that Mark wrote for all the churches.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, only a wide-ranging analysis of the Gospel's rhetoric, as attempted here, can confirm that Mark wrote for a particular and local readership.

#### WHAT THE READER KNEW

*He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. (Mark 6:41)*

Ignoring the original readers has had unfortunate results. For one, it has meant that what they already knew before they read Mark's text has been largely overlooked.<sup>147</sup> A particular difficulty of reader-response and narrative criticism, as usually practised, is the assumption

<sup>144</sup> Telford, *Theology* 17. One of these is "the mood engendered or atmosphere created."

<sup>145</sup> Mark assumes that his readers knew what these opponents were saying. Petersen, "*Literarkritik*" 2.939, 945.

<sup>146</sup> Clement particularly indicates that Mark wrote for local Christians. Cited in Eusebius, *E. H.* 6.14.5.

<sup>147</sup> Booth (*Fiction* 423) had recognised the importance of taking into account what the "authorial audience" already knows, although he meant the general knowledge of a general audience. It is a pity that insufficient attention has been paid to this aspect of his theory. Joanna Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation," in Malbon and McKnight (eds), *New Literary Criticism* 155, asks how the audience's preconceptions and prior knowledge about characters in the story might affect their identification with them. However, she does not follow it up in her exegesis of the Gospel. Moore (*Literary Criticism* 91–95) is critical of the lack of attention to the audience's knowledge by Beavis and reader-response critics. "The virgin reader is an anachronistic construct for Gospel research." Fish ("Text" 48–49) defined his reader as an "informed reader"—a literary critic who is a competent speaker of the language, and has literary competence. Following his

that the reader approaches the text as a first time reader without any prior knowledge of its plot or characters, as with a novel.<sup>148</sup> However, Bassler has shown that, if Iser's reader principles are adopted, whereby the text is regarded as progressively uncovering information and anticipating later events, the feeding stories in Mark would be read in quite a different way, that is, they would be devoid of Eucharistic meaning.<sup>149</sup> Thus, a reader of the Gospel who does not come armed with the knowledge of the first readers not only operates at a disadvantage, but is likely to reach conclusions that are alien to the text's construction.

Critics tend to overlook both the general knowledge of first century Christians and the particular knowledge of Mark's intended readers. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie claim that readers "learn" through the account of the journey to Jerusalem that "they too . . . must be prepared for persecution and death," as if the reader was not already well aware of this possibility.<sup>150</sup> Again, commentators often speak of the reader being 'informed' by the opening verses of such things as Jesus being the "Messiah, the Son of God" (1:1).<sup>151</sup> But the original readers already knew this. After all, Paul had used "Christ" 66 times and had described Jesus as Son of God four times in his letter to the Romans alone. A modern, first-time, reader might be so 'informed,' but not the intended readers, and their reading is very different from the first line of the Gospel text. Similarly, Fowler says that the "first readers" would have experienced "shock" when they read of Judas' betrayal of Jesus.<sup>152</sup> The first readers, however, most likely already knew about the betrayal. The text even indicates that no shock is expected: Mark mentions it as soon as Judas is appointed,

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view, Fowler ("Who" 16–17) calls his implied reader an "ideal reader"—"the supremely informed and skilled individual reader-critic, possessing impeccable linguistic and literary competence." Their reader, however, as one who ignores all the knowledge and experience of the intended recipients, is really an 'uninformed reader.'

<sup>148</sup> An exception is Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 20, who says that, as the text assumes multiple readings, the implied reader is not necessarily a first-time reader.

<sup>149</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, "The Parables of the Loaves," *JR* 66 (1986) 157–72; she cites Quesnell who also concluded that the "eucharistic connotations of the feedings" would be unintelligible unless there were historically informed readers. See Quentin Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6:52* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 66.

<sup>150</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 137, 140–1.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Matera, "The Prologue as the Interpretive Key to Mark's Gospel," in Frank Matera, *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2nd ed.: 1995) 190, says that "the readers possess inside or privileged information, given in the prologue."

<sup>152</sup> He then says: "The reader implied in Mark's Gospel is supposed to be shocked." Fowler, *Reader* 105–6.

among the known roles of the other appointees (3:19). It will be seen that Mark intended to have quite a different effect, relying on his reader's memories of betrayal within his community.

When critics declare that we "should not confuse a historical individual with his narrative representation,"<sup>153</sup> they overlook the probability that the first reader knew some of these people personally, or knew others who knew them. If so, this would have affected the way in which the text was both written and read. It will be shown that awareness of their knowledge puts into a new perspective some aspects of Mark's Gospel that have been the subject of considerable controversy. In particular, the reader's experience of the persecution and martyrdom of fellow Christians significantly affected the mood and the content of this text.

The idea of 'the privileged reader' prevalent in current literary criticism—that the reader is given special knowledge by the author/narrator that the characters do not have—has had adverse effects, as it has been used as *the only basis* of what the reader knows. For the first readers it is a fallacy. Those readers knew far more than the information given in the Gospel story, and they evaluated many more issues than are raised by the text. The rhetoric was truly epideictic. It built on the reader's existing knowledge, beliefs, values and emotions.<sup>154</sup>

## THE RHETORIC OF GOSPEL

*[The rhetorician's] whole effort is directed towards the soul; for in that he seeks to produce conviction. (Plato)*

Mark and his intended readers lived in a rhetorical culture. They did not need to be highly educated to be familiar with rhetorical methods of the day, as they encountered rhetoric in the texts that they examined at their most basic levels of education.<sup>155</sup> More impor-

<sup>153</sup> Berlin, *Poetics* 13; for the same view, see Darr, *Herod* 77.

<sup>154</sup> C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969 [Orig. 1958]) 49–53, regard epideictic oratory as being central to the act of persuasion, with its appeal to common values.

<sup>155</sup> Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat" 20. Recent studies have shown that students, from the early levels of their education, were taught to rewrite speeches and chreiai in their own words. See Robbins, "Cultures" 80–81; in his "Writing as a Rhetorical Act in Plutarch and the Gospels," in Duane F. Watson (ed.), *Persuasive Artistry: Studies*

tantly, rhetoric was encountered in the speeches and debates that occurred in marketplaces, theatres and other public venues, as well as in the law courts, widely attended for entertainment.<sup>156</sup>

Rhetorical criticism has arisen in the last twenty years from the realisation that comparisons can be fruitfully made between biblical texts and other ancient literature, as both are rhetorical texts and utilise similar rhetorical techniques.<sup>157</sup> There are various forms of the method, but the field has been dominated by those who analyse the biblical text according to the conventions evident in Greco-Roman handbooks on rhetoric.<sup>158</sup> George Kennedy has been instrumental: the aim, he says, is to hear the New Testament writings “as a Greek-speaking audience would have heard them.”<sup>159</sup> The author has a central place in this form of criticism: “The ultimate goal of rhetorical

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in *New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 142–68, Robbins describes students being instructed to ‘perform’ traditional material anew each time, rather than to provide a verbatim reproduction. Aune, *Literary Environment* 30, shows how, from an early age, a student would write speeches in the names of famous characters in critical situations, employing “skills more concerned with plausibility than truth.” For her view that Mark had both Jewish and Greek education, see Beavis, *Audience* 39–44.

<sup>156</sup> Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 30–31. F. Gerald Downing, “A Bas Les Aristos: The Relevance of Higher Literature for the Understanding of the Earliest Christian Writings,” *NovT* 30 (1988) 229, says that there is “no evidence for any exclusion of the lower orders from the culture of their social superiors.” He provides many examples, including contact by slaves serving at table, and readings in public at the games and other public places (212–30). See also Beavis, *Audience* 31–42.

<sup>157</sup> See John R. Donahue, “The Changing Shape of New Testament Theology,” *TS* 50 (1989) 331–32, for an optimistic view of rhetorical criticism as a method that “uncovers the power of the text to persuade, convince, or move its original readers and also paints a tableau of those readers . . . an important resource for New Testament theology.” For the history of rhetorical criticism, see Thomas H. Olbricht, “Classical Rhetoric Criticism and Historical Reconstructions: A Critique,” in Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps (eds), *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 108–10; Dennis L. Stamps, “Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament: Ancient and Modern Evaluations of Argumentation,” in Porter (ed.), *Approaches* 129–35.

<sup>158</sup> On the variant forms, see Bruce J. Malina, “Rhetorical Criticism and Socio-Scientific Criticism: Why Won’t Romanticism Leave Us Alone?” in Porter and Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric* 82–84. Gustavo Martín-Asensio, “Hallidayan Functional Grammar as Heir to New Testament Rhetoric Criticism,” in Porter and Stamps (eds), *Rhetorical Interpretation* 86, sees three types, the first two applying classical principles more or less rigidly, and the third arguing for a more inclusive notion of rhetoric. This last group argues that rhetoric encompasses much more than Aristotle, Quintilian and others ever envisioned.

<sup>159</sup> George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 12; see also his *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2nd ed.: 1987).

analysis . . . is the discovery of the author's intent and of how that is transmitted through a text to an audience."<sup>160</sup>

However, as practised to date, rhetorical criticism has mainly attended to argumentation in Paul's letters, and to small units in the Gospels, concentrating on logical argument rather than on the rhetorical nature of narrative.<sup>161</sup> Vernon Robbins has taken a "socio-rhetorical" approach that seeks to discover how any first century Greco-Roman reader would view Mark's Gospel by studying the rhetorical conventions of the day, but he has a general audience in mind.<sup>162</sup> Ben Witherington III has recently produced "a socio-rhetorical commentary" that regards much of Mark's text as chreiai like those in the *progymnasmata*, but he sees Mark as a conservative redactor of sayings and stories, citing Best and Pesch, but with "some creativity."<sup>163</sup> He is conscious of specific readers, placing them in Rome in early 70, and proposes that Mark wrote "apocalyptic rhetoric" to prepare his readers for further suffering.<sup>164</sup> With this exception, little consideration has been given by rhetorical critics to the Gospel as a rhetorical narrative addressed to a specific audience.<sup>165</sup> However, the method has been employed in identifying the rhetorical interests and strategy of non-Gospel biblical texts, and in then considering their rhetorical situations.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Kennedy, *Interpretation* 12.

<sup>161</sup> In rhetorical critical work on chreiai, early traditions are often hypothesised in order to "demonstrate rhetorical composition in clusters of sayings," and some critics recognise that they operate "at the level of redaction criticism." Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, Ca: Polebridge Press, 1989) 196, 202. For an example of seeking to identify a saying of Jesus and the tradition behind the text, see Robbins, "Pre-Gospel Traditions" 136.

<sup>162</sup> He concludes that Mark's readers would have 'read' Jesus in the light of teacher-kings of the ancient world. Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). For criticisms of his approach, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Challenging the Rhetorical Half-turn: Feminist and Rhetorical Biblical Criticism," in Porter and Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric* 34, and Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 29.

<sup>163</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 17.

<sup>164</sup> Witherington, *Mark* 27.

<sup>165</sup> Rhoads ("Prospects" 275–76) says that he is unsure if rhetorical criticism "can be sustained over the narrative of the whole Gospel."

<sup>166</sup> See Donahue, "Changing Shape" 332, who discusses the method proposed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. J. David Hester Amador, *Academic Constraints in Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction to a Rhetoric of Power* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 31–32, however, contends that a text is not a reliable guide to actual events or attitudes; a writer such as Mark may have misread

Moreover, the usefulness of rhetorical handbooks has been questioned, especially as the known examples are dated quite late; even the earliest, Theon's *Progymnasmata*, so often cited, is dated somewhere in the period 50–100 CE.<sup>167</sup> It may not have been written when Mark's Gospel was composed, and it is not likely that Mark knew of its principles. In any event, a handbook may have reflected only one school of thought among many; Quintilian, writing his *Institutio Oratoria* around the period in which the Gospels were composed, indicates that there was a variety of opinion among rhetoricians.<sup>168</sup> He did not refer to handbooks, but saw rhetoric as an art that embraced all the tools of language, and had regard to the social context, knowledge, norms of language, and beliefs of the audience.<sup>169</sup>

Mark's Gospel is very Jewish, and contains no references to Greek philosophy or quotations from Greek literature. Hengel has observed that he does not know of any other work in Greek that uses so many Aramaic words and formulae "in such a narrow space."<sup>170</sup> As Schneidau

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the situation or been unable to express his views well, or his discourse may not have been caused by the situation. However, Consigny argues that the rhetorical situation cannot be created by the rhetorician, who must pay attention to the "particularities of persons, actions and agencies in a particular place and time . . . [if he] is to function effectively." Cited in Duane F. Watson, "The Contributions and Limitations of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Theory for Constructing the Rhetorical and Historical Situations of a Pauline Epistle," in Porter and Stamps (eds), *Rhetorical Interpretation* 128. Wilhelm H. Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *CBO* 49 (1987) 449, 455, rightly says: "A text must reveal its context."

<sup>167</sup> Robbins, "Pre-Gospel Traditions" 111. According to Mack (*Persuasion* 126), *progymnasmata* "probably" began to appear in the first century. See also the discussion in Brian K. Peterson, *Eloquence and the Proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 24–35.

<sup>168</sup> See *Inst.* 5.Pr.1–3; 8.1.1; 9.1.23–24. *Inst.* 8.Pr.3–4 refers to other "text-books on rhetoric," but he does not suggest that they provided accepted conventions. Quintilian was brought up in Rome, and served in the courts as a young man. After a period of around six years in Spain, he was brought back to Rome by Galba in 68 (Hieronymus, *Chron.* 186.7–8), and was appointed teacher of rhetoric by Vespasian. Ludwig Bieler, *History of Roman Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1966) 8, says that he "gives the characteristics of some fifty Latin poets or writers," showing the breadth of his reading and understanding of rhetoric. *Institutio* was written in the early nineties, after Quintilian had taught in Rome for twenty years. For his career, see M. L. Clarke, "Quintilian: A Biographical Sketch," *GR* 14 (1967) 24–37, and K. M. Coleman, "The Emperor Domitian and Literature," *ANRW* II, 32.5 (1986) 3108.

<sup>169</sup> Wuellner ("Taking Us" 450) insists that the rhetorical context should be seen broadly: "By 'context' is meant more than historical context . . . [but] the 'attitudinising conventions,' precepts that condition (both the writer's and the reader's) stance toward experience, knowledge, tradition, language and other people."

<sup>170</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 46.

says, its literary ancestor is the Old Testament.<sup>171</sup> An important question, therefore, is whether the Gospel's rhetoric primarily uses Greek or Jewish techniques. Indeed, James Muilenburg was the first to use the term 'rhetorical criticism,' and he applied it to Jewish literature, using the term 'rhetoric' in a very broad sense, and not presupposing any form of conventions.<sup>172</sup> Sternberg has rightly contended that there are basic differences between biblical and Greco-Roman rhetorical methods,<sup>173</sup> and Fred Burnett has observed that "in spite of the lack of extant rhetorical handbooks, it is now being recognised that the Jewish world had its distinctive rhetorical practices."<sup>174</sup>

Much attention has been paid to the question of the genre of the Gospel, with the majority favouring the Greek biography as the closest model.<sup>175</sup> Old Testament exemplars are rejected as insufficiently close, due to the unique characteristics and role assigned to Jesus in the Gospels. However, if this different emphasis is allowed for, there are indeed close parallels with the narratives of the 'lives' of Moses and David. Polzin has shown the subtlety of the rhetoric by the Deuteronomic writers,<sup>176</sup> and similar subtlety can be found in Mark's style of storytelling. It will be argued that Mark had a Jewish background; if so, such a style was in his blood, and it is likely that he wrote his Gospel in continuity with the biblical texts that he and his readers knew well.<sup>177</sup> To a lesser extent, his text is 'Hellenised' because both he and his readers were imbued with Greco-Roman culture.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Herbert N. Schneidau, "Let the Reader Understand," *Semeia* 39 (1987) 143.

<sup>172</sup> According to Achtemeier ("Omne Verbum Sonat" 8), Muilenburg was concerned to read the Old Testament texts in accordance with the impact they were designed to have on their readers. Dewey (*Debate* 11) has observed that Muilenburg was also interested in "the texture and fabric of the writer's thought."

<sup>173</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics* 36–40, 441–515.

<sup>174</sup> Fred W. Burnett, "Characterisation and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993) 8, citing the work of Ronald C. Katz.

<sup>175</sup> For the conclusion that it is a special form of biography, see Bryan, *Preface* 9–66; John G. Cook, *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark: A Linguistic Approach* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 72–86, 310; Fendler, *Studien* 13–80; Hengel, *Four Gospels* 91.

<sup>176</sup> Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1988); *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>177</sup> One indication of the Jewishness of Mark's rhetoric may be in his use of intercalations: G. Van Oyen, "Intercalation and Irony in the Gospel of Mark," in Van Segroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.961 n. 58, observes that this technique only appears in Hebrew texts.

<sup>178</sup> Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenisation' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London:

Literary criticism in its various forms has continually used the term “rhetoric”: Booth uses the term “rhetoric of fiction,”<sup>179</sup> and Tannehill refers to “narrative rhetoric.”<sup>180</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie use expressions such as “rhetorical impact” and “rhetorical strategies that create suspense.”<sup>181</sup> But literary critics have not properly engaged the concept of rhetoric and incorporated it into their methods. For example, rhetoric is often treated as if it was a separate aspect of the text, rather than being integral with it: Malbon cites “rhetoric” as the fourth element of the narrative (with characters, setting and plot),<sup>182</sup> and Rhoads, Dewey and Michie have it as the fifth element.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, rhetoric has been divorced from the people it was designed to move and persuade, and such a disembodied rhetoric is meaningless.<sup>184</sup> Generally, literary approaches have failed to appreciate the

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SCM Press, 1989), has demonstrated that Hellenism had been pervasive within Judaism before the Christian era. E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991) 150, considers it likely that every educated Jew used Greek texts as part of their Jewish education. Thomas E. Boomershine, “Jesus of Nazareth and the Watershed of Ancient Orality and Literacy,” *Semeia* 65 (1994) 20–21, points to the widespread use of Greek in Palestine. Vernon K. Robbins, *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994) 219–20, considers that the Gospel is “an explicitly multicultural document,” and that it “combines Jewish and Greco-Roman modes of thought and activity.”

<sup>179</sup> Booth seemed to begin the process with his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, also using the term “rhetoric of narrative” (*Fiction* 149). Petersen frequently used the word “rhetoric” in his work on ‘point of view,’ using such phrases as the “rhetoric of Mark’s narrative,” “the rhetoric of point of view,” “his rhetorical devices,” “the rhetoric of fiction”—in all of this language the control of the real author is notable, but Petersen assigns it to the narrator: “The rhetoric of point of view . . . is the best tangible device we have to help us to teach ourselves to listen to what the narrator is telling us.” Petersen, “Point of View” 99, 101, 114, 118.

<sup>180</sup> Tannehill, “Narrative Role” 389.

<sup>181</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 3, 4.

<sup>182</sup> Malbon, “Criticism” 23; see 26–27 for a confused definition of rhetoric as the “how of the story-as-discoursed,” although she defines “discourse” as the “how” of the narrative.

<sup>183</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 7. With the Second Edition, they have now abandoned Chatman’s categories in favour of Kort’s. In the first edition, the first chapter was on “Rhetoric,” which Moore (*Literary Criticism* 42–44, 60, 67) criticised on the grounds that everything is rhetorical. In the second edition, the first chapter is now on “The Narrator,” and only in the final chapter, after all the narrative has been dealt with, do they consider “The Reader.” There is only a brief and confusing 14-line discussion of rhetoric. They define rhetoric as “the way in which an author writes so as to create certain effects on the reader,” so that they are forced to speak of the real author as soon as they discuss rhetoric, yet when they ask “how does the story work to create that effect?” they move to “the ideal reader” (137).

<sup>184</sup> Eagleton (*Literary Theory* 206) has said that “the ‘aesthetic’” is not “separable from social determinants,” and has called for a “return to the ancient path which [literary criticism] has abandoned, that is, rhetoric.”



ancient art of persuasion, which was turned into a fine craft by the rhetoricians, and which influenced the character of the Gospel.

Mark's Gospel is inherently of a rhetorical nature, but it is a rhetoric of faith. It seeks to persuade its readers, and to bring them to faith and changed attitudes and action. It calls for this in Jesus' first words: "Change, and believe!" (1:15). The author and first readers were people of faith, and the text is an expression of it.<sup>185</sup> Mark's rhetoric is epideictic in nature—he built on the values and experiences that he shared with his readers. Narrative was his instrument, because it directly linked to the reader's own story. Narrative did not evaluate logical argument, but brought into play the reader's imagination and intertwined the story of the lives of Jesus and the first disciples with memories of their experiences. Tracy reflects: "There is something intrinsic in experience that demands narrative. In part, I suspect, narrative alone provides us with some fuller way to order and unify our actual lived experience."<sup>186</sup> Crites, too, stresses the inherent link between narratives and life experience: religious stories, he points out, "reveal to people the kind of drama in which they are engaged, and perhaps its larger meaning."<sup>187</sup> Narrative, then, is an especially powerful form of rhetoric that is quite different from letters or speeches, on which much of rhetorical criticism has focused.

Mark's rhetoric has an inner texture that is quite complex, and it continually alludes to other scenes in his drama, to other biblical texts in the great drama of God's relationship with his people, and to the drama of the reader's own life experiences and social situation. Watts has well described the power of allusion: even a single word can have "considerable allusive power and thereby serves to invoke a comprehensive hermeneutical framework," often providing a "shorthand method of referring to whole fields of meaning."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Recognising the "presupposition of faith" as an essential aspect of the final form of the text is a key element of canonical criticism, as conducted by Brevard Childs, according to the analysis of his work by Samuel Cheon, "B. S. Childs' Debate with Scholars about His Canonical Approach," *AJT* 11 (1997) 345.

<sup>186</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981) 275.

<sup>187</sup> Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *JR* 39 (1971) 306. Pieter J. J. Botha, "Mark's Story of Jesus and the Search for Virtue," in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds), *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 156, notes that "it usually takes a story to make people realise what the right thing to do is."

<sup>188</sup> Watts, *New Exodus* 29–32.

This is why the intended readers cannot be ignored. Thomas Olbricht rightly warns that there is “great risk” in overlooking them:

[It is] dangerous to turn loose on ancient documents new readers who have not paid their dues in respect of assessing carefully the manner in which the original audience was determinative for the manner in which the speaker or writer proceeded rhetorically.<sup>189</sup>

Careful attention will therefore be paid to the way in which Mark shaped his narrative, not only to gain a sympathetic hearing, but also to deeply move and to convince other members of his community, familiar, as he was, with the ancient art of rhetoric.

#### READER OR HEARER?

*May the reader understand. (Mark 13:14)*

Amos Wilder once wrote “that the New Testament must be understood as a speech,”<sup>190</sup> and it has recently become a common opinion that Mark’s Gospel should be regarded as a text heard, rather than one read. As stories, speeches and debates were generally performed in public, and all written texts were read aloud at that time, whether they were being studied by a private reader, or read for an assembled group, some scholars have regarded all of the New Testament texts as “oral to the core, both in their creation and in their performance.”<sup>191</sup>

Some critics have been influenced by studies that have attempted to identify the characteristics of oral communication, particularly those of Walter Ong, who studied the oral poetry of Homer and of storytellers and oral poets of preliterate societies in both the ancient and modern worlds.<sup>192</sup> He concluded that they recreate their songs each time they deliver them, based on common elements, and according to the needs of the occasion. Some scholars have applied this

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<sup>189</sup> Erika Mae Olbricht, “Acting on the Center: An Interview on Rhetoric and Hermeneutics with Thomas H. Olbricht in the Wake of ‘Hearing God’s Voice,’” in Porter and Stamps (eds), *Rhetorical Interpretation* 43–44.

<sup>190</sup> Amos Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (London: SCM Press, 1964) 22.

<sup>191</sup> Achtemeier, “*Omne Verbum Sonat*” 19. Bryan (*Preface* 67–171) provides a comprehensive study on orality.

<sup>192</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing*

finding to the Gospel, and seen debates, chreiae, parables, stories of healing, the extended use of repetition, textual echoes and parataxis as indicators of orality.<sup>193</sup> These features have been seen as “tools of memory,” and thus tools for oral communication.<sup>194</sup> Joanna Dewey has argued that such indications of orality figure prominently throughout Mark’s Gospel, and so it is the product of storytelling.<sup>195</sup> Thus, she claims, the Gospel may merely be a record of *one* of many oral performances, “a script for storytelling.”<sup>196</sup> If this is true, the message of the Gospel may have changed from one setting to another, and many of the allusions that are detectable in this document may not always have been present. Further, there would be no one author of the rhetoric, no one rhetorical situation, and no fixed text.<sup>197</sup>

However, as Mark’s Gospel was meant to be read aloud, elements that are useful for effective hearing can be expected, and yet these features would *also* be useful for effective reading in a world where orality and literacy were closely intertwined. As Achtemeier has well said: ‘all words sound’ in that culture.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, many features

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*of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982); “Text as Interpretation: Mark and After,” *Semeia* 39 (1987) 7–25.

<sup>193</sup> Bryan, *Preface* 126–151. As other characteristics of oral narrative, Ong (*Orality* 37–49) includes structures that are ‘aggregative’ rather than analytic, and a narrative that is “close to the human world, agonistically toned, and empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced.” He calls textual echoes “oral respensions” (83). However, it is not only in an oral setting that we find narratives with these characteristics—all of these are to be found in Old Testament texts. Ong (*Orality* 37) even noted that parataxis like Mark’s is found in Gen 1, which he describes as “indeed a text, but one preserving recognisable oral patterns.” On this basis, the oral characteristics that had remained in the book of Genesis for hundreds of years surely served valuable *literary* purposes, as they were never edited out.

<sup>194</sup> Bryan, *Preface* 79.

<sup>195</sup> Joanna Dewey, “Oral Methods in Structuring Narrative in Mark,” *Int* 43 (1989) 32–44; see also “Oral-Aural Event” 145–63; “Textuality in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions,” *Semeia* 65 (1994) 37–65. In addition to the characteristics of orality proposed by Ong, she cites those of Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 1963); *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>196</sup> Dewey, “Textuality” 58; “Oral-Aural Event” 158–59. Pieter J. J. Botha, “The Historical Setting of Mark’s Gospel: Problems and Possibilities,” *JST* 51 (1993) 54, also sees it as “oral traditional literature performed in many contexts before many audiences.” He has Mark “propagating an ‘ideologically’ laden experience and perspective to numerous Greco-Roman audiences” (40). Presumably, he regards all of them to be persecuted.

<sup>197</sup> See Dewey, “Oral-Aural Event” 159, for her view that the text we have might be only one version among many, and “may not be characteristic of the Markan performance tradition.”

<sup>198</sup> Achtemeier, “*Omne Verbum Sonat*.”

claimed as indicators of orality may simply reflect this reality. Redundancy may be helpful in an oral setting,<sup>199</sup> but it is also just as useful in a written text. So, too, are ‘echoes’ and *inclusio*,<sup>200</sup> because they are *both* visual and aural signals to a reader who reads aloud privately. Indeed, Henaut has argued that orality has no distinctive and unique ground rules, giving examples of non-biblical texts that use such ‘oral techniques,’ including a modern newspaper.<sup>201</sup> Shiner has pointed out that episodic narrative occurs in many other written Greek narratives, and he regards it as a way of keeping the reader’s attention.<sup>202</sup>

Dewey’s view seems to spring from a picture of a ‘more ideal’ early church when Christians passed on the gospel by storytelling; she claims that “the dominant elite were literate and made extensive use of writing to maintain hegemony and control.”<sup>203</sup> In the end, Dewey’s attempts to uncover oral characteristics that reflect earlier story-telling is another form of redaction criticism, and, to find evidence of oral structuring to support her theory, she overlooks valid literary reasons for the arrangement of this written text.

Kelber is another basing his reading of Mark’s Gospel on the issue of orality. He builds upon Havelock’s idea that the move to literacy can be compared with Plato’s desire to expel the poets from Athens. He argues that Mark’s Gospel marked a similar break, and aimed to

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<sup>199</sup> Ong, *Orality* 39–41. Ong’s work on Homeric poetry (*Orality* 34) has shown that oral poets memorise their texts by assembling “formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings,” such as “Ulysses, noble son of Laertes.” If Dewey’s claim is correct, those same ‘formulary expressions’ should be apparent throughout the Gospel, but they are not. Mark uses many titles of Jesus, and he is noted for subtly varying his ‘repetitions’ (cf. Jesus’ three predictions of his death in 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). Ong (*Orality* 65) sees the variation in the Last Supper words in the New Testament texts as indicators of oral memorising, rather than reflections of the different theological and rhetorical positions of their authors.

<sup>200</sup> Achtemeier (“*Omne Verbum Sonat*” 18) argues that they are oral techniques. Van Oyen’s study (“Intercalation” 2.961 n. 58) shows that *inclusio* is found in Jewish literature.

<sup>201</sup> Henaut, *Oral Tradition* 75–115. Repetition, he says (55), is clearly useful in literary texts (as in the three passion predictions in Mark), and many of Mark’s supposed ‘oral’ terms are a part of his literary technique (66).

<sup>202</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, “Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: The Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark,” in Hock, Chance and Perkins (eds), *Ancient Fiction* 155–59.

<sup>203</sup> Dewey, “Textuality” 38. Robbins (“Cultures”) 77, describes Dewey’s view of the ‘oral storytellers’ in the early Church as “a form of romanticism,” with the non-literate leaders being a “spirit-led oral leadership” more open to a status-free Church. Martin S. Jaffe, “Figuring Early Rabbinic Literary Culture: Thoughts Occasioned by Boomershire and Dewey,” *Semeia* 65 (1994) 72 comments that “orality, in the rabbinic setting, clearly has nothing of the Edenic qualities that Dewey seems to imply.”

overturn the ways of knowing that were characteristic of the Christian oral tradition. He concludes that Mark's negative depiction of the disciples was a polemic against the bearers of that tradition.<sup>204</sup> His thesis has been broadly criticised, particularly on the basis that first century culture was a mixture of orality and written literature.<sup>205</sup>

Five times, Mark's Gospel itself refers to the reading of texts (2:25; 12:10, 26; 13:14; 15:26), and Robbins rightly points out that, for the biblical authors, it was writing that had always been "a rhetorical act."<sup>206</sup> In the Greco-Roman world, written rhetorical texts were used in education; Isocrates' written speeches were meant to be read and studied. Moreover, an integral aspect of rhetoric was the reading aloud of written texts to others.<sup>207</sup>

There is no evidence that Mark composed his text as one record of prior oral performances. What we do have is a written text that was designed, like other texts of the period, to be *both* heard by the majority, and read by the minority. Unfortunately, the role of the literate members of Mark's community has been particularly overlooked.

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<sup>204</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *Written Gospel*; "Biblical Hermeneutics and the Ancient Art of Communication: A Response," *Semeia* 39 (1987) 97–105; "Narrative" 107–33. Ong (*Orality* 158) had also seen the written text as "a new technology of the word," proposing that Mark produced "a unified narrative," as oral sayings "would not do any more" (65, 16). But his studies were from folklore in preliterate cultures, and they should not have been used in the context of the highly literate culture of the first century. Hurtado ("Textuality" 93–94, 101) criticises reliance on Ong for this reason.

<sup>205</sup> According to John Halverson, "Oral and Written Gospel: A Critique of Werner Kelber," *NTS* 40 (1994) 180–95, Kelber's theory "creates a house of cards. It presupposes a cultural situation of non-literacy that cannot be supported." Moreover, Mark was not hostile to oral tradition, but canonised it. For other criticisms, see Hurtado, "Textuality" 91–106; Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Sociology and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1996) 56–58; Tolbert, *Sowing* 44; Thomas E. Boomershine, "Peter's Denial as Polemic or Confession: the Implications of Media Criticism for Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 39 (1987) 47–69; Moore, *Literary Criticism* 18–19; Robbins, "Rhetorical Act" 145.

<sup>206</sup> Robbins, "Rhetorical Act" 168.

<sup>207</sup> Kennedy (*Classical Rhetoric* 111) points out that "the fiction of orality was preserved" in the overlap between the oral and written, as much literature was publicly read; Herodotus and Virgil publicly read their works. According to Tolbert (*Sowing* 44), Demosthenes and Cicero wrote their speeches before they delivered them, and Isocrates had a greater influence over Hellenistic schools of rhetoric than Plato or Aristotle, but never delivered a speech orally; others delivered it.

## IS THERE A READER IN THE HOUSE?

*No proof . . . will ever be so secure as not to lose its force if the speaker fails to produce it in tones that drive it home. (Quintilian)*

Nevertheless, Ong was correct to speak of the “living exchange between speaker and hearer” that was characteristic of public addresses in the ancient world.<sup>208</sup> The Gospel, like other written texts of the period, would have been orally delivered by a reader who had very carefully prepared for the task. The person who read Mark’s text probably became involved with the audience, delivering the text far more expressively than we would encounter today.

Marrou has shown that the first aim of Greco-Roman education was to enable the student to read aloud.<sup>209</sup> Building on his work, Beavis describes the great care taken in education in selecting words and in the study of literary arrangement. At the primary level, the learning of writing included the careful copying of texts and reading them aloud, and at the secondary level, children aged twelve to fifteen closely examined unpunctuated manuscripts, marking them into lines, words and syllables, leading to careful, expressive reading.<sup>210</sup> Reading aloud to others always required careful preparation and considerable familiarity.<sup>211</sup> A reader needed to know both the rhetoric of the text and the situation and composition of his or her audience in order to deliver it well.<sup>212</sup>

Although the comparison has been made with public recitations of literary works in the baths, forums, and private homes—all common means of making a work known—Mark’s Gospel would hardly have been so publicly proclaimed. Even if there had been no persecution,

<sup>208</sup> Ong, “Mark” 15.

<sup>209</sup> Henri Marrou, *History of Education in Antiquity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1956) 165.

<sup>210</sup> Beavis, *Audience* 20–25.

<sup>211</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 204; see also Bryan, *Preface* 69. Beavis (“Trial” 593) criticises reader-response approaches that insist on adopting a ‘first reading’ of the text, as “no first century lector would have read a Gospel only once before reading it publicly; he or she would have prepared and even memorised the copy. We are thus justified . . . in seeing symbolic relations among widely separated passages. . . . Like other Greek authors, the evangelist expected his readers to become thoroughly familiar with his book and to understand its literary and theological nuances.”

<sup>212</sup> Gamble, *Books* 280 n. 8; Bryan, *Preface* 18.

the attitudes of Roman society to Christians in this period would militate against it. Rather, the text would have been read in private houses to small groups.

However, the delivery of this text would not have been like the performance of a play or a public reading for entertainment;<sup>213</sup> rather, the comparison should be with the reading of texts in a synagogue. Although little is known of the use of Scripture in synagogues at that time,<sup>214</sup> Luke seemed to regard it as normal practice for the biblical text to be read extensively (Luke 4:16). Indeed, he says that Moses had been “read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues for generations past” (Acts 15:21), and that the Jews of the synagogue in Beroea “examined the Scriptures every day” (Acts 17:11). It is likely that there was discussion and even argument about the meaning of the Scriptures in those synagogue gatherings.<sup>215</sup>

Mark’s community knew the Old Testament texts, not just the stories.<sup>216</sup> The community therefore included literate people who had read the biblical texts and who used those texts as a fundamental aspect of the education of other members of the community. Beavis points to the extensive references to teachers in the early Christian communities,<sup>217</sup> and it is difficult to see how teaching could have been performed without manuscript activity of the type that occurred extensively throughout Judaism of the period. Some Christian readers are likely to have been trained in a synagogue environment, and were used to analysing and explaining written texts.

The subtlety of certain aspects of the Gospel suggests that it was designed to be subjected to a deeper study by more competent readers.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, it would have been read to a house-church more than once, so that certain aspects of the text are likely to have been

<sup>213</sup> Bryan (*Preface* 18) proposes that it was performed in this manner.

<sup>214</sup> See the discussion in Leon Morris, “The Gospels and the Jewish Lectionaries,” in R. T. France and David Wenham (eds), *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983) 3.129–156; Aune, *Literary Environment* 26.

<sup>215</sup> As argued by Botha, “Setting” 47, citing D. Georgi, and by Gamble, *Books* 208, 211. Dahm (*Israel* 266), citing Kleist, argues that, in the Christian assembly, a person skilled in the Scriptures and in delivery of texts would read, just as occurred in synagogues.

<sup>216</sup> Examples of allusions which would require knowledge of the wording include Mark’s mention of “green grass” in 6:39, expecting his readers to think of Ps 23, and the phrasing of the disciples’ complaint in 8:4, reminding of Ps 78:19. There are many indications that the recipients of the Gospel had heard the Old Testament texts read, and knew them well.

<sup>217</sup> Beavis, *Audience* 55–66.

<sup>218</sup> Quintilian (*Inst.* 10.1.19–20) urges his students to read important works thoroughly, and then to reread them. They are exhorted to read a passage “again and

appreciated on the second hearing or reading. The richness of this text would have ensured that re-readings and re-hearings occurred.

There are literate readers, then, who have been overlooked by critics.<sup>219</sup> Harris' conclusion that there was a very low literacy rate in Roman society (and throughout the ancient world) is often quoted,<sup>220</sup> but those relatively few members of Mark's community that were literate would have wielded a disproportionate amount of influence, especially in the development of the theology of the community, in its leadership, and in the preservation and distribution of the Gospel.

In particular, there were the literate members who delivered the text to the assembly. The word "lector" will not be used here, as it conjures up images of a modern church setting, and suggests that the appointed reader had no involvement in preaching, teaching, or otherwise explaining the text and interacting with his hearers. Nor is 'public reader' a suitable term, as reading would have occurred in secret in house-churches. It can be assumed, in the first instance, that Mark entrusted the reading of his text to people who not only knew it, but also were probably aware of his rhetorical goals.<sup>221</sup> Indeed, if Mark was unable to deliver his Gospel to all of those churches personally, he needed 'designated readers.' This factor may even have provided a stimulus to the early copying of his text.

Rhetors of the period emphasised how important delivery was; Demosthenes said that the three most important aspects of oratory were 'delivery, delivery, delivery.'<sup>222</sup> Orators would pay close attention

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again" if there is any doubt about the meaning, or if it is desired that it be committed to memory, and then to peruse the text often.

<sup>219</sup> For example, Räisänen, *Secret* 16.

<sup>220</sup> He concludes that there was a maximum of 10–15% literacy in the cities and that, within that percentage, there was a wide range of literary skill. Harris, *Literacy* 267. However, the widespread posting of notices and graffiti in Rome suggest the expectancy of at least basic literacy in a significant proportion of the population for the messages to be effective. Carolyn Osiek, "The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome: The Case of Hermas," in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (eds), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 159, suggests that Harris is very conservative in his estimates, also citing graffiti, but says that the "best estimates" cannot be greater than 50%.

<sup>221</sup> Beavis (*Audience* 31) has suggested that Mark might have been the first such reader. She regards the "reader" of 13:14 as "the person whose task it was to read the book out to the assembly." Ernest Best, "The Gospel of Mark: Who Was The Reader?" *IBS* 11 (1989) 124–32, argues that 13:14 was a direction to the one who read the text aloud to the assembly in the "church service" to not alter the grammatical inconsistency, following the suggestion of H. A. Guy in 1926 that this was the reader in view.

<sup>222</sup> Cited with complete approval by Quintilian in *Inst.* 11.3.6; cf. 1.8.1–4. See 1.11.1–19 on the various aspects of delivery.



to the smallest aspects of delivery: “It follows that those who heighten the effect of their words with suitable gestures, tones, dress, and dramatic action generally, are especially successful in exciting pity; they thus put the disasters before our eyes, and make them seem close to us” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1385<sup>a</sup>31–34). Quintilian wrote:

For the nature of the speech that we have composed within our minds is not so important as the manner in which we produce it, since the emotion of each member of our audience will depend on the impression made upon his hearing. . . . Now, if delivery can count for so much [in performances in the theatre] which we know to be fictitious and devoid of reality, as to arouse our anger, our tears and our anxiety, how much greater must its effect be when we actually believe what we hear? (*Inst.* 3.2–5)

It is sometimes suggested that a particular feature of Mark’s text was not likely to be understood by an audience. But such features could have been explained by Mark himself, or by the readers designated by him or by the church. Citing Plutarch’s *On Listening to Lectures*, Beavis posits that such readers would have to be prepared to answer questions, and even explain relationships between different parts of the text; according to Plutarch, “the hearer is a participant in the dialogue.”<sup>223</sup> This would be consistent with normal behaviour at public events, including, probably, the synagogue, as audiences tended to participate vocally, whether at the law court or the theatre.<sup>224</sup> Asides and explanations should be considered a real possibility in the delivery of this Gospel, and the direction to the reader in 13:14 (not the hearer, it should be noted) may be an indication that more was expected to be said than was committed to writing. Even the explanations and asides that Mark adds throughout his text would have acted as prompts for a designated reader, who may also have functioned as a teacher. Moreover, a designated reader who knew the text well could deliver it with feeling, adding to the force of Mark’s rhetoric.

Because of these forgotten (literate) readers, and their probable

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<sup>223</sup> Beavis, “Trial” 595. Plutarch is writing of a somewhat different situation of reading, but it is likely that the social practice existed in other reading environments. At Qumran, an interpreter was required to be present at all times the Scriptures were read: “And in the place in which the Ten assemble there should not be missing a man to interpret the law day and night, always, each man relieving his fellow. And the Many shall be on watch together for a third of the night of the year in order to read the book, explain the regulation and bless together” (1QS 6:6–7). This has been pointed out by Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992) 45.

<sup>224</sup> Downing (“Aristos” 225) cites Philo, who mentions an enthusiastic audience at a production of Euripides raising their voices above the actors.

importance in the Markan community, the term “hearer” will not be used in this study to designate the recipients of the rhetoric, even though the text was, for the most part, orally delivered. To do so would be to continue to forget this influential group. For want of a better term, all of the recipients will be called “readers,” the term usually employed. Even those who heard the Gospel had it filtered through a reader.

### A PATHETIC GOSPEL

*The power of speech effects the divinest works: it can stop fear, and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity. (Gorgias)*

In considering the rhetorical character of the Gospel, whether it was orally delivered to others, or privately read, it would be quite wrong to see it as a text that relied only on logical argument (*logos*) and ethical appeal (*ethos*). To see the text in its full rhetorical power, it is necessary to focus especially on the third element of rhetoric, regarded by some rhetoricians as the most important, but largely overlooked today—the appeal to the emotions of the reader (*pathos*).

Although the Gospel’s rhetorical nature has been recognised for some time, it is surprising how little attention biblical critics have paid to this element.<sup>225</sup> Even in reader-response studies, the emotions or feelings of the reader are only occasionally touched on. Fowler devotes a mere 21 lines to the subject of emotions in his comprehensive reader-response analysis of Mark, almost entirely in relation to the emotions of the *characters*.<sup>226</sup> Only once do Rhoads, Dewey

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<sup>225</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), especially 44–95, lists five ‘textures’ in his study of rhetoric in texts of the Greco-Roman world—inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture—but his “inner texture” relates to aesthetic issues and the relationship to people’s imaginations, not to the readers’ emotions.

<sup>226</sup> Although Fowler notes (*Reader* 122–23; cf. “Rhetoric” 120–21) that “anger and sadness suggest a narrative full of pathos, as indeed, most interpreters have found Mark’s Gospel to be,” he does not explore the subject, dismissing the idea thus: “Mark’s narrative would surely affect a first-century reader differently than it affects us.” Even in relation to a modern-day reader, he only suggests that the recurring emotions of fear and amazement in the text reflect “what the narrator hopes to achieve.” However, it will be shown here that Mark was in fact trying to confront the existing fears of the intended reader.

and Michie make mention of the effect on the emotions of the first readers, despite recognising that the Gospel would have spoken strongly to them during persecution. They point out that “there are responses implied for readers in every line,” one of which is “having emotions aroused,” but they do not relate this to any specific part of the text.<sup>227</sup>

Moore has criticised this failure of biblical scholarship, commenting that reader-oriented criticism provides “severely limited” readings that “disallow the personal associations that reading invariably sparks, [and] that disallow the affective aspects of reading as opposed to its cognitive aspects.”<sup>228</sup> He points out that there is a “crucial difference” between classical and contemporary critics: modern critics look for responses that are *cognitive*, not *affective*. In reader-response criticism,

their experience of the text is an eluctably cerebral one. . . . Dispassionate objectivity and psychological distance are, of course, the *sine qua non* of modern scholarship; hence the emotionally retarded reader of reader-response exegesis.<sup>229</sup>

McKnight has also pointed out the antipathy of biblical studies to the affective: “Readers who are committed to a ‘modern’ Enlightenment paradigm will seek to eliminate or reduce the subjective character of study.”<sup>230</sup> A few other critics have pointed to the lack of consideration of the reader’s emotions,<sup>231</sup> but no study of the Gospel has significantly taken them into account.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, in their influential work on rhetoric, said: “Nothing could be more arbitrary than the distinction made in text books between factual, neutral, descriptive speech and senti-

<sup>227</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 138. They do, however, suggest that the text arouses “sympathy for the disciples” (129).

<sup>228</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism* 106.

<sup>229</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism* 96–97.

<sup>230</sup> McKnight, “Reader-Response” 206.

<sup>231</sup> Darr (*Herod* 43) has pointed out that, in addition to the cognitive meaning, the usual subject of enquiry, there is also the connotative meaning that operates at unconscious or subconscious level of the human psyche and impinges upon our feelings, emotions, deep values, deep structures, archetypes and identity structures. Wuellner (“Taking Us” 461) says that we must learn “to accept on their own grounds the whole range of appeals which rhetoric embraces—those addressed to the imagination and feelings as well as those addressed to reason.” Olbricht (“Classical Rhetoric” 123) remarks that biblical scholars examine the *logos* of the rhetoric, but “only in passing the *pathos* and *ethos*,” and that these may be especially helpful in adding insight. In his latest reader-response commentary, Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 456) notes that “the Gospel demands that due attention should be given to the emotions evoked in it.” However, he makes few observations. Nor does Heil (*Model* 2) follow up on his comment that the text calls forth “emotional feelings” in the reader.

mental, emotive speech.” Such distinctions, they argue, suggest that “there are speeches in which only facts, with their unquestionable objectivity, find a place.”<sup>232</sup> They point out that a speaker must arouse and direct his audience’s passions in order to “facilitate the ‘objective’ consideration of the problems under discussion,” and that this is necessary to overcome apathy and forces acting in a contrary direction.<sup>233</sup> Nevertheless, they do not treat the use of the emotions in their work anywhere near as much as the ancient masters did.

The use of appeals to the emotions had been part of a vigorous debate about the art of rhetoric from the time of Plato. Gorgias and Isocrates had advocated an approach to rhetoric that seemed to persuade the hearer by any means, while others believed that the approach should be based on justice (Socrates), truth (Plato) or logic (Aristotle).<sup>234</sup> Nevertheless, even Aristotle frequently insisted on the necessity of appeals to the emotions in rhetoric: “You must make use of the emotions” (*Rhetoric* 1417<sup>a</sup>36).<sup>235</sup> This seems to have been accepted throughout the whole Greco-Roman tradition, and appeals to the emotions were a fact of life in all forms of rhetoric.

Moreover, classical Greek rhetoric had always valued mimesis, described by Kennedy as the “imitation of the spirit, passions and essential nature of life in such a way that the product seems real in itself.”<sup>236</sup> Diodoras had described the aim of mimesis as the representation of the ‘truth’ of the facts and of the pathos inherent in them; for him, an historical account without pathos falls short of the truth.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *New Rhetoric* 150. They add: “The distinction between the emotive aspect and the description aspect of a concept is questionable” (440). They point out that the emotions in a speaker show his sincerity (456–57). Against Kant, they argue that argumentation means many other means of proof than logical proof (29), and they point out that the logical, Cartesian view provides a very limiting view of reasoning, “completely artificial and contrary to the real processes of our thought which excludes such things as passion, imagination or suggestion” (1–3).

<sup>233</sup> This wider view of persuading and convincing is called “a new rhetoric.” Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *New Rhetoric* 5.

<sup>234</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric* 26–28.

<sup>235</sup> Most of Book 2 relates to the emotions. See also *Rhetoric* 1419<sup>b</sup>25: “When the facts and their importance are clearly understood, you must excite your hearers’ emotions. These emotions are pity, indignation, anger, hatred, envy, emulation, pugnacity.” Discussion of the emotions, and ways to move those emotions, are also found in 1356<sup>a</sup>14–24; 1378<sup>a</sup>19–1388<sup>b</sup>30; 1408<sup>a</sup>10–20; 1419<sup>b</sup>11, 24–27.

<sup>236</sup> Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 116. Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.3.61–8.4.8) cites Cicero’s ability to vividly describe events briefly, and his expansion of details for “emotive effect,” even adding “fictitious events of the type which commonly occur.” “The attainment of such effects is, in my opinion, the highest of all oratorical gifts” (8.2.71).

<sup>237</sup> B. Gentili and G. Cerri, “Written and Oral Communication in Greek Historio-

Rhetoricians knew that the hearer needed to believe that the events portrayed could happen to them,<sup>238</sup> and, to do this, they used events of previous eras to speak to people in their own time.<sup>239</sup> Gorgias spoke of the fear, compassion, tears and “intense desire” stirred by Greek tragedy: “The soul feels the emotions of others as its own.”<sup>240</sup> Aristotle particularly emphasised the value of stirring pity (*Rhetoric* 1385<sup>b</sup>11–1386<sup>a</sup>1).<sup>241</sup>

By the time Mark was writing, appeals to the emotion seem to have been seen, not just as a valid aspect of the art of persuasion, but even the most powerful aspect. The importance of addressing the emotions of the audience recurs extensively throughout Quintilian’s work in relation to all forms of rhetoric.<sup>242</sup> He taught that “the power

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graphical Thought,” in Eric A. Havelock and Jackson P. Hershbell (eds), *Communication Arts in the Ancient World* (New York: Hasting House, 1978) 151 n. 30. Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953 [Orig. 1946]) 554, wrote of “the interpretation of reality through literary representation or ‘imitation’,” beginning with the Greco-Roman literary world.

<sup>238</sup> For example, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1385<sup>b</sup>11–1386<sup>a</sup>2; Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.23; 10.1.16. However, Mary Ann Tolbert, “How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character,” *Int* 47 (1993) 347–49, has doubted that readers of Greco-Roman literature identified with characters, supported by others who have argued that characters were only seen as types (that is, as representative of group values), and that personalities were considered fixed: David E. Aune, “Greco-Roman Biography,” in Aune (ed.), *Greco-Roman Literature* 109–10; also Tolbert, *Sowing* 76–77; Fowler, “Characterising” 98. If so, this would limit the readers’ reactions to the disciples to one of *ethos* only, seeing them as ethical models. In Chapter 7, however, it will be argued that this could not be so for Mark’s Gospel. Indeed, others have argued that character development did occur in Greco-Roman historiography and biography: Burnett, “Characterisation” 6–15, following Christopher Gill; Sternberg, *Poetics* 253, 342–48. In any event, the primary model for characterisation in Mark may be the Old Testament rather than Greco-Roman writings. Auerbach (*Mimesis* 12–13, 49) has pointed out that all characters in the Bible have greater depth than those found in Greco-Roman works.

<sup>239</sup> Aune (*Literary Environment* 62) has demonstrated that “ancient Hellenistic biographers and historians also wrote on two levels, combining ideas from their own time with events from the past.” He cites Isocrates, Polybius, Livy, Plutarch and Lucian. Plutarch’s “use of the past was implicitly understood” as paradigmatic.

<sup>240</sup> Cited in Gentili and Cerri, “Communication” 142–43. Gorgias thought truth was not able to be known rationally, and so the role of the orator is not so much logical demonstration as emotional presentation that will stir the audience’s will to believe. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 31.

<sup>241</sup> “Athens, the wisest of all states, regarded pity not merely as an emotion, but even as a god.” Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.11.38.

<sup>242</sup> Examples can be found in *Inst.* 1.10.5; 3.5.2; 4.Pr.6; 4.2.115–128; 4.3.15; 4.4.6; 5.Pr.1; 5.8.3; 5.11.38; 5.12.9; 5.13.55; 5.14.29; 6.1.1–6.3.1; 8.3.67. Quintilian’s writing reflects approaches to rhetoric during the previous hundred years. He cites Cicero in particular: “Cicero is the name not of a man, but of eloquence” (*Inst.* 10.1.112). Cicero’s theory of speaking relied on three “sources of persuasion”: to prove, to delight and to move, equivalent to the three styles: plain for proof, middle for plea-

of oratory is greatest in emotional appeals,” and insisted that “it is in its power over the emotions that the life and soul of oratory is to be found” (*Inst.* 4.4.6; 6.2.7).<sup>243</sup>

Pathos was thought to be particularly effective towards the end, where “appeals to emotion and motivation were considered appropriate,” but ethos and pathos had to be kept in mind throughout.<sup>244</sup> Emotions run high in the last three chapters of Mark; indeed, 16:7 appeals to the emotions, and 16:8 is motivational (see Chapters 6 and 7).

But Mark knew his Jewish texts well, and biblical writers had always appealed to emotions, both in terms of *pathos* and *ethos*.<sup>245</sup> Polzin’s exposition of the way the Deuteronomist undercuts David’s reputation and depicts his progressive downfall suggest a subtle manipulation of the emotions of the readers of the day. When David weeps and cries, ‘Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom’ (2 Sam 18:33), the Deuteronomist may have wanted his readers to weep with him—over the sorry state of the House of David in their own day.<sup>246</sup> Then there are the laments, and the emotional element of certain psalms. The portrayal of the patriarchs may have appealed to strong feelings for the land after the exile. The prophetic texts were written to cause revulsion at the behaviour of the prophet’s targets. Perhaps above all, there is the pathos of God, who becomes quite emotional in Hos 11:1–9 and elsewhere.<sup>247</sup>

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sure, and grand for emotion (*Inst.* 12.10.58–59). The three sources are equivalent to Aristotle’s three modes of proof: *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Kennedy (*Classical Rhetoric* 100) comments: “Cicero treats *ethos* and *pathos* as degrees of appeal to the emotions, the former being the calmer and more persuasive attributes of character, the latter more violent stirrings of passion,” and adds (*Interpretation* 18): “Cicero thus recognised that logical argument is rarely enough to persuade an audience.” Quintilian’s equivalent three aims of oratory were “to instruct, to move, and to charm his hearers,” and he, too, regarded *ethos* as the calmer appeals to the emotions (*Inst.* 3.5.2; 6.2.9).

<sup>243</sup> Other contemporary works refer to the use of the emotions: “Longinus,” *On the Sublime*, a first-century CE work, described it as one of five “aspects of rhetorical invention,” and linked imagination and emotion; rhetoric produces “every kind of sublime emotional effect” (8.1–2; 15.1–2; 22.1; 23.1). Demetrius’ *On Style*, probably written late in the first century CE, takes for granted appeals to the emotions as an aspect of rhetoric (1.28).

<sup>244</sup> Mack, *Rhetoric* 36.

<sup>245</sup> Even so, Sternberg makes little mention of appeals to the emotions in his extensive work on the poetics of the Old Testament, although he devotes over sixty pages explicitly to rhetoric. Where he does mention emotions, he refers to “our feelings” (*Poetics* 55). Yehoshua Gitay, “Rhetorical Criticism,” in Haynes and McKenzie (eds), *Meaning* 135, 145, has noted that, in ancient Hebrew rhetoric, the emotions are brought into play in appealing to the reader.

<sup>246</sup> Polzin (*David* 187) comments: “David reacts in a way that easily elicits the reader’s sympathy . . . Who has ever read these lines and not been moved to pity David?”

<sup>247</sup> Martin Warner, “Introduction,” in Martin Warner (ed.), *The Bible as Rhetoric*:

Before Mark, Paul was certainly emotional in his writing, and was no doubt aware of its importance for rhetoric. When his letter to the Galatians was read out, who could have missed his emotional tone, or his appeals to their emotions? Biblical writers and their early Christian descendants had long known the rhetorical value of emotions.

Readers through the centuries have felt the passion behind Mark's Gospel.<sup>248</sup> It will be argued that it was an emotional time for Mark's community, a deeply emotional time, and it is striking that Mark depicts an emotional Jesus so often (see Page 248). This has often been recognised by commentators, without fully seeing its implications for interpretation. As a result, overall perceptions of Mark's Gospel have often been 'tame': Best simply says, "Mark's purpose was pastoral. He wrote primarily to build up his readers in faith."<sup>249</sup>

It is proposed in this study that Mark empathised deeply with his readers in their questioning and in their suffering, because he lived among them.<sup>250</sup> Like Paul, Mark was emotionally involved with his text, and it could be said that his Gospel was his own passion. This Gospel is not the text of a philosopher, but that of a storyteller who sought to break into the story of his reader's life, especially using *ethos* and *pathos*, to bring about conversion of attitudes. If we do not recognise the emotional aspects of this text, we will have, with Plato, banished the poets in favour of *logos* only.

#### READING DIFFERENTLY

*All meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation. (George Eliot)*

This appreciation of the literary character and rhetorical nature of the Gospel provides additional means of detecting the social situa-

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*Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (London: Routledge, 1990) 1, points out the pathos in Job 19:21. See also Kennedy (*Classical Rhetoric* 121–23) on pathos in the Old Testament and the arousing of emotions by Judeo-Christian orators.

<sup>248</sup> For example, Mark I. Wegener, *Cruciformed: The Literary Impact of Mark's Story of Jesus and His Disciples* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1995) 5, says that it is a literary text that "has the power to evoke human action and reaction," although he argues that readers must first distance themselves from the historical sense of ancient texts and then appropriate the impact of the texts for themselves.

<sup>249</sup> Best, *Story* 51.

<sup>250</sup> In contrast, Tolbert (*Sowing* 53) speaks of "the audience imagined by the author."

tion and concerns behind it, because it brings to the fore previously unobserved textual pointers to the author's aims and to his perceptions of the needs of his community. Mark meant his text to be somewhat obscure for outsiders, but recognition of his literary methods, including his use of allusion and irony, and his subtle arrangement of the text, enables the veil to be lifted.<sup>251</sup> Combined with a fuller examination of the historical evidence, this provides a new opportunity, not only to identify the setting of the Markan community, but also to appreciate the issues facing it.

In this study, the first step will be to re-examine the debate over the Gospel's setting and to determine the most probable situation of writing (Chapters 2 and 3). The identification of the situation of Mark's community can, of course, only be an exercise in probabilities, but biblical studies, and often historical studies, rely more on probabilities than proofs.<sup>252</sup>

After Chapter 3, the remainder of this study tests that proposed setting, and confirms it with further evidence. It does this by first examining the social, political and religious climate and seeing how the Gospel is not only compatible with that situation, but also alludes to it and to recent events familiar to the reader (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, the situation of the Christians in that setting is examined, showing how the text reflects both their recent suffering and their fears for the future. In Chapters 6 and 7, the rhetoric of the Gospel is examined, showing that it matches the climate, the mood and the issues previously brought to light, and how Mark designed his text to help his readers deal with their situation. Chapter 6 concentrates on major aspects of the structure and themes of the Gospel, while Mark's much-discussed portrayal of the disciples is dealt with separately in Chapter 7.

This study follows Mark's style in two important ways. It will be shown that Mark continually caused his readers to mentally redirect their attention from the world of the story to their own stories, and

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<sup>251</sup> For a valuable study of irony in Mark's Gospel, see Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). However, he misses key instances of Markan irony by failing to identify the rhetorical situation. Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 27, sees Mark's use of irony and allusion as subtle means of communication with his reader—"Mark not only drops hints, he drops hints that he drops hints."

<sup>252</sup> Vorster ("Historian" 69–70) notes that, in relation to historical investigations, probabilities are "the most we can do."



to the social situation that they faced. Here, too, the discussion will keep turning from the Gospel text to the social situation and vice versa, echoing Mark's intended effect. Moreover, although this study progressively moves from considering the relationship between the Christian community and society in general to the examination of the inner fears and doubts of the individual readers and of relationships within the house-churches, the external threats will necessarily appear in the foreground at all points in the discussion, echoing the constant stress upon those first readers.

The hermeneutical circle cannot be escaped. Marxsen admitted that there was a "circular character" in redaction historical work,<sup>253</sup> and Crites even uses the concept of the hermeneutical circle as a way of deriving the most satisfactory explanation.<sup>254</sup> By this procedure, the proposed setting is continually checked against the text, each giving light to the other, and it is proven to be a valid process if, in the end, the result resolves many unanswered questions about the text. Gundry has rightly said, "The success of any interpretation depends on its explanatory power, on its ability to make more complete, coherent and natural sense of textual data than other interpretations."<sup>255</sup>

This hermeneutical arena is entered, not by constructing an imaginary reader, but by identifying the most probable intended readers, and then seeing how well their situation is reflected in a rhetorical critical reading of the narrative. At no time, however, will 'literary constructs' be employed; only the original, flesh-and-blood readers will be in view, many of whom, it will be shown, were prepared to give up their flesh and blood for the sake of the gospel. Only the conception of the text can explain its genetics, and that moment in history will be the focus as we read, through the eyes of the forgotten readers, this pathetic Gospel.

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<sup>253</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 25.

<sup>254</sup> Crites, "Experience" 297 n. 9. Vorster ("Reader" 376) says that the hermeneutical circle cannot be avoided; see also Powell, *Narrative Criticism* 20–21. Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory* 79) comments that it need not be "a vicious one." It is notable that, there, despite his attempts to achieve hermeneutical objectivity, Ricoeur expresses the test of success in terms of probability: "An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation."

<sup>255</sup> Gundry, *Mark* 4. Malbon ("Text and Context" 93) has three criteria for a satisfactory interpretation: (1) inclusiveness, that is, fitting together all the parts into a whole, or that interpretation which encompasses most elements, (2) intersubjectivity, in that others assent to it, or at least regard it as reasonable, (3) efficacy, that is, it has the power to lead to new discoveries and continued comprehension.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SITUATING THE RHETORIC

#### IDENTIFYING THE LOCATION OF MARK AND HIS COMMUNITY

#### LOCATING THE COMMUNITY

*And when they lead you away, arresting you . . . (13:11)*

In 1924, C. H. Turner, in answer to the questions—‘where and when was Mark’s Gospel written?’—could write:

We are fortunate to be able to give a definite and decisive answer. It is not a matter of serious debate that the author was Mark, the disciple of Peter, and that he wrote his Gospel in Rome somewhere about the year A.D. 65.<sup>1</sup>

This view was supported both by early church traditions, and by references in the Gospel to persecution, seemingly confirming its origins during Nero’s attack on Christians in or soon after 64.<sup>2</sup> It all seemed to fit together neatly.

However, of the early Christian witnesses, it was not until Clement of Alexandria (ca. 180–200) that Rome was specifically named as the place of writing,<sup>3</sup> and so some scholars have regarded the patristic evidence as unreliable, and have argued that a setting in the East is more likely. Accordingly, discussion on the situation of Mark and his community has revolved around two widely separated geographic locations—Rome, or some place in Syria.<sup>4</sup> Principally because of this

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Seán Kealy, *Mark’s Gospel: A History of its Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 128. Indeed, Turner wrote this only one year before Bacon completed his two-part study, concluding that Mark wrote at Rome as late as 75. Benjamin W. Bacon, *Is Mark a Roman Gospel?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919); *The Gospel of Mark: Its Composition and Date* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925).

<sup>2</sup> It has long been recognised by virtually all commentators that the Gospel relates to a community that has been persecuted; for example, D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (London: SCM Press, 1963) 42; Lane, *Mark* 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Eusebius, *E.H.* 6.14.5.

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of attempts to locate and date the Markan community, and lists of supporters of the various positions, see John R. Donahue, “The Quest for the Community of Mark’s Gospel,” in Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.817–38. For a list of supporters of Rome and the East, see Joel

debate, quite a number of commentators now reach no conclusion on its provenance,<sup>5</sup> and even some historical critics regard knowledge of its situation to be unimportant for interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Here, it is argued that identification of the setting is crucial.

The proposals for an Eastern setting are founded on one or more of the following views: (a) the Gospel's emphasis on Galilee suggests that the Markan community was in that region, (b) it is likely that the Gospel was produced close to the source of the traditions, (c) its text contains motifs or images of a rural nature and appears to be predominantly addressed to a rural audience, and (d) the Gospel seems to reflect the turmoil of the Jewish War, and those who lived in the surrounding region were most likely to be affected. There are serious difficulties with each of these assertions. They will be examined in turn, showing not only that the observed textual features do not indicate an underlying Syrian environment, but also that such a setting is implausible. On the other hand, these features will all be shown to be appropriate for a piece of literature composed in Rome.

## ORIGINS IN GALILEE

*At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. (1:9)*

In 1956, Marxsen was the first to seriously challenge the consensus of Rome, placing the Markan community in Galilee between 66 and 70.<sup>7</sup> However, as noted in Chapter 1, at quite crucial points in his

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Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark," *JBL* 111 (1992) 441. Reflecting common thinking, Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 162, cite Martin Hengel, John Donahue and Donald Senior as the principal current supporters of a setting in Rome, and Howard Kee, Gerd Theissen and Joel Marcus for a setting in the East.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22–25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 135 n. 5; Garrett, *Temptations* 151; Anderson, *Mark* 29; Hooker, *Mark* 8.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 163.

<sup>7</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 54–116. Others placing Mark's readers in Galilee are Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 130, who defines 'Galilee' to include the Decapolis, Tyre and Sidon, and Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994 [Orig. 1988]) 53–54, 128, 421. Rick Strelan, *Crossing the Boundaries: A Commentary on Mark* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1991) 21, accepts its origin there because of the "obvious bias that Mark shows towards Galilee."

arguments, he relied heavily on assumptions about the evangelist's literary process and use of sources. Claiming that 16:7 "does not belong to the report of the empty tomb" because of a supposed "contradiction" with 16:8, he contended that Mark had inserted it into an earlier account, revealing his expectancy of a Parousia in Galilee.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, asserting that 1:14 and 1:16 were also a result of Markan editing, he asked: "Does this not suggest that Galilee, just as the wilderness, has some kind of theological significance?"<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on Galilee in the first part of the Gospel, he argued, indicates that it functions symbolically, and really points to the place of the Markan community that preserved the Gospel traditions.<sup>10</sup> He asked, "Must we not at least put a question mark after the old churchly tradition which allows that the Gospel was written in Rome?"<sup>11</sup> He later claimed that it is "more reasonable" that Mark was writing in or near Galilee: "For would one write a 'Galilean Gospel' without having any connection with this area?"<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to see how else the Gospel story could have been told, even to readers in Rome, given that Christians followed "Jesus of Nazareth." The Gospel begins in Galilee, in a largely rural setting, but that is where the story did begin. It is true that Tacitus, as the first Roman writer to mention Christians, does not refer to Galilee, but Judea, as "the source of the superstition" (*Annals* 15.44). However, his focus is on Jesus' criminal background, and so he cites his execution there by Pilate. Early Christian writings, however, have both Galilee and Nazareth embedded in statements of origins.<sup>13</sup> It is significant, then, that Mark introduces Jesus in this way: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee . . ." (1:9). Compared to

<sup>8</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 76–93.

<sup>9</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 59.

<sup>10</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 108.

<sup>11</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 66. He argued that the same tradition underlay both Mark's Gospel and the fourth century reports of the flight to Pella by Eusebius (*E.H.* 3.5.3) and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.7.7–8; 30.3.7; *Weights and Measures* 15), and that both point to a gathering of Christians expecting the Parousia in Galilee, although Mark "does not define Galilee narrowly." Marxsen, *Mark* 107, 115–16. On the historicity of a flight to Pella, see Craig Koester, "The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 90–106.

<sup>12</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to its Problems* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968 [Orig. 1964]) 143.

<sup>13</sup> In particular, see Acts 10:37–39. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 108) has his opponent describe the origin of movement in this way: "You even selected some choice missionaries, and despatched them into all the world to spread abroad that a certain vile and impious heresy was broached by a deceiver, one Jesus of Galilee."

the introductions of other protagonists in ancient writings, this one is devoid of all reference to his birth, family, status or early life, and although there may be other literary reasons for Mark omitting these, he has chosen to introduce Jesus by mentioning *both* Nazareth and Galilee. It is the sort of statement that might be made to readers distant from the region. Moreover, as those readers would also have known of Jesus' execution in Jerusalem, the settings for the beginning and end of Mark's story were already established.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Mark may have been countering the negative connotations of the term 'Galilean' that was being applied to Christians. In the early second century, Arrian, a pupil of Epictetus (ca. 55–ca. 135 CE), reports that his master referred to the stubbornness of the "Galileans." Under the heading of "fearlessness," he writes, "And is it possible that anyone should be thus disposed towards these things from madness, and the Galileans from mere habit?" (Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* 4.7.2).<sup>15</sup> Hengel argues that Epictetus was referring to the known stubbornness of the Jewish rebels, as he would have known their reputation, and that other uses of 'Galilean' for Christians are quite late.<sup>16</sup> However, Arrian clearly believed that readers in the early second century understood who he meant by the term 'Galilean,' and knew of their obduracy. His scorn is similar to that of Marcus Aurelius, who wrote later in that century of the stubbornness of the martyrs: "This readiness [to be released from the body] must be the

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<sup>14</sup> Therefore, there is no need to posit, as Marxsen (*Mark* 102–4) did, that there was a Galilee-Jerusalem feud or dichotomy of traditions in order to explain the Galilee-Jerusalem axis of the Gospel. See Dahm (*Israel* 274) for those who have followed Marxsen's view. Dahm notes that there is no evidence at all for an early Galilean community in competition with the Jerusalem community.

<sup>15</sup> Arrian published Epictetus' works after his death ca. 135. In his *Letter to Lucius Gellius*, he wrote: "I did not compose 'The Words of Epictetus' as one usually composes such a book . . . I declare that I did not 'compose' them at all. Rather, whatever I heard him say I wrote down verbatim, thus writing a memoir to endure for myself to preserve his thoughts and bold speech." Cited in David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan (eds), *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd ed.: 1994) 125. However, Robert F. Dobbin, *Epictetus: Discourses Book 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) xx, points out that Arrian cannot be completely believed, due to the unlikelihood of transcription, his absence from a number of dialogues reported, and the modelling of some of the discourses on writings of Plato and Xenophon.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989 [Orig. German: 2nd ed.: 1976; 1st ed.: 1961]) 58–59. He is supported by S. Applebaum, "The Zealots: The Case for Reevaluation," *JRS* 61 (1971) 169, who points to the rebels' reputation for stubbornness under torture (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.5; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.23–24; *JW* 7.417–19).

result of a specific decision, not as with the Christians, of obstinate opposition, but of a reasoned and dignified decision, and without dramatics, if it is to convince anyone else" (*Meditations* 11.3).

It is more likely, as most scholars accept, that Epictetus referred to Christian intransigence.<sup>17</sup> For Arrian to mention Epictetus' disdain for them shows that he considered such a reference to Christians to have been plausible both for the earlier period when Epictetus was Arrian's teacher, and for Arrian's own time, extending from the late first century to the early second century. His term "*hypo ethous*," best translated as "by habit,"<sup>18</sup> suggests that he was referring to a long-standing practice that was well known. As Epictetus was raised in Rome by a freedman who was Nero's secretary, and would have been around sixteen years of age when Mark wrote, it is possible that he had picked up the term 'Galileans' as a result of the 'stubbornness' of some Christians in Rome at that time.

Mark's Gospel provides further evidence that it was used of Christians. Often Mark 14:70 has been read in the light of Matt 26:69, 73 ("your accent betrays you").<sup>19</sup> With the recent appreciation of the role of irony in the biblical texts, there is good reason to suspect that the use of the term in various places in the New Testament means more to the readers than just a geographical origin of the person (see Luke 22:59; 23:6; Acts 2:7; John 7:41, 52).<sup>20</sup> If so, it is significant that both Luke and John were probably writing at a distance from Galilee and implying that Christians were called 'Galileans.' In 14:70, Mark equates "Galilean" with being "one of them."

Hengel does not analyse the later applications of 'Galilean' to Christians, only mentioning that they were very rare.<sup>21</sup> But, as late as the fourth century, Julian the Apostate wrote *Against the Galileans*,

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Vol. 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974) 541, who considers that 'Galilean' was unlikely to be used for the Jewish rebels.

<sup>18</sup> BAGD 218.

<sup>19</sup> Marxsen (*Mark* 108), for example, claims that Peter was called a Galilean in 14:70 because of his accent, but Mark does not say so (nor Luke), only Matthew.

<sup>20</sup> Hengel (*Zealots* 58–59) disregards any possible ironical meaning of the Gospel uses of 'Galilean,' viewing them merely as references to the geographical origins of the apostles.

<sup>21</sup> Hengel cites H. Karpp, "Christennamen," in Franz J. Dölger and Hans Lietzmann (eds), *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Anton, 1954) 1131, but he does not comment on them, relying on Karpp's opinion that the term was "seldom used." However, the term would not have appeared in Christian writings often if detractors used it.

referring to “the fabrication of the Galileans” and “the sect of the Galileans” (39, 42).<sup>22</sup> In the sixth century, John Malalas, probably of Antioch, says that: “Christians acquired this name during [Claudius] time in office, for bishop Euodias [the first bishop of Antioch] gave this name to them in his preaching; formerly Christians had been called Nazarenes and Galileans” (*Chron.* 46).<sup>23</sup> The implication is that the term ‘Galileans’ was applied to them by others. Malalas uses the term ‘Galilean’ of Christians twice more in his account, both times in statements made by non-Christians.<sup>24</sup>

Although ‘Galilean’ may have been a term applied to different non-conformist groups from Galilee at various periods,<sup>25</sup> this same sense is likely to have been applied to Christians at a very early stage. In opening his Gospel as he does, Mark, in addition to describing the origins of Christianity in Galilee, might also be responding to the term that had been applied to his readers in a pejorative manner by the society around them.

Marxsen’s position has not been well received by scholars; Mark’s Gospel as a whole hardly appears to be a document urging Christians to gather in Galilee for the Parousia.<sup>26</sup> The ‘connection’ with Galilee

<sup>22</sup> Wilmer Cave Wright (trans.), *The Works of Emperor Julian* (London: Heinemann, 1923) 1.313; 2.37. In *Oration* 6.192, Julian sneers at “the words of the Galileans.” Polymnia Athanassiad-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 161, considers that Julian used the term “in order to deny to their creed any claim to universality,” and to cast it as a heresy of Judaism. Nevertheless, he intended to be disparaging, and he may have chosen a known derogatory term that emphasised their Jewish origins.

<sup>23</sup> Although the record of historical events by John Malalas in the sixth century is often seen as a mixture of “fable and fact,” as by A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964) 1.183, it is generally regarded as a valuable source of information, according to A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973) 1.267, and Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys and Roger Scott (trans), *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986) xxii.

<sup>24</sup> Malalas reports that Numerian (288 CE) “had heard that the Galileans performed their liturgies in secret” (*Chron.* 303), and that Constantine, returning to Rome after his victory, was said to have pointed to a cross and exclaimed: “This is the sign of the God of the Galileans who are known as Christians” (*Chron.* 317). It is possible that Malalas found these terms in his sources, perhaps written by non-Christians.

<sup>25</sup> Hengel (*Zealots* 56–57) cites a ‘Galilean heretic’ mentioned in *m. Yadayim* 4.8. J. T. Milik, “Une Lettre de Simeon Bar Kokheba,” *RB* 60 (1953) 276–94, argues that a mention of ‘Galilean’ in a letter by Simon Bar Kochba refers to a ‘rebellious’ group in Galilee.

<sup>26</sup> Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 95, observes that the Gospel is “entirely the wrong literary form for such a straightforward and urgent message.” For other criticisms, see Anderson, *Mark* 29, 42–44; Hooker, *Mark* 7; Perrin, *Introduction* 150.

that Marxsen overlooked is the ongoing identification of Christians with the place of origin of the movement, and the need for Mark to begin the story there. The Galilean emphasis is no indication of a Markan community in that region and, in fact, the Gospel reads like a text written at a distance. In Rome, adherents of foreign cults were used to stories and images of their religion's origins in another land, and Mark's readers are likely to have viewed the Gospel similarly.<sup>27</sup>

### LOCAL COLOUR

*A sower went out to sow . . . (4:3)*

For some scholars, it makes most sense that the first Gospel was put together near the source of the traditions and material thought to be incorporated into it. They argue that its rural images, motifs and scenes are evidence of an underlying small-town background of the Christians that preserved such traditions. These features, they claim, provide 'local colour.'

This view originated with Gerd Theissen, who argued that oral traditions behind ethical sayings, especially those related to the leaving of home, family and possessions, were preserved and passed on by "itinerant charismatics," or "itinerant radicals," who went from place to place to preach and heal, operating on the fringe of city churches that were becoming more and more institutionalised.<sup>28</sup> He drew this picture, however, not from the first Gospel to be written, but from a generalised view of the sayings material in all the Synoptic Gospels. His argument for a rural setting occupied only a small part of his initial discussion:

The sayings tradition points to a rural region. One thinks of the symbolic world of the parables. Here small villages, day-labourer and tenants, shepherds and vineyard owners appear. Here is talk of seeds and harvests, fields and weeds, flocks and fishing.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The myths associated with the Isis cult were all set in Egypt and Phoenicia. On the cult in Italy, see R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971) 70–88, especially 83–84, referring to wall scenes of Isis at Pompeii that depict the Egyptian origins of the cult.

<sup>28</sup> Gerd Theissen, "Wanderradikalismus: Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum," *ZTK* 70 (1973) 245–71.

<sup>29</sup> Theissen, "Wanderradikalismus" 264.



Later, he expanded his hypothesis, claiming that these itinerant charismatics “shaped the earliest traditions and provide the social background for a good deal of the synoptic tradition,” and he asserted that the overseers of the city churches were in a subordinate position to them.<sup>30</sup> The local communities, he said, “are to be understood exclusively in terms of their complementary relationship to the wandering charismatics.”<sup>31</sup> He asserted that the “Jesus movement” was originally confined to country areas, beginning with Galilee, and that the ambivalence to Jerusalem in Jesus’ lifetime is “best explained in terms of conflict between city and country.”<sup>32</sup>

Only in his 1991 work does he address the setting of Mark’s Gospel specifically, and he argues that Syria near Palestine is more likely for three basic reasons: “the culture of its milieu, its location with respect to tradition, and its geographical references are more readily understood.”<sup>33</sup> There, he continues to argue for a rural setting, although recognising that Mark also aimed at readers who lived a settled life. Yet, he asserts that the traditions in the Gospel “presume acquaint-

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<sup>30</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The First Followers of Jesus: A Sociological Analysis of the Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1978 [Orig. German: 1977]) 10, 20, citing *Didache* 11.2; 15.2. It is doubtful, however, that aspects of Syrian Christianity can be reliably deduced from the *Didache*, a second century work by an unknown author, possibly in Alexandria, using and probably revising various sources. Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1970) 166, concludes that a city like Antioch might have written this as a manual to guide rural churches. For the diverse opinions on the *Didache*, see Jonathan A. Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research: An Overview,” in Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Didache in Modern Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 1–42, especially 35–36 for the early influences on Theissen, and several criticisms of his methods.

<sup>31</sup> Theissen, *First Followers* 22. Theissen takes the evidence too far in arguing for this picture of early Christianity: Matt 6:25–32 does not need to relate to the harshness of life of these itinerant charismatics, as he claims (13). There is not even any reference to travel in this text, and it could be related to any poor disciple, anywhere. Further, against Theissen’s claims (9, 12), families would think Christians mad wherever they were, not just in rural villages (see Page 267), lack of possessions is hardly unique to itinerant Christian preachers and prophets, and Agabus is not a wandering charismatic—he is simply described as travelling from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27–28) and from Judea to Caesarea (Acts 21:10). It is also difficult to see how Paul and Barnabas modelled themselves on these supposed rural itinerant radicals, as Theissen maintains (9), given that they targeted major cities, and had close links with major city churches.

<sup>32</sup> Theissen (*First Followers* 47) contends that, with the rise of collegiate bodies and the episcopate, the itinerant charismatics fell increasingly into disrepute, replaced by Christians “with a high position in society.”

<sup>33</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 257. There, he says (58 n. 84): “I hold to my theses about itinerant radicals even if it would have to be formulated differently at the present time,” but does not explain which aspects of his early work he might modify.

tance [by Mark] with the life of Jesus' radical followers" as shown by 6:7–12; 10:17–30, and that this points to his location in Palestine and Syria—"here we are most likely to find followers of Jesus who have left house and land to preach the reign of God."<sup>34</sup> This is an extraordinary claim. Presumably, he is alluding to Mark's mention of followers giving up house and land (10:29–30), but the giving up of family, lifestyle or property hardly means a rural Syrian setting—Paul and other city-based Christians left everything, and Barnabas gave up property (Acts 4:37), for the sake of the gospel. Indeed, Mark could just be referring to those who had moved to the city to join the Christian community.<sup>35</sup>

There is no evidence of itinerant preachers of the type envisaged by Theissen operating in rural Syria at that time, nor, indeed, of the existence of any rural Syrian church, let alone one that could have produced and preserved a work like Mark's Gospel.<sup>36</sup> If it was written for rural Syrians of a low social status or, indeed, for anyone in rural areas, it is difficult to understand why Aramaic is explained. Moreover, the idea of itinerant charismatics/preachers moving from village to village and being shunned by the city-based churches hardly suggests the Gospel's acceptance, preservation and distribution by those major churches.<sup>37</sup> Paul's letters and Acts consistently show early Christianity gaining ground, formulating its beliefs, and dealing with internal controversies in the major cities of the Empire. Moreover, they give no hint of such an underlying rural movement.

Theissen's view of tradition history has meant that he ignores clear alternatives in his discussion. For example, he argues that anyone who knew the Mediterranean would hardly call the Lake of Galilee

<sup>34</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 241.

<sup>35</sup> 10:29–30 only refer to someone leaving their *oikia*, which can just mean their extended family or household, and *agros*, which can mean either a farm or just the countryside.

<sup>36</sup> Hengel (*'Hellenisation'* 3–5) points out that we "know nothing" about Syrian Christianity between 30 and 100 CE, except for the Damascus and Antioch information supplied by Luke and Paul. Syrian Christian writing only began with Tatian ca. 200 CE, and before that we have no non-Christian Syrian literature, as the "great period of Syria" only began in the second century.

<sup>37</sup> Robbins (*Teacher* 7, 210–13) also relies on Theissen's picture: "The preservation of Mark's Gospel reveals the significant inroads that itinerant Christians made into the village-town culture of the Mediterranean world. . . . They performed a respected role among people throughout towns and villages." Like Theissen, Robbins sees the itinerants suffering "persecution and hatred from established leaders who felt that their positions were threatened." It is difficult to see how the Gospel could have survived in such an environment.

a “sea”; such language “would be hard to imagine in the cosmopolitan city of Rome,” and so “this evangelist retains the rural background of Jesus’ activity better than any other.”<sup>38</sup> And yet he admits that *thalassa* is found in the Septuagint and thus has a background of Semitic language usage, so that Mark’s use is

an indication of the fact that [the Gospels] were written in a region where Semitic language directly or indirectly contributed to the shaping of the vocabulary. This points to the eastern part of the Roman Empire: either the Gospels were written there, or their authors came from there, or the traditions incorporated in them were native to that region.<sup>39</sup>

Of these options, he just ignores the second possibility in his ensuing discussion—that there is Semitic influence because Mark was a Jew who came from that region.<sup>40</sup> Nor does he consider the way in which the word “sea” would have operated as an Old Testament allusion, and generally neglects possible literary reasons for the inclusion of particular sayings, phrases or words. Instead, he sees Mark as a collector of existing local stories, and he has a firm view of Mark being in Syria collecting them. This leads to the claim that Mark includes pre-Pauline traditions, such as the use of *euangelion*, the Last Supper, and the list of vices in 7:21–22, which were “shaped by Syrian Christianity,” because Paul was formed there.<sup>41</sup> He does not consider whether Mark could have obtained them from Paul, his letters, or his followers.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, Theissen, admitting that Luke wrote in the West (“clearly”),<sup>43</sup> says that he could have collected his material during a

<sup>38</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 238.

<sup>39</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 107.

<sup>40</sup> It is not suggested here that Mark’s Gospel reflects the eyewitness accounts of Peter, or is a record of his sermons, as has been claimed, but, if there was some contact between Mark and Peter that underlies the statements in the early church tradition, Mark may have picked up the phrase “Sea of Galilee” from this Galilean fisherman or, indeed, from any other Galilean Christian with whom he had been in contact at any time. However, this says nothing about where Mark was when he wrote.

<sup>41</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 240.

<sup>42</sup> It cannot be assumed, either, that such ‘traditions’ were pre-Pauline, nor necessarily Syrian. Theissen (*Gospels* 241–42) notes that Mark differs from Matthew in regard to some of the “secret teachings” of Jesus (7:17; 9:28, 35; 10:10), but concludes that Mark is also writing from Syria encountering the same “traditions and attitudes” as Matthew, yet arguing a different point of view. However, it is at least as likely that Mark was encountering different traditions and attitudes in a *different* locale. For the sake of this particular argument, Theissen seems to view Mark as a creative shaper of these traditions.

<sup>43</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 258. In his first work (“Wanderradikalismus” 270), he had argued that Luke preserved the oral traditions of the itinerant charismatics better than any evangelist, and yet distanced himself from them by stressing the importance

single visit to the East, without needing further input of ‘local colour,’ which seems to contradict his basic thesis about the need for the evangelists to be near the source of the traditions. But, he continues, for Mark to have written in Rome, he would have

needed access to Palestinian popular lore and Jerusalem community traditions, and his Gospel would have to have reached the East very quickly in order for Matthew to use it as a source. This is not impossible, but it is rather improbable.<sup>44</sup>

It is difficult to see why Luke could have collected his material on one visit to the East, but Mark could not have done so on a similar visit or even before he went to Rome. It is also hard to understand why Theissen thinks it improbable for Mark’s Gospel to have reached the East within ten years of its writing in Rome, given the extensive contacts between churches.

Theissen sees Mark collecting both Syrian-Hellenistic and Palestinian traditions, and argues that this is “more likely in Palestine (and neighbouring Syria) than in distant Rome.”<sup>45</sup> But Pesch could just as well be correct in describing Rome as an ideal place for collecting material, a “*Sammelplatz von Jesustraditionen*,” where Christians of different origins lived.<sup>46</sup> It was there that Paul, Peter, and probably others from the East, had visited and taught. It is most probable that Mark came from Jerusalem at some stage, given his knowledge of that city, and there is no reason why he and others could not have brought stories with them to Rome.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, forty years after Jesus’ death, further local input of information on Jesus’ life was unlikely to have been needed to write a narrative such as this.

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of the apostles, including Paul. In doing so, Theissen has conceded that Luke has well preserved many sayings purportedly related to rural life and wandering preachers. This argues against his earlier understanding of the conditions for preserving such traditions.

<sup>44</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 258.

<sup>45</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 240. He cites P. Vielhauer, who argued for Mark being written “in a city or region where the Palestinian Jesus traditions were still alive; Greek-speaking Syria presents these conditions in immeasurably greater degree than does Rome” (241–42).

<sup>46</sup> Pesch, *Markusevangelium* 1.13.

<sup>47</sup> William S. Vorster, “Bilingualism in the Greek of the New Testament: Semitic Interference in the Gospel of Mark,” in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 22, argues that Mark was “a bilingual author whose native language was probably Aramaic and his second language Greek.” He notes the “Semitic interference” in Mark’s use of Greek. This suggests that Mark had a Palestinian origin, and he appears to know Jerusalem well. See Dean E. Chapman, “Locating the Gospel of Mark: A Model of Agrarian Biography,” *BTB* 25 (1995) 33–35, who lists Mark’s “remarkable geographical detail” of Jerusalem and its environs, and concludes that he had been a resident of the city.

Theissen's essential focus was "the native places and ancestry of individual traditions,"<sup>48</sup> not the writing of Mark's Gospel, and the early history of traditions says nothing about the likely place of composition of such a document. It is unfortunate that the two questions have been so closely tied together by some.

## A RURAL SETTING?

*They were on the way, going up to  
Jerusalem. (10:32)*

Theissen's views have been influential upon those placing the Gospel in the East, with many accepting a rural setting.<sup>49</sup> They observe that the first half of the Gospel is largely set in rural and small-town Galilee and its environs, and that its parables contain a number of agricultural metaphors, and take these features as confirmation that it was composed or, rather, redacted in a rural area. Theissen had pointed particularly to the "neighbourhood expressions" (1:38; 3:8; 5:14; 6:6; 8:27–29) and the agrarian focus of the parables:

We find ourselves in a deeply rural milieu . . . If the world of the narrative reflects something about the world of the narrators, it is hard to imagine the author of Mark's Gospel in the largest metropolis of the first century world. It is more probable that rural Christianity is a familiar environment for both the author and the readers. Even if they live in a city, they knew that Christianity is spreading throughout the countryside. This points more to Syria than to Rome.<sup>50</sup>

Impressed by Theissen's views, Howard Kee has examined the setting of such a community from a sociological viewpoint, and he has

<sup>48</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 25.

<sup>49</sup> The German forerunner to Theissen's *Gospels in Context* had the title *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1989). His terms and ideas recur in the "wandering Christian missionaries" and "rural colour (*kolorit*)" of Ludger Schenke, *Das Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988) 46, 48, and in the rural settings envisaged by Kee (*Community* 105: "rural and small-town Syria"), Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 13 ("village folk residing in a rural territory"), Richard Rohrbaugh, "The Social Location of Mark's Audience," *BTB* 13 (1993) 114 ("a peasant audience in a small town or village setting"), and Botha ("Mark's Story" 164–65, 178: stories for peasants in "a village or small-town context").

<sup>50</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 238.

been an important authority for many commentators who set Mark in the rural East.<sup>51</sup> Like Marxsen and Theissen, Kee relies heavily on redaction critical methods and, based on what he perceives to be the ‘Markan’ pieces of the text, concludes that the Markan community, situated “in rural and small-town Syria,” was an apocalyptically oriented group.<sup>52</sup> Yet, in adopting Theissen’s approach, Kee has made serious errors. He claims that

the accurate reflection of practices having to do with agriculture, housing, employment and land-ownership and taxation that are characteristic of the whole of Syria-Palestine in this period do indeed speak for the larger area as the place of origin and against Rome.<sup>53</sup>

Kee gives few references for these claims, and none support his conclusion. He cites the works of Dodd and Jeremias, who drew on the parables in *all* of the Synoptic Gospels, as Theissen did.<sup>54</sup> Their studies can hardly be used to show that Mark wrote in the East. Moreover, Mark’s use of such stories and figures only tells us that his readers were familiar with those particular rural images and practices. In fact, Mark has only four parables containing rural images (4:3–20, 26–29, 30–32; 12:1–9), and an equal number that use other metaphors: the divided kingdom and divided house (3:23–26), the burgled house (3:27), the lamp (4:21–22), and the measure (4:24–25).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> He states that Theissen’s work on itinerant charismatics was “of great importance methodologically as well as substantively. His insistence on examining the socio-economic conditions which lie behind and are filtered through ancient texts like the New Testament . . . is a salutary move.” Kee, *Community* 104. He calls Theissen’s 1973 study “Wanderradikalismus” “illuminating and suggestive” (201 n. 103).

<sup>52</sup> He claims that they had similarities to the Essenes and to “Cynic-Stoic charismatic, preacher-philosophers.” Kee, *Community* 77–107, especially 100–5. However, Bryan (*Preface* 158) has noted that an audience would pick up that, unlike Cynics, the disciples did not carry a “*pēra*” and cloak (6:8–9)—“significantly,” he says—and that the house is the centre of action, not the open road or street corner. He does not identify a provenance, but concludes that the community is “a stable community with ties, not rootless charismatics, [as these] are most vulnerable to such persecution by the state.” See also his references to this issue listed there.

<sup>53</sup> Kee, *Community* 102.

<sup>54</sup> He refers to Jeremias, *Parables*, and Dodd, *Parables*. In *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938) 148–52, Dodd said the parables gave a “realistic” view of neighbourly village life, and in *Parables* (21) he exclaims: “What a singularly complete and convincing picture the parables give of life in a small provincial town—probably a more complete picture of *petit-bourgeois* and peasant life than we possess for any other province of the Roman empire except Egypt.” Recent perceptions of the rural background of Mark’s Gospel seem to have their beginnings in such a view.

<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants is told from the perspective of the distant owner of the vineyard, not that of the rural tenants.

Furthermore, none of the examples that Kee provides uniquely reflect a rural Syrian environment. For ‘agricultural practices,’ he cites only 4:2–6, 26–32, and relies on Jeremias’ claim that the Parable of the Sower reflects agricultural practices in Palestine, where sowing occurred before ploughing.<sup>56</sup> But the scenes depicted could refer to any part of the Mediterranean region, and would be just as familiar and as meaningful to readers in Rome. Grain was grown in Italy, and seed was broadcast by hand.<sup>57</sup> Writing in Rome in the seventies, Pliny the Elder had this to say of the practice:

There is a certain science in scattering the seed evenly; at all events, the hand must keep time with the pace of walking and always go with the right foot. Also, it comes about by some not obvious method used by certain people that luck is kind to them and brings a good return.<sup>58</sup>

Pliny wonders about the element of chance involved in obtaining a good harvest. Similarly, Mark’s mysterious parable leaves the reader wondering at the seeming carelessness and randomness of God in scattering his word, and how it is that some people are ‘good soils’ and others not. Mark has provided an image of a practice that was in use near Rome, and that appears to have been the subject of some local discussion. Mark may have used a known parable of Jesus, but his inclusion of it does not mean that his reader must have been in a rural situation. Mark would have found it rhetorically effective, even in the city of Rome.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, for ‘housing practices,’ Kee cites first the oft-mentioned change by Luke of Mark’s (presumed) thatched roof in 2:4 to roof

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<sup>56</sup> Jeremias, *Parables* 12. However, Mark does not mention ploughing. As Jeremias was focusing on the lifetime of Jesus, he did not consider whether the scene also mirrored customary practice elsewhere.

<sup>57</sup> “There is no evidence that the Romans used any other method.” The sower was followed by the ploughman. K. D. White, *Roman Farming* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) 179, citing Columella 2.4.8, 11. P. W. De Neeve, *Colonus: Private Farm-Tenancy in Roman Italy during the Republic and the Early Principate* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1984) 129, argues that imports of grain may not have been enough for Italy, and would have had to be supplemented by local crops. This grain would need to be relatively close to Rome to feed the market there, and the supply of grain was a constant concern of the populace.

<sup>58</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 18.197. Columella (2.2.5–7) also wrote about different soils.

<sup>59</sup> Other agricultural practices mentioned by Mark also figure in Italy: mustard trees (4:30–32) were commonly grown there (Columella 11.3.29), and sheep (6:34; 14:27) were raised for wool; see Martial (*Epigrams* 14.155) for a list of the major wool-producing districts, cited in Ugo Enrico Paoli, *Rome: Its People Life and Customs* (London: Longman, 1963 [Orig. 1940]) 154.

tiles (Luke 5:19).<sup>60</sup> But there were similar roof styles in Italy, where early rural houses were commonly constructed with thatched roofs, a practice that probably continued for some houses until at least the first century CE.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the thatched hut was an important traditional image for the people of Rome, as there was such a hut on the Palatine hill as a reminder of Rome's beginnings—the *casa Romuli*.<sup>62</sup> The allusion to a house with a thatched roof would suggest to the Roman reader the house of a poor person.

Also under 'housing practices,' Kee cites only 4:21, which, he says, depicts a single-room house apparently so small that one lamp could light it. However, Mark does not say this at all; it only appears in Matt 5:15.

On 'employment practices,' Kee cites Dodd, but there are no parables in Mark that relate to employment practices.<sup>63</sup> On 'land ownership and taxation practices,' Kee cites Jeremias, who claims that the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (12:1–9) reflects the "revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants" towards foreign landowners, arguing that there is evidence of considerable foreign-owned landholdings in Galilee, and claiming that Mark refers to such "foreign landlords" in the phrase *kai apedēmēsen* (12:1).<sup>64</sup> However, while this verb *can*

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<sup>60</sup> Mark does not mention a thatched roof—only that the paralytic's friends could "dig through it."

<sup>61</sup> Joan M. Frayn, *Subsistence Farming in Roman Italy* (London: Centaur Press, 1979) 119–23, 128; White, *Roman Farming* 419. Frayn gives archaeological evidence from Etruria and Latium, and cites Ovid, Virgil and Pliny the Elder. It is likely that such houses existed in Italy until recent times; she cites a seventeenth century painting and wall paintings from Rome and Campania that show buildings with thatched roofs and fisherman drawing nets from streams. Whether these paintings are idealised or not, they show that the thatched roof dwelling figured prominently in the imagination of the city dweller, but it is likely that the Christians of Rome would have seen such buildings for themselves in the nearby countryside.

<sup>62</sup> Romulus was thought to have lived in one. Frayn, *Subsistence Farming* 117, citing Dion. Hal. 1.79.11; Plutarch, *Romulus* 20; Vitruvius 2.1.5. James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999) 95, notes that Vesta's temples were always circular, perhaps to remind of early Roman huts.

<sup>63</sup> He cites Dodd, *Parables* 95, which does not discuss this question. Dodd (*Parables* 122) does refer to the saying, "the first shall be last" (10:31), which, he claims, is based on the parable of the labourers in the vineyard found in Matt 20:1–16. If this is Kee's referent, this would be a case of Mark *removing* an agricultural motif.

<sup>64</sup> Jeremias, *Parables* 74–76, referring to Dodd, *Parables* 125–26. Dodd (*Parables* 21, 123) saw the parables as full of "realism" but, of course, in relation to the life setting of Jesus. Accordingly, he saw 3:27 (a strong man entering someone's house) in this way: "We may think of a border incident on the frontiers of Syria, always exposed to Bedouin raids," and a man guarding his courtyard. But Mark's little



suggest travelling to another country, it also means simply “goes away” or “be absent” (cf. 2 Cor 5:6: “while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord”).<sup>65</sup> It could mean that the owner lived in the next town. Tenant farmers were very common in Italy, as were vineyards, and absentee landlords were probably a more dominant situation there, because of the extensive property holdings by wealthy Romans, than anywhere in the East.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, none of the evidence upon which Kee’s perception of a rural Syrian setting relies is a reflection of practices unique to that region, and some of the items that he cites do not relate to Mark’s text at all. There are no grounds, therefore, for the proposition that Mark’s inclusion of such features indicates that he wrote for a community there, and the few rural motifs in the Gospel would be just as meaningful for a reader in Rome.

A number of scholars have observed that the Gospel indicates a reader of low economic and social status and claim that this, too, confirms the rural and small-town scenario.<sup>67</sup> But there were very large numbers of people who were poor and of a low social status in the city of Rome, where a high proportion of its residents were reliant on state welfare.<sup>68</sup> In the sixties, Seneca (*Ad. Helv.*

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parable may have been more relevant to those fearing burglars in the close quarters of a city like Rome, where burglary would have been a problem. Martial (*Epigrams* 3.58) tells a country friend how lucky he is to be among friendly neighbours and, compared with the city dweller, away from the fear of burglary: “Your Priapus fears no thief.” Cited in K. D. White, *Country Life in Classical Times* (London: Paul Elek, 1977) 91–92. Priapus was the deity that protected vineyards, gardens and orchards.

<sup>65</sup> BAGD 90.

<sup>66</sup> “Most of the work on the land was provided by slaves for absentee landowners.” Charles Freeman, *The World of the Romans* (Abingdon: Andromeda Oxford, 1993) 37. Although this refers to the first century BCE, the situation would have worsened by the first century CE, as property acquisitions were common, and estates grew larger (see Page 81). The large property qualification required for members of the equestrian and senatorial classes in Rome meant that there were properties owned by upper class Romans throughout Italy.

<sup>67</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering* 15; Rohrbaugh, “Location” 125; Myers, *Strong Man* 51: “The social location of the poor will be central to our reading of Mark.”

<sup>68</sup> Although it is generally recognised that a large proportion of the population of Rome was very poor, it is difficult to quantify the extent of this poverty. Frayn (*Subsistence Farming* 75) remarks: “The poor are remarkably elusive in Roman literature.” Our information on the grain dole is not very helpful: Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941) 78–79, estimated that two-thirds to one-half of the population of Rome depended on it. Although the numbers on the dole were around 150,000 in the later years of the Republic, the criteria for entitlement are not clear. James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definition in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, Pa:

12.1) exclaimed, “Look how great a majority are the poor!”<sup>69</sup>

Waetjen claims: “The original addressees of the Gospel were village folk . . . [who] belonged to the lower-class strata of Roman-occupied Syria. They appear to have been primarily peasants and artisans.”<sup>70</sup> He cites sowing, the mustard tree, tenant farmers, the fig tree, and the mention of bleaching (9:3) as features that indicate the reader’s situation.<sup>71</sup> But, as noted above, all of the items listed would be well known in and around Rome. The interests of the Gospel may reflect a largely lower-class readership, but not necessarily a rural area.

Rohrbaugh is another who has built his proposals on the basis of “the obvious rural language in Mark,” citing Theissen’s latest study, and “simply presume[s] the Gospel was written in a village or small-town context” near Palestine.<sup>72</sup> He contends that the story of Jesus in the Gospel depicts a conflict with the social elite situated in cities, and argues that the social status of Mark’s audience can be determined by observing stratification in the Gospel, which, he says, “is plausible

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Trinity Press, 1993) 115 n. 101, claims that it was only for the citizen poor. On the other hand, Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (London: Penguin, 1990 [Orig. French 1976]) 244, argues that the dole was not only for needy people, and we do not know how people were chosen for the list of those entitled; epitaphs show people were proud to be on the list. Wilfried Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 85, agrees, saying the dole was for a “relatively well-off segment.” According to P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225 BC–AD 14* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 109, the dole was not sufficient to support a family, so that the poor had to supplement their basic needs through other sources.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974) 87, who estimates that the equestrian and senatorial classes amounted to less than one-tenth of one percent in the empire, with the property requirement of the former being 250,000 times the daily wage of a labourer (88–89); see 111–14 for the contempt of the poor evidenced in Roman writers.

<sup>70</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering* 13, 15. He describes Simon of Cyrene (15:21) as a “peasant” coming in from the fields, although Mark merely says that he was walking into Jerusalem from the countryside (*agros*).

<sup>71</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering* 15. Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992 [Orig. French: 1989]) 260, mentions that, when a Roman citizen was seeking election to a public post, he would traditionally wear a “pure-white, chalk-bleached” toga to stand out from his peers. The poor would wear a toga that was rather brownish. Perhaps, in the status scene of the Transfiguration, Mark reminds his reader of this practice. Although the mention of white clothes is common in portraying heavenly figures in Christian and Jewish literature, as Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Jews,” *HTR* 42 (1999) 400, 402 n. 48, observes, Mark is the only writer to mention that the clothes were bleached whiter “than any human being on earth could bleach them” (9:3).

<sup>72</sup> Rohrbaugh, “Location” 114.

for a peasant audience in a small town or village setting.”<sup>73</sup> He is right in his view that the Gospel reflects the social situation behind it,<sup>74</sup> observing the references to those in political and religious power and of a higher social stratum, but a rural setting should not be the only one considered.<sup>75</sup> As the side-by-side existence of the poor and the very rich was more striking in Rome than anywhere, the Gospel would speak strongly to readers there about the type of power exercised by Roman society. Rohrbaugh concludes that Mark’s story “implies a group of readers who will celebrate the victories of the weak and the defeats of the strong,” but he fails to consider that this would describe the situation of Christians in Rome very well indeed.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Donald Senior has proposed that the Gospel displays an attitude to power that best reflects the social situation present in Rome.<sup>77</sup>

In addition, the repeated assertion that Mark has a dislike of cities is untenable. Kee claims that Mark has “a clear antipathy towards the city,” and that a Syrian provenance would account for this; “His images and metaphors [are] drawn from the life of field and village, and [he] has Jesus avoid cities,” showing “a clear preference for villages and open spaces in contrast to cities.”<sup>78</sup> However, he does not

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<sup>73</sup> Rohrbaugh, “Location” 115.

<sup>74</sup> “The simple requirements of verisimilitude and relevance in literature designed to *persuade* make substantial overlap between Mark’s story-world and Mark’s real world probable.” Rohrbaugh, “Location” 123.

<sup>75</sup> Rohrbaugh (“Location” 118–19) claims that the dominance of references to the social elite is “not because much of Mark’s story takes place in an urban environment where these groups lived, but because their control extended into rural areas in a pervasive way.” Surely, it is more likely that the Gospel reflects a social setting that is *in a city*, and in a major city at that, where there is a very powerful group in political power at the expense of the poor, and where there is daily contact.

<sup>76</sup> Rohrbaugh, “Location” 124. Similarly, Botha (“Mark’s Story” 164–65) proposes that his audience was “a peasant audience listening to an itinerant storyteller” as “folkloric legend” provided “an escape” from their “poverty, harassment and exploitation,” so that “Mark’s achievement” was to show them “the right of humiliated and scorned persons to make something of themselves . . . and rise above a subordinate position.”

<sup>77</sup> He notes that the clash of notions of kingship and the exhortation to give allegiance to Rome subject to allegiance to God (evident in other Roman documents from *Romans* to *1 Clement*) would fit the Roman setting best, and concludes that Mark wrote in 69, close enough to Nero for “time [not to have] tempered the terror. . . . No other place or time provided a more realistic setting for understanding the difference between the power of those who wielded ‘swords and clubs’ and those whose power rested on the hidden triumph of the Son of Man.” Donald Senior, “‘With Swords and Clubs . . .’: The Setting of Mark’s Community and His Critique of Abusive Power,” *BTB* 17 (1987) 14–19.

<sup>78</sup> He cites 1:38, 45; 5:14; 6:6b, 11, 31, 39; 8:4, 27; 11:2, 11; 13:3. Kee, *Community*

consider literary explanations. For example, the reference to “green grass” (6:39) is an allusion to Ps 23:2, and the depiction of Jesus staying outside cities (1:45) shows his willingness to become an outcast in order to heal a man. Further, Jesus’ overnight stay in Bethany (11:11) is hardly proof of a general dislike of cities, as Kee claims.<sup>79</sup> Nor is Jesus’ execution and burial outside the city walls evidence of antipathy towards cities,<sup>80</sup> as this was the common practice everywhere in the ancient world, including Rome, where both executions and burials occurred outside the Esquiline gate.

It is significant that Kee ignores one of the key Markan statements about Jesus’ missionary work: “Wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces (*agorais*)” (6:56). There, in a point in the Gospel which breaks down Jew–Gentile boundaries and where Jesus begins to make his main excursion into Gentile territory (cf. 5:1), Mark uses both *kōmē* and *polis*, and, although the latter can be used to describe large towns, it more normally refers to larger cities. A mention of preaching and healing in the *agorai* of cities in such a summary statement is hardly the act of an author that wants to depict Jesus as shunning cities. Waetjen, too, ignores 6:56.<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, any claim that Jesus shuns cities completely overlooks the fact that, in this Gospel, Jesus makes as his goal the great city of Jerusalem, the heart of the nation, and risks death in order to preach the message there. This motif would speak most to those who had followed the ‘way’ of Jesus in travelling to Rome, the Great City, to confront the heart of the Roman Empire, only to be rejected and to face execution.<sup>82</sup> The journey to the city is a strong motif in Mark,

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91, 103. Senior (“Swords” 14) points out that Mark never expresses a preference for the village. He describes Kee’s hypothesis as having “no historical corroboration,” and classifies his arguments as “weak,” and his evidence “rather fragile.”

<sup>79</sup> There are a number of possible literary reasons for Jesus’ stay outside Jerusalem: a rejection of Jerusalem and its Temple, a reflection of the hostility and plotting against Jesus evident from 3:6, or even a literary ploy to allow the fig tree episode to operate. In any event, with the very large number of pilgrims to Jerusalem for Passover, it may have been a common practice to stay outside the city, and Mark may have been aware of this.

<sup>80</sup> Kee, *Community* 104.

<sup>81</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering* 13. He cites Mark’s use of *agros* eight times and *kōmē* seven or eight times as evidence of the rural setting of the Markan community, but admits that *polis* also occurs eight times.

<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Kee (*Community* 97) recognises that “the Markan community obviously saw its own activity reflected in Jesus’ travels to Gentile regions,” but ignores the possibility that they also saw their story mirrored in Jesus’ journey to the capital to preach the gospel.

evident in 10:32–33 in particular, and his non-mention of other cities has the literary effect of emphasising Jesus' final goal.<sup>83</sup>

Theissen largely ignores the evidence in the Gospel for the readers being in a settled situation and of Mark having a positive view of such a setting.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the Gospel seems to address city readers fearing arrest. In particular, 13:11–13 strongly indicate a city readership, as they suggest that the persecutions 'promised' in 10:30 will occur in an environment of Roman courts, and that the readers are living with their family (who will betray them).<sup>85</sup> If so, Mark could have been in any city in the Empire and included some 'rural colour' from stories he knew, knowing that his city dwellers were familiar with farm practices, either from their place of origin, or by knowing of such things in the nearby countryside.

#### HOUSES AND FIELDS

*Truly I say to you, there is no one who  
has left house . . . or fields, for my sake  
and for the sake of the gospel . . . (10:29)*

In Rome, rural stories and images would not have been out of place at all. The city of Rome, although populous, did not cover a large area, and was in close contact with its surrounding countryside.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> As a parallel, the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis, emphasising God's promise of the land, are set in what appears to be a largely empty countryside, perhaps to persuade Jews still resident in Babylon to return. Like Mark, the writer(s) of Genesis ignored cities and peoples of the region for rhetorical purposes.

<sup>84</sup> John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983) 63 n. 55, points to 1:29–30; 2:12; 5:19; 6:10; 8:26; 9:36–37; 10:1–11, 13–16 as evidence of a settled life of the readers. In his most recent work, Theissen (*Gospels* 286) claims that Mark expanded the traditions of the itinerant charismatic preachers to apply them to features of Christian life "that can be realised even by those who do not leave house and land to take up the homeless life of discipleship; in fact, service to others is far more readily possible for them than for unpropertied wanderers." If so, surely this suggests that Mark has these settled readers before him as he writes. Remarkably, here he claims that this is why Mark has "relatively little material from the sayings traditions," which seems to counter his basic proposition.

<sup>85</sup> Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 48) has rightly observed that Mark seems to have been addressing people in a city or cities, because it was there that they could not avoid the pressure of hatred and betrayal and the involvement of city authorities. However, he insists that the Gospel retains the rural "colour" from the traditions, and that Mark's intended readers therefore lived in both the city and the surrounding rural areas.

<sup>86</sup> See Glenn R. Storey, "The Population of Ancient Rome," *Antiquity* 71 (1997)

Traffic between rural areas and the city of Rome was extensive, especially because of the markets and entertainments of Rome, and Romans moved out into the countryside at harvest time for work.<sup>87</sup> Wealthy Romans highly valued the country life: Columella (writing ca. 61–64 CE) recommended a nearby estate for relief from a busy day, and spoke of senators being summoned by “road-men” (*viatores*) from their villas to the Senate in earlier times (*On Agriculture* 1.1.19; also 1 Praef. 18; 1.1.12–14; 1.2.1). Although he lived in the country, he was closely in touch with contemporary Roman figures, including Seneca and Pliny the Elder, and had a comprehensive knowledge of Roman writers.<sup>88</sup>

Country life was often idealised in Roman poetry, and Roman writers of the late Republic and the early Empire regularly included rural images, metaphors and stories in their works.<sup>89</sup> Bechtler points out the numerous agrarian figures used by Paul in Rom 11:17; 1 Cor 3:8; 9:7–11; 15:37–39, 42–44; 2 Cor 9:6–10, and cites Danker’s observation: “Agrarian metaphors are stock-in-trade for the most urbanised Roman authors and their urbanised auditors.”<sup>90</sup>

MacMullen describes the very close relationship between the city and its surrounding countryside throughout the Roman world, and the way in which Roman and Greek authors presented idealised views of the country as a place where life “accords best with nature,”

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966–78, for a recent attempt to estimate the population of Rome at this time. Earlier estimates had ranged up to one million inhabitants but, based on typical population densities and the area of the city, Storey calculates 500,000 people. However, he only deals with the area within the boundaries recognised by the later Aurelian wall, and admits that this figure would be considerably enlarged if those outside those boundaries and those in the hinterland were included.

<sup>87</sup> Brunt, *Italian Manpower* 110. Peter Jones and Keith Sidwell, *The World of Rome: An Introduction to Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 142–44, note that “the countryside of the area around Rome itself is not physically removed from the city,” and cite an inscription of a city retailer of leather goods who was buried in a community in the Tiber valley, 45 miles north of Rome, adding that the river would have provided easy contact.

<sup>88</sup> Harrison Boyd (trans.), in the introduction to Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella, *On Agriculture* (London: Heinemann, 1941) ix–x.

<sup>89</sup> “Almost every Roman writer at some time refers to country life”; even “men about town,” such as Juvenal and Persius, used rural images. Frayn, *Subsistence Farming* 13. Virgil, in his *Georgics*, extolled rural life, beginning in this way: “What makes the cornfield smile . . . here more blithely springs the corn, and here the grape” (1.1). White (*Country Life* 105) discusses the rural themes in the Augustan poets. Clarke (*Quintilian* 32) notes that “agriculture and the countryside . . . are among the pursuits which provide [Quintilian] with his illustrations.”

<sup>90</sup> Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering Community and Christology in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 67, 87.

and a place of bounty and harmony.<sup>91</sup> Romans would adorn their rooms with landscape scenes.<sup>92</sup> From Rome, Martial, writing during the latter decades of the first century, describes the idyllic life on the estate of a friend at Baiae, of “the strapping daughters of honest farmers” bringing gifts of produce, and “a cheerful neighbour invited to dine” and, from another near-Rome farm, describes the views of the hills of Rome and of “the noiseless stream of travellers” to the city along the northern Flaminian Way (*Epigrams* 3.58; 4.64).<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, there had been a strong move of people to Rome in the preceding century, both from the Italian countryside and from other parts of the Empire.<sup>94</sup> Seneca (*Consol. Ad. Helv. Matr.* 6.2) speaks of the crowds of people who have “flooded in from the country towns of Italy, in fact from all over the world.”<sup>95</sup> It may well be that some of the Christian community of Rome looked more fondly to places other than the city in which they lived, especially considering the very poor living conditions there for the lower classes. In the late fifties, of those listed by Paul in Rom 16, Epänetus, Andronicus, Junia, Urbanus, Stachys and the mother of Rufus are all said to be from places other than Rome. Some, perhaps many, of the Markan community had birthplaces in rural areas, and came as immigrants from the East, or as slaves.

Other members of the Christian community of Rome may have lived in the nearby countryside, walking into the city or coming up or down the Tiber to the house-churches.<sup>96</sup> Lampe has identified the Transtiber district as the earliest Christian locale in Rome, and it was close to both rural districts and to the river.<sup>97</sup> However, rural areas were also

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<sup>91</sup> MacMullen, *Social Relations* 27–28, 55–56. Recent research around Pompeii shows that there is “no sharp division between city and rural life.” Kevin Greene, *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (London: Batsford, 1986) 141.

<sup>92</sup> Freeman, *Romans* 97.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in White, *Country Life* 91–92, 114.

<sup>94</sup> The drift was notable in the first century BCE as rural conditions deteriorated, with “much misery in the country.” Brunt, *Italian Manpower* 109.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London: Duckworth, 1979) 13–14, who comments that they came for opportunity and work, and because of their trade skills. They would retain the status of *peregrini* unless they applied for an individual grant of citizenship to the emperor after some time. He also cites Juvenal’s famous remark (*Satires* 3.60–62): “The Syrian Orontes is now a tributary of the Tiber,” and Lucan (39–65 CE) lamenting the inflow into Rome of Galatians, Syrians, Cappadocians, Galli, Hiberi, Armenians and Cilicians after the civil war (*Phars.* 7.535–43).

<sup>96</sup> Jones and Sidwell (*Rome* 164) note that eligibility for the dole probably extended well into the countryside.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2nd ed.: 1989) 52. From later evidence, he concludes that there

not far from other parts of Rome, and it did not take long to walk across the city. It is possible that one or more of the house-churches met in the nearby countryside because of the difficulty in finding a suitable place in the city.<sup>98</sup>

There were many small farms close to Rome at that time, in an area extensively used for market gardening.<sup>99</sup> Mark's indication that Christians had left "house" and "fields" (10:29–30) may simply mean that some readers had left their farms or country life as tenants or workers to join the community in Rome. Alternatively, it may allude to members of the community that had lost their family property as a result of the loss of a member of their family through persecution, perhaps even through delation by a neighbour, as an informer was rewarded with a portion of the convicted person's estate. There was continual pressure on the small farms in the vicinity of Rome in the first century, with the tendency for small farmers to be absorbed into larger holdings, or to be assimilated into the country estate of wealthy Romans.<sup>100</sup>

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were a number of concentrations of Christians, the oldest being in the Transtiber district and on the Via Appia around the Porta Capena.

<sup>98</sup> Mark's mention of bleaching (9:3), if it connects with the trade of any of his readers (or his own), may be an indication that not all of the readers were close to the city centre. Jeffers (*Greco-Roman* 27) says that bleaching would normally be undertaken outside a city because of the smell.

<sup>99</sup> Brunt (*Italian Manpower* 344–50) cites H. Nissen for "extensive evidence" of market gardening in the vicinity of Rome. Southern Etruria abutted the Transtiber district of Rome, and there were a number of such towns in easy walking distance. The archaeological study by the British School at Rome of the region of the *Ager Capenas*, the area immediately north of the city, north of the Milvian bridge on the west bank of the Tiber, found that "it is small farms that form the majority of sites" in the M. Forco region, and none were larger than the others, making it unlikely to represent an environment of landlord and tenant farmers. They noted the degree of reliance on the river for sending produce to market. G. D. B. Jones, "Capena and the Ager Capenas," *PBSR* N.S. 17 (1962) 116–207, especially 147; "Capena and the Ager Capenas: Part II," *PBSR* N.S. 18 (1963) 100–158, especially 105. Similarly, Anne Kahane, Leslie Murray Threipland and John Ward-Perkins, "The Ager Veientanus, North and East of Rome," *PBSR* N.S. 23 (1968) 149–58, in investigating the area around Veii (15 km northeast of Rome), have found that archaeological evidence shows both large and small dwellings in the first century CE. Small farmers only disappeared under the stresses of the third century CE. For a map produced as a result of the British School's survey of villas and farms, extending as close to Rome as the Fulvian Bridge, see Greene, *Archaeology* 104. Frayn (*Subsistence Farming* 18) describes the coastal regions, also not far from Rome, as occupied by "villagers who were engaged in agriculture, seafaring, fishing and the salt trade." She also notes that the Tiber was used extensively as a means of communication, and could be navigated up as far as Ripetta in 1905 (26, 37). Perhaps there were even fishermen connected with the Christian community of Rome.

<sup>100</sup> Edward Champlin, "The *Suburbium* of Rome," *AJAH* 7 (1982) 102. As 10:23



It is not denied that Mark used stories that had an Eastern origin, but their inclusion in his narrative is no indication that he or his readers were in the East. A reader in Rome would have found his metaphors and scenes just as meaningful.

In 15:21, Mark gives us the picture of Simon “coming in from the country” (*ap’ agrou*), commandeered to carry the cross to Calvary. It is an unnecessary scene. Perhaps Simon represents those who came into Rome from the country, only to find themselves carrying a cross to a Roman place of execution. This may indeed be a piece of ‘local colour.’

### ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS?

*You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. . . . You will be hated by all because of my name. (13:9, 13)*

Most commentators who advocate an Eastern setting have further argued that Josephus’ reports of strife during the Jewish War explain the mood of the text and the references in the Gospel to persecution, betrayal and trials. Kee is typical: he maintains that, before 70, the refusal by Christians to be involved in the anti-Roman struggle would have “enraged the revolutionaries,” and they would also have been targeted by Gentiles because of their suspected Jewish sympathies.<sup>101</sup>

Schenke argues that Mark’s community, situated “in the Hellenistic cities in the Syrian border region,” were seen as “a special group of Judaism.” He asserts: “We might assume without further ado . . . [that Christians] were dealt with in the disturbances and pogroms against the Jews in the same way.”<sup>102</sup> Mark summarises “what could happen to Jewish Christians,” especially as they followed a messianic agitator crucified by Romans, and the motif of “possible martyrdom”

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speaks of the uselessness of riches, and 10:42 of the misuse of power by those who “lord it over” others, it is possible that 10:30 alludes to the unjust acquisition of farm properties. De Neeve (*Farm-Tenancy* 143–45, 157, 161, 169) discusses farmers who lost their land through debts, and then became tenants, and notes that, as “land ownership was the foundation for status,” the trend was to expand one’s property, with debt-bondage occurring on a large scale in the first century BCE.

<sup>101</sup> The Markan community, putting forward “prophetic claims . . . could expect little but suspicion and hostility from Jew and Gentile alike.” Kee, *Community* 99–100.

<sup>102</sup> He also claims that “officially imposed accusations and persecutions” occurred against the Jews throughout the whole of the region, but offers no evidence. Schenke, *Markusevangelium* 23, 36, 40.

may just remind of earlier martyrs—James, son of Zebedee, James, brother of the Lord, and Peter. Only those living nearby, he argues, directly experienced the “cruel horrors” of the war, and there is no need to connect the Gospel with the Neronian persecution, as it fits better the “atmosphere of hatred” towards Jews around the war zone during 66–69, especially in Antioch.<sup>103</sup>

Marcus has been particularly influential, proposing instead that Christians suffered persecution from “Jewish revolutionary groups” during the war because of their openness to non-Jews.<sup>104</sup> He says that the “real bitterness of the Gospel is directed against Jews, not Romans,” and that Chapter 13 especially reflects the war—features, he contends, which are “most easily explained” if Mark wrote “in geographical and temporal proximity” to it.<sup>105</sup> He proposes that Mark and others fled Jerusalem after the rebels took control of the Temple in 67/68, and went to a Decapolis city (possibly Pella), joining a Gentile Christian community. He suggests that they were attacked by both Jews and Gentiles there.<sup>106</sup> Marcus had agreed with Theissen that the Gospel was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70, especially in view of the “precision of 13:1–2.”<sup>107</sup> Now, however, he has become less certain about the date, saying only that it was written “in the shadow of its destruction,” some time between 69 and 75.

None of these scenarios adequately explain all of the indicators of setting in the Gospel. Indeed, characteristic of claims for the East is the vagueness of the particular situation proposed. Elements of evidence are collected from Josephus—attacks on Jews and on Gentiles, the war, Jew–Gentile tensions, trials of dissenters in Jerusalem, the threat to and destruction of the Temple—and the conclusion is reached that the Gospel alludes to these contemporary events. But there is no specific time and place proposed where it can be shown

<sup>103</sup> Schenke, *Markusevangelium* 36, 38, 47. He cites *JW* 7.41–62, 100–11.

<sup>104</sup> Marcus, *Way* 199, 201; cf. “Jewish War” 453.

<sup>105</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 33, 35. However, “bitterness” towards the Jews is found throughout the New Testament because of the rejection of Jesus and his followers by his people (cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16), and the inclusion of such a theme is no evidence of an Eastern setting or the tensions of the Jewish War. If Mark was addressing such bitterness towards the rebels, far greater reference to opponents other than the High Priests and Pharisees could be expected. Marcus relies heavily on the “den of bandits” accusation in 11:17 as an indication of such opponents (“Jewish War” 448–51; *Mark* 35), but it will be argued that this is primarily an allusion to Jer 7:11 and to the destruction of the Temple.

<sup>106</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 35–36.

<sup>107</sup> Marcus, “Jewish War” 460.

that it was feasible for all of these elements to come together and match the Gospel text.

Those who favour the East accept that the Gospel was written at a time when persecution was continuing. If so, to plausibly provide a setting for the attacks on Christians indicated by this Gospel, it would have to be shown that:

- If the violence was associated with the attacks against Jews at the outbreak of the war in 66, they continued until at least 69, as the Gospel reflects either the destruction of the Temple, or an imminent expectancy of it,
- Attacks by Gentiles, or by Jewish revolutionaries, extended to Christians, and
- The Roman authorities condoned and participated in the attacks.

Such propositions, it will be argued, are unrealistic.

#### *Attacks by Gentiles?*

Although both Theissen and Marcus admit that we have no evidence for the persecution of Christians in Syria,<sup>108</sup> they, with Kee and Schenke, contend that Gentiles attacked Christians either because they could not identify Christians as being separate from Jews, or because of their supposed ‘pro-Jewish sympathies.’<sup>109</sup> These claims contradict the evidence for the situation of Christians in Syria in the late first century: Luke portrays them as a clearly identifiable group separate from synagogue Jews early in the history of the movement. It was in Antioch that they were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), before the late forties, and the community included many Gentiles.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 268; Marcus, *Mark* 34, who describes this lack of evidence as “the weakest point” in an argument for the environment of the Jewish War.

<sup>109</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 260–69) proposes that, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Markan community in Syria feared the establishment of a pagan cult on the site of the Temple, and it was being attacked by Gentiles. They “were close to the Jews and shared their fate,” as they “rejected the gods and had restricted table fellowship.” He claims (262) that Mark expected more trouble, as the rebellion had not yet been completely put down. He also maintains (269) that intra-familial betrayal “must” have occurred, citing only Josephus’ report (*JW* 7.47) of the accusation by Antiochus against his father and other Jews of a plot to burn Antioch.

<sup>110</sup> Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1978) 5, point out that they were designated “Christ-people,” standing them out from Jews. This, they say, “calls attention to the fact that the ‘Christ-movement’ attained a degree and kind of self-identity at Antioch which made it visible to outsiders as a distinct movement

It is difficult to believe that the populace twenty years later would not distinguish between Christians and Jews. It is also most unlikely that, forty years after Jesus' death and probably with an even stronger Gentile element in the Antioch church than when Paul was there, Christians would have even considered being supporters of the rebels.<sup>111</sup> There is no evidence in Josephus' account that the rebels could enlist the help of Jews from any part of the Diaspora, let alone induce Christians to support them.<sup>112</sup>

If members of Mark's community had been killed and were still being killed by Gentiles because of their supposed Jewish sympathies, one would have thought, then, that Mark would have been keen to distance his readers from Jews and Jewish practices, and yet his Gospel looks very Jewish in language, symbols and motifs, uses the Jewish Scriptures extensively, and accepts the value of the Jewish law and certain Jewish practices. His treatment of the Sabbath does not urge its non-observance, only its reasonable observance (2:27–28). Although he denies the food laws (7:18–23) and the place of the Temple as the centre for the forgiveness of sins (11:14, 24–25), he accepts the Jewish ritual for pronouncing cleanliness from skin disease (1:44), objects to the Temple's improper use (11:17), has Jesus and his disciples observe the Passover and sing a Jewish hymn

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very early in its history." Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, is the first known to have used the term "Christianity" (*Christianismos*: *Mag.* 10.1, 3; *Rom.* 3.3; *Philad.* 6.1), and used *Christianos* seven times in his letters.

<sup>111</sup> Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 322–24, asserts that the Gospel was written at the "outbreak and initial stages" of the war, and reflects the temptation for Christians to take up arms and destroy the wicked, "caught up in the revolt's allure and all it seemed to promise for God's elect." He claims that the persecution in Rome is not a "plausible 'candidate'," as only in the East did it become an option for Christians to support the war, and that a Roman setting does not explain the warnings not to be led astray by pseudo-Messiahs and false prophets, which he takes to be a call to oppose enemies of Israel. However, there is no reason to assume that anyone called the readers to take up arms, and non-violence is only a minor motif in the Gospel (14:47–49). It is also very difficult to understand what benefits Mark's Christian readers could have expected from such a struggle. Nor does Gibson explain how the imminent destruction of the Temple would be expected at the outbreak of the war.

<sup>112</sup> There is only the late, unsubstantiated report by Dio (66.4.3) that the Jews received the help of countrymen from the region, from other parts of the Empire, including beyond the Euphrates, but this might be just an exaggeration of the extent of the opposition. James McLaren has verbally suggested that Dio might have been confused by Josephus' reference to his first version of *Jewish War* written for Jews beyond the Euphrates (*JW* 1.3). There is also Josephus' remark that "the Jews hoped that all of their nation which were beyond the Euphrates would have raised an insurrection together with them" (*JW* 1.5).

(14:12–16, 26), and refers to the Jewish covenant (14:24). If its contents were reported to outsiders, his document might have added to any suspicions that they were Jewish sympathisers.

Further, Mark warns: “You will stand before governors and kings *because of me, as a testimony to them. . . . You will be hated by all because of my name*” (13:9, 13; cf. 8:38: “those who are ashamed of me”). This shows that their opponents were identifying them as Christians, and they were being tried as such, not for appearing to be Jews, or for supporting the Jewish revolt.

The attacks on Jews on which these commentators rely appear to have been short-lived riots about issues that would have been of no concern to Christians, and would probably have been limited to the latter part of 66, before the Roman forces arrived. The first and most serious attack, in Caesarea, was the climax of long-standing tensions over Jewish rights in that city (see especially *Ant.* 20.173–76; *JW* 2.284–94).<sup>113</sup> Later riots in other Syrian cities were triggered by news of that event (*JW* 2.458, 461), probably exacerbated by similar tensions.<sup>114</sup> It is unlikely that Jewish Christians would have been advocating Jewish civic rights anywhere, and, if any Christians were caught up in the attacks, it is likely to have been incidental and peripheral, not extensive and systematic.<sup>115</sup>

Evidence suggests that these troubles did not last long. Although the inhabitants of Ptolemais were said to have killed 2,000 Jews during the riots (*JW* 2.477), when Vespasian and his troops marched down from Antioch, the initial point of assembly of the Roman forces, there is no indication that he was restoring order, indicating that the local authorities had already dealt with the problems of a few months earlier (*JW* 2.500; 3.29).

<sup>113</sup> For the initial attacks, see *JW* 2.457–80, 487–98, 559–61. Josephus’ tendency to exaggerate is a factor to consider, notable in his claim that the Caesareans killed more than 20,000 Jews in one hour (2.457; cf. 2.561). In *JW* 7.361–69, Josephus laments over the fate of the nation, describing how surrounding cities killed Jews in large numbers, so that there was “not one Syrian city which did not slay their Jewish inhabitants” (7.367). In 7.363–67, his defence against suggestions that the Caesarean mob action was due to long-lived Jew-Gentile quarrels seems to be an attempt to downplay the Jewish role in the civil strife.

<sup>114</sup> Josephus’ report (*JW* 2.463) that the Syrians turned on “Judaizers” as well as Jews seems to refer to those who “mingled” with the Jewish community, and who probably advocated or followed Jewish practices. It is most unlikely that Christians would have been seen as such, especially at this late stage.

<sup>115</sup> Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 40) argues that only Jewish Christians were under attack, but Mark appears to warn *all* his readers against persecution; see 8:34, where Jesus turns to the whole crowd and invites “whoever wants to follow” him to be prepared to take up their cross, and 13:37: “What I say to you I say to all.”

Antioch, where there was a significant Christian presence, as well as the other northern cities, Sidon and Apamea, did not rise up against the Jews. Josephus suggests that the lack of riots in Antioch was because there were so many Jews there, but he also indicates that there was little enthusiasm in that city for siding with the insurgents (*JW* 2.479). Cestius had been confident enough that Antioch was under control that he removed the Twelfth Legion to deal with unrest elsewhere (*JW* 2.500).

Antiochus' action against the Jews of Antioch soon after Vespaian's arrival in 67 is not an indication that Vespaian permitted harassment of the Jewish population by Roman troops. Antiochus is said to have stirred up the people against those who would not sacrifice in the theatre, and harassed the Jewish population (*JW* 7.47–62, 100–11). He is described as an *archōn* of the Jews, possibly simply a synagogue leader, who seemed intent on demonstrating to the populace that he had abandoned his Jewish ways (*JW* 7.47, 50), and he probably now held some civic post, as he could call on the assistance of Roman troops (*JW* 7.52). This seems to be a unique set of circumstances when an apostate Jew tried opportunistically to make his influence felt just as Vespaian arrived early in the war. There is no evidence of killings in Antioch associated with this harassment and, although Jew–Gentile relations were no doubt strained in that city, there seems to have been little spilling of blood at any time (*JW* 2.479; 7.49, 56).<sup>116</sup>

Both Barclay and Theissen point to Titus' attitude towards the Jews of Antioch in 70/71 when, after his victory, he destroyed a synagogue there to build a theatre, and erected a provocative monument on the city gate using cherubim that were spoils from the Jerusalem Temple (Malalas, *Chron.* 261), a story which Barclay regards as “believable,” given Titus' use of spoils elsewhere.<sup>117</sup> But it is likely that Titus' actions were directly related to the victory atmosphere at the end of the war and his triumphant display in Eastern cities

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<sup>116</sup> According to *JW* 7.52, when Antiochus disallowed the observance of the Sabbath in Antioch, the prohibition spread to other cities “for some small time.” Mark's Gospel does not reflect such a ban, as he advocates a liberal attitude to the Sabbath, not the dispensing with it, nor the hiding of its observance (cf. 2:27–28). Those verses suggest that some Christians were still respecting the Sabbath in some way, and this indicates that Mark was not writing either in Antioch or in the surrounding region during this period.

<sup>117</sup> John Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 248–57; Theissen, *Gospels* 263, who claims that this heightened the expectancy of the erection of a pagan temple in Jerusalem.

affirming Roman might, and they offer no evidence of the situation in the intervening four years.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Josephus' scene of the people going out of the city to welcome Titus, and to urge him to remove the Jews, again reflects the ongoing dispute over Jewish rights, not an attempt to kill them (*JW* 7.100–4). The citizens seem to have believed that the matter had to be raised through legal channels, suggesting that there had been firm control by the Roman authorities, and Titus' decision to affirm their rights is likely to be a reflection of the Roman attitude towards keeping order in the city throughout the war.

The nature of the attacks on Jews that Josephus describes in the first months of the war hardly amounts to a systematic persecution by the authorities involving trials, and although Josephus' repeatedly mentions the ingrained hatred of the Jews by the Syrians (*JW* 1.88; 2.461, 478, 502; 5.550–1, 556; 7.367), there is no evidence of the execution of Jews by the Roman authorities in these cities during or after the war. The killings in 66 resulted from riots. It is very difficult to imagine otherwise: with the Roman concern for order and tight civil control, it is highly unlikely that the authorities, once Vespasian arrived and his legions began to assemble, would tolerate, sponsor or condone constant lawless mob actions against Jews, let alone Jewish Christians suspected of Jewish sympathies. This would have brought disorder in an already tense situation, and Roman legions were needed for direct attacks against rebel strongholds, not to keep control in every town and city in Syria.

### *Attacks by Jews?*

Similarly, the idea that Jewish revolutionary leaders were persecuting Christians fails in a number of respects.<sup>119</sup> Marcus claims that 13:9 reflects trials similar to those held by the rebels in Jerusalem of those advocating peace with Rome.<sup>120</sup> His picture is quite unclear. According to his scenario, Christians had left Jerusalem in 67/68 and joined a

<sup>118</sup> Meeks and Wilken (*Jews and Christians* 5) go too far when they suggest that “the Jews were still in danger until the coming of Titus,” relying only on the Antiochus incident in 67, and the incidents surrounding Titus' visit in 70/71. They cite *JW* 7.100–3.

<sup>119</sup> Marcus, *Way* 36–37, 201; “Jewish War” 453; Kee, *Community* 99–100.

<sup>120</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 34. He cites Donahue who, he acknowledges, had later repudiated the idea that 13:9–13 alluded to the trials of the rebels, and had rejected a setting in the East in favour of Rome.

community in the Decapolis. Marcus does not seem to be suggesting that 13:9 reflects only the memory of incidents before some of them left Jerusalem, as he rightly recognises not only that the Gospel prepares the readers for the possibility of martyrdom,<sup>121</sup> but also that the intensity of the persecution is so marked in the text that it is “a daily reality.”<sup>122</sup> He seems to be suggesting that such trials could still be occurring in the Decapolis. However, he does not describe the current social situation of Christians there at all, or attempt to explain how trials by rebels could still be happening some time between 69 and 75 in an area long pacified by the Romans. After 70, his scenario would require that rebels were still having free run of some Syrian city holding trials and executing people thought to be supporting the Romans. Such a setting is unimaginable.

Moreover, the trials by revolutionaries that he cites do not match those described in the Gospel. Indeed, he only discusses those mentioned in 13:9, not those described more explicitly in 13:11–13, which, as noted above, do not refer to trials of supposed Roman sympathisers, or of those refusing to fight, but to trials for being a Christian. The reason given (13:13 “you will be hated by all because of my name”) seems to reflect the well-known Roman treatment of, and disdain for, Christians.<sup>123</sup> Its similarity to the language of Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44: “hatred of the human race”) has often been noted and, overall, the scene seems to describe the interrogation of a Christian before a Roman magistrate.

There is no evidence that the actions or even the attitudes of those rebels in Jerusalem were mirrored in Antioch or anywhere else in Syria; such an assertion lies in the realm of speculation.<sup>124</sup> The

<sup>121</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 29. He notes that 10:30 expects persecution “now, in this time.”

<sup>122</sup> Marcus, *Way* 127. In this work, he assumes throughout that further persecution was expected, describing the readers as being “in the midst of these persecutions” (127). Members of Mark’s community, he says (36–37, 195), would recognise in Jesus’ way to Jerusalem “their own path of suffering and death,” citing 10:45; 14:24. Indeed, Marcus’ analysis of the text well shows how the Gospel is a response to ongoing persecution.

<sup>123</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 40) argues that the scenario of Jewish attacks on Christians in Syria is “untenable,” as Christians could not have escaped by abjuring their faith, and these verses, with 9:42–48, “clearly” points to a situation of arrests and interrogation of individuals who apparently can avoid torture and execution by denying that they are Christians. He argues for Rome, but before 70 (41, 52).

<sup>124</sup> Myers (*Strong Man* 333–34, 419) argues that Christians in Galilee were opposed by both Jewish rebels, who insisted that they take a stand, and by the Romans. He claims that, in 69, “Roman storm troopers” marched through Galilee, leaving burned villages and a trail of crosses (414). “It does not take much historical imagination



Roman authorities in Syrian cities could not have been involved, as they would hardly help Jewish revolutionaries attack Roman supporters. Nor could rebels have put residents of those cities on trial and executed them without quick suppression either by Roman forces or by the city authorities.<sup>125</sup> The Roman order would not tolerate lynch mobs anywhere in the Empire.

### *Crucifixion*

Perhaps the most serious difficulty for a setting during these troubles, and one that seems always to be ignored by proponents of an Eastern setting, is that the readers of this Gospel are not just harassed, but are threatened by the possibility of crucifixion. Indeed, some advocates for the East ignore all of the references to persecution in the Gospel.<sup>126</sup> Disregarding these threats in a reading of the Gospel disembowels the text, and will certainly result in a very different picture of Mark's readers.<sup>127</sup> The strong motif of persecution in the Gospel has to be explained, not in relation to random attacks by mobs, but to executions by legal authorities for being a Christian, because Mark's text demands this.

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to assume that during this period rebel supporters were going throughout Palestine calling the faithful to the final battle" (329). However, Vespasian pacified Galilee in 67 and, by 69, had fortified all the cities around Jerusalem (*JW* 4.486). Moreover, his claim that 13:11–13 refers to 'legal' measures taken against Christians (314) because "suspected rebels were routinely executed by Rome, and suspected collaborators by the Zealots" is quite misleading—both refer to events in Jerusalem, not in Galilee or Syria, the former referring only to those who tried to escape the Jerusalem siege in 70.

<sup>125</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 270) claims that trials of Christians before "councils, synagogues, kings and governors" must have occurred in the East, because all of these authorities existed together there, but he makes no attempt to propose what the charges would be before such bodies in the setting of the Jewish War.

<sup>126</sup> In claiming that only two passages (8:38–9:1; 10:40) link the suffering of disciples to that of Jesus, Botha ("Mark's Story" 174) makes no mention of the threat of crucifixion, the exhortations to be ready to give one's life, nor the prospect of appearance before courts (not referring to 8:34 or 13:9–13). Waetjen (*Reordering* 198) ignores the setting of 13:9–13. Mack (*Mythi*) ignores all references to persecution and martyrdom, and does not even cite in his work the references to them in 4:17, 10:30 or 13:9–13.

<sup>127</sup> Söding ("Evangelist" 32) denies that executions occurred, arguing that state and civic bodies "probably pursued the goal of intimidation, confusion and deterrence of Christians" because of the preaching of a political Messiah-king during the war, but that the Markan community "hardly stands in a martyrological situation." Instead, he asserts, Mark writes against the temptation to weaken under this pressure.

There has been a tendency, too, by Eastern proponents to be indefinite in referring to the authorities that carried out these executions. Marcus had spoken of Mark's readers being "delivered for judgement to rulers and monarchs," and he referred to "the successor of the earthly authorities" who killed John the Baptist now "doing what they want" to the Markan community, without identifying those authorities.<sup>128</sup> Recently, he has also pointed to the persecution of Christians by Jewish rebels in the Second Jewish War (132–35 CE), claiming: "It is not therefore implausible that they were similarly harassed" in the first rebellion.<sup>129</sup> However, such actions by Bar Kokhba and his supporters would have occurred in areas under rebel control, not in cities under the control of the Romans.

When Mark warns of the action to take when arrested and brought "to trial" (13:11–13), he just assumes that the reader knows the outcome of such a trial for the one who "endures to the end." The warning about familial betrayal (13:12) is that a brother, parent or a child will have the Christian member of the family "put to death." Mark uses *thanatoō*, a word that always relates to an execution by legal authorities (cf. 14:55; Exod 21:12, 14–17; 1 Macc 1:57; Rom 8:36; 2 Cor 6:9; Matt 27:1).

The specific mention of the cross in 8:34 shows that it is the prime fear in the community. Indeed, the whole Gospel implies that it is a possibility for the reader, as it graphically depicts Jesus leading the way for all of his followers. In the story, the disciples flee from the same fate as Jesus—crucifixion. A reader appearing before a magistrate in the circumstances described in 13:11–13 could only expect the same form of punishment (if he or she was a non-citizen). Any proposed scenario therefore has to demonstrate a plausible threat of crucifixion. As crucifixion could only be carried out by Roman authorities throughout the Empire, a setting that involves a legal Roman trial has to be found. Indeed, for a capital offence in the provinces, the governor himself would need to have been involved.<sup>130</sup> The fact

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<sup>128</sup> Marcus, *Way* 76, 109. Again, he vaguely speaks of the readers being "brought to trial before the authorities" and condemned to death, citing 13:9–12, even citing the involvement of magistrates (169, 171).

<sup>129</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 34, citing Justin, *First Apology* 31.6; *Apoc. Pet.* 2:8–13.

<sup>130</sup> See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 28–31, for a discussion of trial procedures in the provinces and the powers of the governor.

remains that we have no evidence at all for Roman executions of Christians in the East at this time.<sup>131</sup>

There is no evidence of crucifixion being carried out either by rebels or by the mob in Caesarea or in other attacks on Jews, and it is highly unlikely that mob crucifixions would have been tolerated in areas under Roman control. Theissen's claim that "the *Sitz im Leben* of all the Gospel redactions is thus the 'local community'"<sup>132</sup> would require, for Mark, that trials and crucifixions were happening to Christians in Syrian towns and villages.

Overall, the Gospel text is not explained by the situation in the East.

## AN UNUSUAL DEBATE

*Worse horrors reigned in the City. (Tacitus)*

Other scholars have favoured the Syrian region, using similar arguments.<sup>133</sup> However, advocates for the East do not apply the same methods to Rome. They typically dismiss Rome very quickly, using only very few criteria, and then consider quite different matters when discussing the East.

Marxsen gives no arguments for Rome at all, except to say that "the oft-named Latinisms in Mark's Gospel have scarcely any significance here, since they are part of the tradition, not the redaction,"<sup>134</sup> thus

<sup>131</sup> Hengel, *Four Gospels* 259 n. 323, points out that the first known crucifixion of a Christian in Syria occurred around 107, recorded in Eusebius, *E.H.* 3.32.6.

<sup>132</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 292.

<sup>133</sup> Dahm (*Israel* 282–85) proposes a region "in the milieu of Palestine" in an environment of danger and Parousia expectancy, on the basis of "text-imminent arguments." In doing so, he seems to observe the mood of the text as much as its content. Mack (*Myth* 315–21) places it in the early seventies: "Jesus people in Southern Syria would have been abuzz for several years about rumours of wars in Jerusalem, popular Messiahs on the march, and the Roman armies coming and going." Söding ("Evangelist" 30) favours a place near Palestine because "the spectrum of Jesus traditions" suggest the Gospel's "birthplace" lies nearer to Palestine, noting that the Jewish war had affected the community badly. Others to prefer Galilee or Syria are: Achtemeier, *Mark* 115; Dieter Lührmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1987) 6–7; Mann, *Mark* 80–83. Theissen (*Gospels* 236 n. 3) also cites W. Schmithals, H. Koester, K. M. Fischer, and K. Berger. Recently, David Rhoads ("Social Criticism" 141–45; cf. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 2) follows Theissen and Kee, placing it "in Galilee or rural Syria around 70."

<sup>134</sup> Marxsen, *Mark* 66. Similarly, see Achtemeier, *Mark* 114–15. Söding ("Evangelist" 29) considers only the Papias' evidence and Latinisms for Rome, and so argues that the setting could be anywhere. Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*

proposing, strangely, that Mark's sources contained a heavy Latin content. Although Kee is really quite correct in his basic idea that "what must be taken into account in any comprehensive analysis is the social and cultural factors which give rise to this kind of literature,"<sup>135</sup> he only applies his sociological approach to a proposed setting in Syria. He dismisses Rome very early in his discussion with the comment:

Among scholars and interpreters of conservative bent, there has often been a determination to cling to the familiar claim of Papias that Mark had been the interpreter of Peter and that he had written down 'accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord.'<sup>136</sup>

He seems to merely equate the argument for Rome as an argument for the accuracy of the tradition, and does not consider what the social, political or religious circumstances of the Christian community might be in Rome, and how well the text might fit a Roman situation.

Theissen, too, seems to consider that the argument for Rome is an argument for the tradition. Theissen's first step in his discussion of location is this: "It seems natural to think that the oldest Gospel was written in the land where Hellenistic Christianity originated."<sup>137</sup> The idea of an Eastern setting seems to come more from intuition, building on his prior thesis on the origin of the traditions, than from weighing the evidence. He then proceeds to discount the tradition by saying that the earliest form of the tradition (Papias) is neutral on the Gospel's location, connecting it only with Peter, which could have occurred anywhere, and that "most of the early reports about Mark himself point more to the East." In doing so, he just assumes that 'Mark' is the John Mark of the New Testament without discussion, and claims that the John Mark–Peter connection could have occurred in Syria.<sup>138</sup>

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(London: SCM Press, 1966 [Orig. German: 1965]) 70, argues only that, since (a) the Papias note is uncertain, (b) the Latinisms are "largely military terminology," and (c) 10:12 is a Markan expansion for his Gentile readers, the only argument for Rome is that a significant church must be behind the Gospel; "otherwise nothing points to Rome." Thus, a community "in the East is much more likely."

<sup>135</sup> Kee, *Community* 77–80. He regards the apocalypticism that he detects in the Gospel as a reaction to economic exploitation and Hellenisation in the East, but does not consider whether it could have arisen in another, very different, situation elsewhere in the Empire. Here, too, he draws on all of the Gospels for support, rather than relying only on the text of Mark.

<sup>136</sup> Kee, *Community* 4.

<sup>137</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 236.

<sup>138</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 236–37. He concedes that the "oldest unambiguous localisation of Mark's Gospel in Italy is in the anti-Marcionite Prologue," and then Clement. As he also admits that Irenaeus meant Rome, then the only reference in the tradition that is unclear to him is Papias.

Botha concludes that the controversies about Jewish practices in Mark would be more likely to occur in “a rural area and [among] peasants within a Jewish sphere of influence,”<sup>139</sup> but does not consider the likelihood of friction and debates in the close quarters of Rome, especially in the environment of the Transtiber district with its large Jewish population alongside the new, fragile, Christian group.<sup>140</sup> He adds: “The last will be first—gospel to a peasant indeed,”<sup>141</sup> but fails to consider whether the Gospel is more likely shaped for those considered ‘last’ in the city of Rome.

Schenke claims that, as the text reflects the war, it has to be in a region where “‘little people’ could match news, opinions and rumours” about military events in Palestine, citing 13:5, 7, 21–22. For this reason, he says, the Syrian border regions were “certainly preferable to Rome.”<sup>142</sup> But communications and traffic between the war zone and Rome would have been frequent, and Tacitus repeatedly says that rumours of the exploits of the legions and provincial events circulated in Rome in the late sixties.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, there seems to have been a hunger in the City for such things. Further, the return of Vespasian and Titus to Rome in 70–71 accompanied by their large entourage and prisoners means that Rome serves very well as a place where there had been rumours and news of the war in those months, along with rumours of other concurrent border conflicts.<sup>144</sup> Schenke, Marcus, and others simply assume that all of the allusions to persecution, to fear, and to the expectancy of, or reaction to, the Temple’s destruction, arise out of conditions in the vicinity of the war, without considering whether they could better reflect the knowledge and concerns of the Christians of Rome.

Marcus is another who does not equally consider Rome. In his 1992 article, he merely discusses the uncertainty of the church traditions,

<sup>139</sup> Botha, “Mark’s Story” 164 n. 13.

<sup>140</sup> For the settlement of Jews in this district in the previous century, augmented by slaves brought to Rome by Pompey, see Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 155–58. There may have been 50,000 Jews in Rome at this time. On the size of the Jewish population, see Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, “The Formation of the First ‘Christian Congregations’ in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations,” in Donfried and Richardson (eds), *First-Century Rome* 120.

<sup>141</sup> Botha, “Mark’s Story” 176.

<sup>142</sup> Schenke, *Markusevangelium* 45.

<sup>143</sup> For example, Tacitus, *Histories* 1.4, 16, 31, 47, 50, 53, 84, 88; 2.7, 42, 72, 78, 95; 3.24, 67, 74; 4.12 (twice), 55 (twice).

<sup>144</sup> According to Tacitus, “Nero had been dethroned more by rumours and dispatches than by force of arms” (*Histories* 1.89). See Page 162 for further evidence of rumours in Rome.

cites the contention of Kümmel and Koester that the Latinisms reflect military terminology, argues that *praetōrion* and *kodrantēs* “do not necessarily point to Rome,” cites Theissen on the word “Syrophoenician” (see below), and concludes that there is “no unambiguous indication of the Roman provenance of the Gospel.”<sup>145</sup> Noting that Chapter 13 and 11:17 seem to reflect the Jewish War, his method then changes character, examining the social, political and religious situation in the East during the war and its possible effects on a proposed Christian community there.<sup>146</sup> He does not examine the situation of the Roman church at all. Although he relates the apocalyptic tone of the text to an Eastern situation, he, along with all other proponents of the East, does not consider whether it might reflect the mood in Rome.

In his latest work, Marcus notes that the mentions of persecution, betrayal and universal hatred “make some sense in a Roman context,” but claims that persecutions of Christians were known elsewhere (see Page 107). He dismisses Rome on the grounds that we should expect to see a “Nero-like figure” dominating Chapter 13, and there is not “the sort of preoccupation with regal wickedness” that is in Daniel and the Book of Revelation.<sup>147</sup> However, in discussing his proposed Syrian context, he suggests that the Gospel was written during the years after Nero had died (69–75), so that it is unclear why he should expect a Nero-like figure in the text. For Rome, he seems to be narrowly thinking only of the period of Nero’s reign. He does not look at the mood in Rome or the situation of its Christians in the period that he proposes for the writing of the Gospel, that is, the post-Nero, and particularly the Flavian, years, nor does he examine how Chapter 13 might operate rhetorically in that environment.<sup>148</sup>

Generally, when discussion turns to a proposed Eastern setting, political and sociological questions are at the forefront, as well as the nature of the readers’ suffering, fears and expectancies, and the intended effects of the text upon them. If it is recognised that such considerations are paramount in determining the situation of the Markan community, then they should be applied equally to Rome and the East.

<sup>145</sup> Marcus, “Jewish War” 442–46.

<sup>146</sup> Marcus, “Jewish War” 446–62.

<sup>147</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 30–33. His only other discussion in this work of a possible Roman provenance is to briefly deal with Latinisms, “Syrophoenician,” and Rufus.

<sup>148</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 37) is quite correct, however, in his concluding comment on the Gospel’s provenance: “We will never understand Mark if we do not try to enter imaginatively into his first-century world.”

To this point, it has been shown that arguments for an Eastern setting are untenable, and that the settings proposed are unrealistic. This study now begins to turn to an examination of the evidence for a Roman setting. Later chapters will show how the features of the Gospel observed by advocates for the East can be explained well if it is seen to have been written in Rome at a somewhat later time than is usually proposed.

### ARGUMENTS FOR ROME

*All roads lead to Rome. (Proverb)*

Before discussing those aspects of the Gospel that clearly support a Roman setting, some comment will be made on a number of aspects that have usually come up in earlier debates on provenance. These will only be treated briefly, as none of them point particularly to Rome. Some do make the East less likely. However, each will be shown to be compatible with a Roman setting. Above all, it is important to note that there is no internal or external evidence that contradicts a Roman setting.<sup>149</sup>

#### *The Use of Aramaic*

Proponents of both Rome and the East have used the fact that Mark translates Aramaic words and phrases in a number of places. Although it is less likely that Aramaic would have to be translated in the East, it could have been necessary in cities for a mixed community.<sup>150</sup> This does, however, speak against a rural setting.

Such a text could have been produced at any place where some readers knew Aramaic and others needed it to be translated. As there was a significant Jewish component in the churches of Rome, it qualifies as such a place. The issue is why Mark included Aramaic

<sup>149</sup> Although Pesch (*Markusevangelium* 1.12) is over-confident that the author was John Mark who was with Peter in Rome, based on 1 Peter 5:13 (“*sicher*,” he says), he is still correct in saying that “nothing speaks against a Roman origin of Mark’s Gospel” (1.13).

<sup>150</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 69–70) argues that Tyre was bilingual, and says that translation into Aramaic was still necessary at the time of Diocletian. To add to the confusion, Matthew removed the Aramaisms, and he is thought to have written in the East.

at all. As the rhetoric of 6:31–8:21 suggests that tension over Eucharistic practices and food laws existed between the Jewish and Gentile house-churches of Rome, it may be that Mark's Aramaic touches were particularly designed to appeal to those in the Jewish house-churches who spoke the language.

*Geographical errors*

Mark's oft-noted geographical inaccuracies have also been used by both sides of the debate, especially his location of the "territory of the Gerasenes" next to the sea of Galilee (5:1), and his description of Jesus travelling through Sidon and the Decapolis on a journey from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee (7:31). Theissen argues that such errors are normal where there are no maps, and may be typical ways of describing those regions, citing Pliny the Elder, and that it may also be possible that Mark was using these "geographical audacities" to hint where the Markan community lay—in Syria near Palestine.<sup>151</sup> Kee suggests that Mark knew the names of the places, but not the topography, and that he is situated therefore somewhere in the region.<sup>152</sup> Schenke rightly observes that even a citizen of Jerusalem may be somewhat ignorant of the geography of Galilee and the surrounding region, and that Mark could have left the region many years earlier. Yet, although claiming that Mark's readers know even less of Palestinian geography, he places both Mark and his readers in Syria, close to the area of supposed confusion.<sup>153</sup>

Chapman, however, has proposed that Mark has a special "geography of meaning" that explains the supposed inaccuracies, and argues that Mark once resided in Jerusalem.<sup>154</sup> This would explain Mark's knowledge of that city, and his use of Aramaic. Although

<sup>151</sup> He suggests (*Gospels* 242–45) that, for a person in Syria, Gerasa would be the destination if the high road to the Decapolis is taken, so that the whole of the Decapolis could be described as the "region of the Gerasenes."

<sup>152</sup> Kee, *Community* 103.

<sup>153</sup> Perhaps to overcome this problem, Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 29–31) focuses more on Mark's supposed reversal of the suburbs of Bethany and Bethpage in 11:1 (*eis Bethpage kai Bethanian pros to Oros ton Elaiōn*), as Bethpage was closer to the city. Söding ("Evangelist" 22 n. 46) also points to the 11:1 'confusion.' There is, however, some doubt where Bethpage was situated, according to John J. Bimson (ed.), *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Bible Places* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1995) 70. The fact that Mark knows both Bethpage and Bethany as towns near Jerusalem in fact suggests good local knowledge. See also Chapman, "Locating" 33, who argues that the towns marked the boundary of the city.

<sup>154</sup> Chapman, "Locating" 34–35.



Mark could have moved to any other place, he is not likely to have been near Galilee, as his vagueness about the region suggests that he was in a distant place, and was not in a position to obtain corrective information. His knowledge is compatible with someone who had been in Rome for some years.

### *The Syrophoenician Woman*

Hengel argues that the term “Syrophoenician” in 7:26 would be “nonsensical” if it was written in Syria, whereas the term is found in many Western texts and inscriptions.<sup>155</sup> Theissen disagrees, with arguments that seem to rely on later uses of the term, and on Mark’s text being the first to show it was common in the East (which begs the question).<sup>156</sup> Marcus has argued that the term might have locally differentiated either someone of mixed Syrian and Phoenician blood or someone from the Phoenician part of Syria.<sup>157</sup> However, the arguments for an Eastern usage are not strong, and Hengel’s evidence is more tangible, demonstrating that the term was actually used in Rome during this period.

### *The Coins*

Mark’s explanation of the two lepta (12:42: “which are [equal to] a quadrans”) has been an argument for Rome, as the quadrans was not a coin circulated in the East.<sup>158</sup> However, both Theissen and Marcus have argued that people in the East knew of the quadrans, and Marcus further argues that the term *lepton*, which otherwise is used to mean “light” or “small,”<sup>159</sup> is just a general term designating a small coin.<sup>160</sup> Nevertheless, Mark’s explanation of the value of the lepta is more likely in Rome, where the quadrans was in use.

### *Other Factors*

The Markan text on divorce gives a woman the right to initiate divorce, which accords with Roman law (10:12), but not Jewish law.

<sup>155</sup> It is found in Lucilius, Juvenal, Pliny the Elder, and in Latin inscriptions in Italy and in Africa, but is entirely absent from Egyptian papyri. Hengel, *Studies* 29.

<sup>156</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 245–47.

<sup>157</sup> Marcus, “Jewish War” 445–46; *Mark* 32.

<sup>158</sup> Hengel (*Studies* 137 n. 162) cites Plutarch, *Cicero* 29.5, where the quadrans is explained for the Greeks.

<sup>159</sup> BAGD 472.

<sup>160</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 247–48; Marcus, “Jewish War” 445; *Mark* 32.

This could, however, place the context anywhere that Roman law was regarded as the norm, and so it certainly suits Rome.<sup>161</sup>

Mark's explanations of Jewish customs have suggested to some that the readers were distant from Palestine, citing his lengthy description of Jewish washing practices in 7:3–4. However, those verses look rather like exaggeration, or even ridicule.<sup>162</sup> In any event, explanations of Jewish practices could have been required wherever Gentiles were entering the Markan community in significant numbers. Mark's translations of Aramaic terms show that he is willing to cater for different groups. Such a text could have been written anywhere, but also matches the situation of the Roman churches.

Donahue has pointed out that the Gospel shows a high degree of adaptation of tradition for "a principally Hellenistic audience," citing Mark's attitude to food laws in 7:18–23 as "a much more radical break with Jewish observances than is found anywhere in Paul."<sup>163</sup> Brown sees 7:19 as a parallel to Rom 14:14,<sup>164</sup> and it is possible that Mark reflects a further development in Rome of the rejection of the food laws, although the placement of the declaration that all foods are clean (7:19) at the centre of the 'Jew–Gentile' section of

<sup>161</sup> Gibson argues that such a 'test' of Jesus is meaningful even in a Palestinian setting. Gibson, *Temptations* 261–74; see 259 n. 9 for references on the situation on divorce in Roman law. But Mark expects his reader to understand, and relate to, the Roman legal situation.

<sup>162</sup> It is often thought that these verses mean that Mark's readers were not familiar with Jewish customs and the requirements of the Law, and thus included few Jews. For example, Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988 [Orig. 1955]) 218–19. A number of manuscripts (A D W Θ et al.) add *kai klinōn* ("and beds") to what is washed, indicating either that at least one copyist understood that it was ridicule, or that these words were in Mark's original list. Mark does not hesitate to exaggerate (cf. 3:8; 10:25) and to belittle the beliefs and practices of Jesus' opponents (7:8–13; 12:24–27, 38–40). The description of the washing practices of "the Pharisees, and all the Jews" is certainly wrong—it was neither a requirement of the Law, nor the practice of "all the Jews"—but the polemical style of the pericope should not be overlooked. His use of the word "*hypokritēs*," meaning an actor, and the strength of vv. 6–7, suggest that the issue being dealt with is one that causes anger and frustration in the author. All of this suggests that Jewish Christians in Mark's community did not follow such extreme practices, and that they were now distanced from scrupulous non-Christian Jews, not that they were unfamiliar with Jewish practices. Mark may have been deliberately evoking a picture of very strict observance early in his rhetorical unit (7:1–23) to suggest that anyone who does not agree with his/Jesus' pronouncement that all foods are clean (7:19) falls into the category of the falsely focused Jews that Jesus condemns in the story.

<sup>163</sup> Donahue, "Quest" 827–35.

<sup>164</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 162.

the Gospel suggests that food issues were still highly debated.<sup>165</sup> Mark's lengthy plea to forget those laws is consistent with the continued existence in the Roman church of the conservative Jewish Christian element that Paul knew of in the latter part of the fifties.

It has been said that the Roman centurion suggests a readership in Rome.<sup>166</sup> However, a centurion need not be a native of Rome, especially as promotion to the centurionate generally occurred from the ranks in this period, and recruitment into the legions in the first century came almost entirely from outside of Italy.<sup>167</sup> Rather, it will be suggested that his inclusion aims to remind the reader of scenes of execution in Rome.

Rufus and Alexander are mentioned in 15:21 as the sons of Simon of Cyrene. Mark's specific and unnecessary mention (they do not otherwise figure in the narrative) suggests that the reader knew them personally, since no Rufus seems to have been a widely known Christian figure. It is possible that Rufus is the member of the Roman community who, along with his mother, is mentioned in Rom 16:13.<sup>168</sup>

None of the above items provides strong evidence, and yet all are consistent with a setting in Rome. However, there is other evidence that does add significant weight to that location.

### *The Extent of the Latinisms*

One of the oldest arguments for Rome has been the presence in the Gospel of a large number of Latinisms. Recently, this phenomenon has been summarily dismissed by some commentators, claiming that they are all military or economic terms, and are more likely to have

<sup>165</sup> Against Rome, Söding ("Evangelist" 29) argues that we should expect to see in a Gospel written in Rome the issues of Jewish-Gentile tensions and even the difference between the 'weak' and the 'strong' found in Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. It is suggested here that tensions still exist.

<sup>166</sup> The inclusion of the centurion "brings him closer to familiarity (if not nationality) with Mark's immediate audience in Rome." T. E. Schmidt, "Cry of Dereliction or Cry of Judgement? Mark 15:34 in Context," *BBR* 4 (1994) 152.

<sup>167</sup> Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries AD* (London: A. & C. Black, 1969) 107; Brian Dobson, "The Significance of the Centurion and 'Primipilaris,'" *ANRW* II, 1 (1974) 407.

<sup>168</sup> It is a mystery, however, why Paul called Rufus, "the chosen in Christ." Perhaps, he was referring to the extraordinary encounter that his father had with Jesus, the impact of which was passed on to his sons. Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960) 95-107, found the name Rufus only once among 175 Jewish funerary inscriptions in Rome in the first centuries of the Empire. He found Alexander seven times.

been employed in an area under Roman occupation.<sup>169</sup> This glosses over a number of terms and distorts the evidence.

Included in the Latinisms are terms like *dēnariōn* (6:37; 12:15; 14:5), *modios* (4:21), a measure of grain, *xestēs* (7:4), a Roman liquid measure (a *sextarius*), *spekoulator* (6:27: “executioner”), *legiōn* (5:9, 15), *kenturiōn* (15:39, 44, 45), *praitōriōn* (15:16),<sup>170</sup> *phragelloō* (15:15: “flog”), *kēnsos* (12:14: “tax”), and *kodrantēs* (12:42: “quadrans”).<sup>171</sup> Waetjen, following Kelber, argues that all of these are more likely related to the situation of “village folk residing in a rural territory” of Syria, rather than “the socio-cultural milieu of Rome.” He says:

If this text had originated and been addressed to an audience in the capital city, a sociologically different set of Latinisms—domestic, social, and even religious in character—would have been assimilated.<sup>172</sup>

This claim fails to take the content of the story into account, especially as it tells of a Roman trial and execution in a country under occupation. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that military terms were more likely to be used in the provinces just because the legions were there. The exploits of legions were the talk of Rome. Further, executioners and flogging were common in Rome, and Roman measures were at home in the extensive granaries, warehouses and shops of the city. In fact, as the administrative centre of the empire where military language was common, Rome is *the* place where all of these Latin terms came together most commonly.

In addition, the word construction and grammar suggest an environment where Latin was widely used. In Syria, contact with the language at a village level would have been rare and, in cities, its

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<sup>169</sup> Kelber (*Kingdom* 129) argues that these Latinisms would be known in any area occupied by the military, as does Anderson (*Mark* 27: “largely military”), Kümmel (*Introduction* 70), Dahm (*Israel* 24), Waetjen (*Reordering* 13) and Marcus (“Jewish War” 444–45). Achtemeier (*Mark* 114–15) also points out that Latinisms were used by writers of the Talmud. That was in a much later period, however, when the use of Latin was far more widespread.

<sup>170</sup> The use of the word *praitēriōn* in 15:16 is East-West neutral; it has a wide meaning, usually to do with the quarters of a Roman commander, but also can be the headquarters of a provincial governor, a hostel for officials, or an imperial palace, among other uses. John Brian Campbell, “Praetorium,” in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd ed.: 1996) 1241. In Rome, it would probably refer to the headquarters of the Praetorian Guard.

<sup>171</sup> For others, see Freidrich Rehkopf, *Grammatik der neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) 4–9.

<sup>172</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering* 13.

use would largely have been for military, political and administrative purposes, not for everyday use. It is doubtful that there were many people among the lower classes speaking Latin in the East. Hengel considers that the Gospel had to have been written at “a clear distance from Palestine” because of the extent of this phenomenon: “Such an accumulation of Latinisms is unusual in comparison with other writings. At best, one could point to *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which was similarly written at Rome.”<sup>173</sup> Flanagan is convinced that “Mark had Latin as one of his languages and wrote in a Latin-speaking area.” He points out that 15:15 provides one case where Mark was “more comfortable with Latin than with Greek”—transliterating *flagellare* into *phragellein* is “unexpected.” Even more unexpected, he says, is Mark’s transliteration of *satisfacere*; having no Greek word, Mark breaks it up into two components (*facere* and *satis*) and translates each into Greek (*hikanon poiēsai*).<sup>174</sup> In addition, Van Iersel has recently pointed out that the positions of verbs in sentences, as well as the use of *hina* in the non-final sense of the Latin *ut* after verbs of speaking, point to the “influence of a Latin-speaking milieu on speakers whose mother tongue was not Latin.” This considerably increases the number of Latinisms in Mark, and suggests, he argues, a milieu where Mark was regularly exposed to Latin in the streets.<sup>175</sup>

The most likely place for Latinisms to predominate is in the city of Rome, where the Latin and Greek languages were closely intermingled as nowhere else at that time. Latin was certainly used throughout the Empire, but it was in Rome most of all that the ordinary person was forced to deal with both languages in daily life.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 29.

<sup>174</sup> He notes that three Latinisms occur in two verses here. Patrick J. Flanagan, *The Gospel of Mark Made Easy* (Fairfield, Vic: Fairfield Press, 1996) 174 n. 29. This concentration of Latinisms occurs after Jesus’ trial before Pilate, at the scene of his maltreatment by the Roman troops. It becomes a Roman scene here, and, if the proposal in this study is correct, Mark may well have had in mind his local situation as he composed this scene, and selected his words accordingly. It is possible that Mark added the explanation in 15:16 because *aulē* could have referred to the palace of the High Priest or its courtyard (see John 18:15). Nevertheless, by making it clear that he refers to the camp of the Roman troops, he thereby ensures that the continuing involvement of the Roman military authorities in the death of Jesus is emphasised, and it may have been designed to remind the readers of the treatment of condemned Christians by the Praetorian Guard in Rome (see Chapter 5).

<sup>175</sup> Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 34–35. Brown (*Introduction* 161) also points out *hodon poiēin* (2:23 = *ite facere*). Lane (*Mark* 24) points out that, twice (12:42: *quadrans*, 15:16: *praetōrion*), Mark explains common Greek expressions with Latin ones.

<sup>176</sup> Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 45) argues that Mark may have wanted “to make his

The influence of Latin on the text does add weight to the argument for Rome, and against a Syrian setting, especially a rural one.

*Early Church Traditions*

Nor should the patristic traditions be disregarded, as some have done, simply because they are not as clear as they might be. The early writings on the Gospel's origins are set out below:<sup>177</sup>

**Papias**, Bp. of Hierapolis, ca. 110–140 (cited in Eusebius, *E.H.* 3.39.13)

This also the presbyter used to say: When Mark became Peter's interpreter, he wrote down accurately, though by no means in order, as much as he remembered of the words and deeds of the Lord; for he had neither heard the Lord nor been in his company, but subsequently joined Peter as I said. Now Peter did not intend to give a complete exposition of the Lord's ministry but delivered his instructions to meet the needs of the moment. It follows, then, that Mark was guilty of no blunder if he wrote, simply to the best of his recollections, an incomplete account.

**Anti-Marcionite Prologue**, ca. 160–180<sup>178</sup>

He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.

**Irenaeus**, ca. 180 (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1)

After their death [that is, of Peter and Paul] Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter.

**Clement of Alexandria**, ca. 180 (cited by Eusebius, *E.H.* 6.14.5)

When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed him for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said: and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him. And that when the matter came to Peter's knowledge he neither strongly forbade it nor urged it forward.

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writing understandable to a widely conceived readership." But the Latinisms are not included to make the text clearer. Rather, they reflect the usage habits of the author and his readers.

<sup>177</sup> All translations are from Kealy, *Gospel*.

<sup>178</sup> The Anti-Marcionite (Old Latin) Prologue could be dated anywhere from 160

Black has examined the patristic texts at length, and concludes that a Roman provenance is, “if not proven, then at least not improbable.”<sup>179</sup> Certainly, Clement could have assumed Rome because of the association of Peter with that city.<sup>180</sup> But, on the other hand, both Papias and Irenaeus are likely to have assumed that their readers would immediately think of Rome when they mentioned Peter and, in the case of the latter, Paul.<sup>181</sup> Papias reports that Mark wrote from memory, suggesting that he was unable to refer to Peter because he had died. He paints a picture of a previous close association between them, but does not hint that Mark was elsewhere when he wrote.<sup>182</sup> Hengel has recently argued that Irenaeus could draw on the archives of the Church of Rome.<sup>183</sup>

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CE to the mid-third century. E. Earle Ellis, “The Date and Provenance of Mark’s Gospel,” in Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.804, argues that it probably originated in Rome, ca. 160–180.

<sup>179</sup> Most issues related to the accuracy and meaning of these texts will not be examined in this study. For a comprehensive analysis, see C. Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), quote on 238; also, see his “Was Mark a Roman Gospel?” *ExpTim* 105 (1993) 36–40.

<sup>180</sup> It has often been suggested that the location of Rome was deduced by the later patristic writers because of Papias’ link of Mark with Peter (for example, Hooker, *Mark* 7). Petr Pokorný, “Das Markusevangelium,” *ANRW* II, 25.3 (1984) 2020–21, argues the opposite—that the known connection between the Gospel and Rome might have come first, and then a connection with Peter was assumed from that, pointing out also that the Gospel would have been able to be quickly disseminated from there.

<sup>181</sup> For the evidence that Peter was regarded as a Roman martyr consistently from the late first century to the end of the second century, see Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985) 34–35, 208; also D. W. O’Connor, “Peter in Rome: A Review and Position,” in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 2.146–61, and George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century: An Examination of Various Controverted Questions Relating to its History, Chronology, Literature and Traditions* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913) 145–79, and see 52–54 on evidence for Peter’s memory being “held in special reverence” by the Roman church. For an archaeological study of the memorial built over Peter’s tomb during the period 130–300, see Jack Finegan, “The Death and Burial of St Peter,” *BAR* 2 (December 1976) 3–8.

<sup>182</sup> The issue whether Mark is the John Mark who knew Peter will not be discussed here, as any decision has to come down to guesswork only, given the evidence available.

<sup>183</sup> Hengel, *Gospels* 35–36. He cites Claus Thornton, who maintains that Irenaeus wrote from a Roman perspective. Bacon (*Gospel?* 42–90, 106) had argued that the Gospel reflects Roman ritual, language (including its Latin and Aramaic use) and attitudes, and that only the Roman church could have produced a text containing the Pauline and Petrine elements that he saw, and disseminated with authority under the name of Mark.

Some of those arguing against Rome seem to automatically equate advocacy for Rome as advocacy for the Gospel as Peter's memoirs, although it has been a long time since the Gospel has been thought of in these terms. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie do this, and do not suggest that there are any other arguments for Rome. They simply say that scholars who accept the traditions about Mark place the Gospel in Rome in the mid to late sixties, while those who doubt the accuracy of the Papias tradition instead argue from the text of Mark "taken by itself without any traditions about it," and so locate the Gospel "in or near Palestine."<sup>184</sup> These statements seem to express common attitudes towards the two positions in biblical scholarship. Such thinking has tended to cast scholars who advocate Rome as 'traditionalists,' completely obscuring any other arguments that might be raised for that provenance. Here, however, the evidence of the early Christian witnesses will be only one of many pointers to a Roman setting.

Although no firm proof will be found in the patristic texts, they do add considerable weight. No one in the early church attempted to refute the claims that Rome was the place of origin, so that there was apparently no other significant church championing Mark as its own.<sup>185</sup> The external evidence indicates only Rome.

### *Persecutions*

This Gospel warns the reader to be ready for martyrdom at the hands of the Roman authorities. It will be shown here that Mark's readers not only still bore painful memories and suffered from the trauma of past persecution, but were also deeply afraid that they, too, would soon face the magistrate.

Perhaps one reason why some commentators are not comfortable with a Roman setting is that a clear historical moment that matches the mood and all of the motifs of the Gospel has not been identified. Nero is known to have killed Christians in 64, but there is no external evidence of subsequent executions, and some seem to believe that persecution in Rome ceased with, or even before, his death in 68. As the Gospel text indicates either the imminent or recent destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70, commentators have tended to

<sup>184</sup> Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark (Second Edition)* 2.

<sup>185</sup> Telford (*Theology* 100) points to "the strength and virtual unanimity of the church tradition."



select a date as close to the known Neronian persecution as possible.<sup>186</sup> It has been thought, too, that Vespasian brought peace to Rome and its Christians in 70 after the civil war.<sup>187</sup> Accordingly, Hengel is forced, rather against his better judgement it would seem, to argue for 69 on the basis that the Markan community feared Nero's return.<sup>188</sup> It will be argued that this was not the case, and that, after 70, the Christians of Rome still had every right to fear the future.

It is often suggested that the persecution of Christians was sporadic, giving the impression that they were left in peace in the intervals. An example is W. H. C. Frend, who says that "the Neronian persecution was a single catastrophe, but not the beginning of a consistent policy of repression," claiming that, after Nero, Christians "were to enjoy another 130 years free from serious molestation."<sup>189</sup> But a distinction needs to be made between those well-publicised periods when emperors initiated the investigation and widespread execution of Christians, and the more normal periods when a Christian, brought before a court, would be automatically sentenced to death. "Persecution" can mean either (a) "a particular course or period of systematic infliction of punishment directed against the professors of a religious belief, or (b) "the infliction of death, torture or penalties for adherence to a religious belief . . . with a view to [its] repression."<sup>190</sup> Henry Chadwick, while admitting that "Christianity remained a capital offence," uses the word "persecution" only in the former sense.<sup>191</sup> By the latter definition, however, persecution, that is, the subjection to legal penalties for their religious beliefs, should be considered to have been a continuous state of affairs once being a Christian became

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<sup>186</sup> For example, Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 43) date the Gospel "around 70." They argue that the Gospel reflects the Neronian persecutions, but say that further suffering is expected, without discussing why persecution was still a possibility. They are reluctant, however, to move even a year beyond 70 (cf. *Mark* 166), presumably to keep the date close to Nero's reign.

<sup>187</sup> It has been a long-held view: Edmundson (*Church* 206) said that the Church in Rome "seems to have lived in comparative repose" during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, which were of "singular moderation," because there is no record of persecutions in this period. It was an argument from silence. Hengel (*Studies* 22) rejects the period after autumn 70 on the basis that Vespasian had brought peace to the whole empire, and an apocalyptic view such as 13:7-8 would not have been held by the Christians of Rome.

<sup>188</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 22. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Hengel's proposal.

<sup>189</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church: From the Beginnings to 461* (London: SCM Press, 1982) 32.

<sup>190</sup> James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions (eds), *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 7.721.

<sup>191</sup> This appears in such phrases as "persecution was far from being continuous or systematic." Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 28-31.

a capital offence. It is clear from later periods that Christians were charged and executed at times other than during the well-known ‘religious cleansings’ of emperors such as Decius or Diocletian (see Chapter 4). The narrow use of the term “persecution” has often led Markan commentators to limit the term to the Neronian era only within the first century, with a possible brief period under Domitian. But the key issue is whether Christians faced capital punishment because public policy required that anyone reported to the authorities was executed. It is irrelevant whether official purges were under way when Mark wrote; the reader still feared arrest and execution.

There is no more likely place for Christians to fear crucifixion than Rome at this early stage.<sup>192</sup> In 112, Pliny the Younger took it for granted that Christians were executed when identified and, in his letter to the emperor, he refers to trials of Christians in Rome in earlier years as if they were common:

I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature of the crime nor the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed. (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96)

It is clear from Pliny’s earlier career in Rome that he could not have been involved in criminal trials of this sort, which is why he has to ask certain questions of Trajan.<sup>193</sup> Yet, he did know that Christians

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<sup>192</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 30) argues that there were persecutions of Christians other than in Rome, citing Acts, Paul’s letters, and other (unspecified) “later church sources.” He includes Paul’s own persecution of Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus. But, as far as we know, only James, son of Zebedee, and James, the brother of Jesus, were killed, both in the absence of a Roman prefect/procurator. There is no record of any Christian being killed by Roman authorities. Mark can hardly be referring to such isolated, Jewish-instigated events in 13:11–13. In Chapter 6, it will be suggested that 13:9 does refer to these earlier attacks in a list of past events, but that 13:11–13 and other references in the Gospel refer to both past and expected Roman trials.

<sup>193</sup> Pliny had a long career in the law in Rome, but only in property cases in the Centumviral Court, which he describes as “my own sphere of action” (*Letters* 6.12). From 93, he was involved in the trials of a series of provincial governors that occupied him for many years, and was appointed in the nineties to take charge of the military treasury, and as an official of the Treasury of Saturn (each for three years). In 104, he took on a three-year term as president of the Tiber Conservancy Board, responsible for keeping the banks of the river in repair, and spent the time between 107 and his departure for Bithynia in 111 on his country estates compiling and publishing the letters written during his career. He would not have been involved at all in petty criminal trials, and was given a special commission by Trajan to sort out the financial problems of Bithynia and Pontus because of his defence of Bassus and Varenus, former governors of Bithynia, which showed the parlous state of the affairs of the province. Pliny was regarded, because of his experience, as “an expert on finance.” Betty Radice, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny* (London: Penguin, 1963) 15.

were subject to the death penalty, and so he must have known of this practice in the capital. Accordingly, on arrival in the province, he did not hesitate to execute those who confessed being Christians. He did not write to Trajan to ask about their punishment, only about certain aspects of the legal procedure. Nor is there any hint in his letter that such treatment was a recent development; rather, it suggests knowledge of a long-standing practice. He seems to know nothing or little of Christian beliefs, and is puzzled by the nature of the crime, seeking confirmation from Trajan that the crime was not any act that they had committed, but simply their being a Christian. There is no suggestion in Trajan's reply (Pliny, *Letters* 10.97) that he disagreed with Pliny's action; he only confirmed that Pliny should not actively seek Christians out, probably because it would encourage false accusations and social unrest. But the crime and the penalty were well established, and were not doubted, and he did not remark on any procedural abnormality in Pliny's hearings.

The rate of dissemination of this policy to the provinces is not known. It would have taken time for the legal precedent to become practice for governors, perhaps only being implemented there when new appointments were made from Rome. But, when Mark's Gospel was being written, only a few years after Nero's precedent-setting act, Rome was the only place where there was likely to be officially sanctioned executions, and the only place where they would already have had a severe effect on the readers of this Gospel.<sup>194</sup>

## NO PARADISE

*He was with the wild beasts . . . (1:13)*

To conclude this discussion on the location of the author and his readers, it will be proposed that there is an important piece of evidence early in the Gospel that has been overlooked, and that only

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<sup>194</sup> Augustine Stock (*Message* 11) sees the call to bear a cross as "a literal reality for Mark's readers in Rome." He follows Lane (*Mark* 15, 24) who remarks on the similarity of the situation of Roman Christians and that of Jesus, and who suggests that 9:49 ("everyone will be salted by fire") refers to the Neronian persecution. Van Iersel, *Reading Mark* 15, observes: "That the author time and time again warns his audience so seriously of the danger of persecutions says much of the situation." He says Rome is the "least speculative."

becomes apparent when Mark's attention to past and expected persecution throughout the Gospel is recognised. To some extent, the following discussion anticipates the investigation of the social climate and the mood of the Gospel, but Mark seems to have provided a very early pointer to his readers' situation, fears and recent traumas. It is appropriate, then, to bring it to light at the forefront of these investigations.

There has been extensive debate about Mark's enigmatic scene in 1:12–13, that occurs directly after Jesus' baptism: "And immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness; he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, but angels ministered to him."<sup>195</sup> The literature on these two verses is vast, and all of the issues cannot be discussed here. A decade ago, Ernest Best considered that there was general acceptance among scholars that this scene depicted Jesus as the Second Adam, although his dissenting view was that it showed Jesus' victory over Satan at the beginning of his ministry.<sup>196</sup> Neither of these views is satisfactory as (a) nowhere else does Mark portray Jesus as a new Adam, (b) the scene is set in a wilderness, not a garden of paradise, and (c) no explanation is provided for the enigmatic phrase "with the wild animals."<sup>197</sup> Accordingly, some commentators have recently proposed alternatives.

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<sup>195</sup> It would appear that this scene would have been plausible to a first century reader that knew of conditions in the region in Palestine, as there were wild animals around Palestine in the time of Jesus. Pierson Parker, "A Second Look at *The Gospel before Mark*," *JBL* 100 (1981) 397, claims the contrary: in listing Mark's inaccuracies, he says that there would only have been wild goats. But leopards were well known in Palestine in the nineteenth century, and a nuisance to shepherds south of the Jabbock, with one sighted in Syria in 1856 and one shot in 1964. Lions were in Palestine during the Crusades. George Cansdale, *Animals of the Bible Lands* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970) 106, 112. Animals for the Roman games were often drawn from Syria as late as the third century. George Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937) 53–54, 62. Mark appears to have known the situation there, or at least to have believed that the story was plausible. Yet, as with other stories he uses, it is proposed that this story operates at a number of levels for the reader, relating not just to the story of Jesus, but also to the story of the readers and their community.

<sup>196</sup> For a summary of earlier approaches, see Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed.: 1990) xvi–xxii. Recently, Hans-Josef Klauck, *Vorspiel in Himmel? Erzähltechnik und Theologie im Markusprolog* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997) 57–59, has described 1:13 as "eschatological peace with animals as a reappearance of paradise," saying that "Jesus appears here as a new Adam, moving into a Paradise."

<sup>197</sup> Watts (*New Exodus* 188) calls the mention of the wild animals, "one of the prologue's difficult images."

Van Henten sees the animals and angels as an allusion to Israel's period in the wilderness, so that Jesus is seen to be tested as "the actual leader of the people," building on Old Testament wilderness testing motifs, and dismisses the phrase "with the beasts" by claiming that it "may be nothing more than a repetition of the notice that Jesus has left the inhabited world."<sup>198</sup> But Jesus is hardly depicted as the leader of Israel in these opening verses. With some similarities, Gibson proposes that the beasts and angels subjugate themselves to Jesus as he proves himself loyal and obedient to his commission at baptism.<sup>199</sup> However, the baptism scene is hardly a commissioning scene in which the Father calls Jesus to suffering and death. It speaks only of his relationship to the Father. Gibson also claims to see a motif of protection of Jesus from the wild animals and Satan, referring especially to Ps 91:11–12, *T. Iss.* 7.7; *T. Benj.* 5.2, *T. Naph.* 8.4.<sup>200</sup> But those texts relate to the protection of the just one, whereas Mark's whole Gospel is about how the just one(s) will be killed. These references also speak of the wild animals fleeing but, in 1:13, there is simply the rather ominous phrase "with the wild animals" (*meta tōn thērion*).<sup>201</sup>

Bauckham gives an "ecological reading" of the phrase "with the animals," claiming that the animals are not said to be antagonistic to Jesus, or allied with Satan in testing him. Although he concedes that *thērion* normally denotes hostile beasts of prey and that Jewish texts frequently refer to them as such, Mark has not made clear that he intends this meaning on this occasion, and has instead used a phrase that "could readily suggest peaceable and friendly association."<sup>202</sup> Compared with the disordered world after the Fall, he argues,

<sup>198</sup> He points out that there is little evidence that the wilderness was thought of as the place where Satan and demons dwell, but it is a symbol of a place of danger. Jan Willem Van Henten, "The First Testing of Jesus: A Re-reading of Mark 1:12–13," *NTS* 45 (1999) 350, 352–56, 362, 366.

<sup>199</sup> Gibson, *Temptations* 23, 81–82; see also Jeffrey B. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation according to Mark," *JST* 53 (1994) 3–34.

<sup>200</sup> Gibson, "Wilderness Temptation" 21–22.

<sup>201</sup> A. B. Caneday, "Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration: 'He was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him,'" *BBR* 9 (1999) 19–36, builds on Gibson's proposal. He adds Isa 35:8–10, but these verses refer to a joyful return to Zion. Nor does he connect his solution with Jesus' baptism satisfactorily.

<sup>202</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age," in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays in the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 3–21. He claims that a restoration of paradise motif in some form is now the dominant view.

it depicts peace as expected in the Messianic age.<sup>203</sup> Bauckham fails to note that the texts that he cites are merely another way of denoting the protection by God of the righteous person (Isa 11:9: “they shall not hurt or destroy . . .”; *Sib. Or.* 3.793: “For he will make the beasts on earth harmless”; cf. Isa 65:25; Hos 2:18).

Gundry has performed a fine detailed analysis of the many problems associated with the interpretation of these verses, but his conclusion is of the same nature as proposals he rejects. He points out that there is no textual support for the claim that Jesus overcomes the wild animals, nor does Mark spell out that Jesus succeeded in defeating Satan. Yet, Gundry proposes that this scene signifies “an acknowledgement of Jesus’ stature as the very Son of God” by Satan and the animals, which do not harm him. But there is not the slightest indication in the text of such acknowledgement.<sup>204</sup> In the same way, while Bauckham dismisses the idea of Jesus being depicted as a New Adam on the grounds that there is “no other trace” of such a Christology in Mark,<sup>205</sup> exactly the same can be said of his proposed motif of a Messianic restoration of peace. Mark never promises peace in this Gospel—only persecution and strife. It is paramount that the interpretation of this passage is integrated with the remainder of the Gospel.

Indeed, *meta tōn thērion* is perhaps better translated as “with the beasts,” and would have been a highly evocative and emotional phrase for Mark’s readers. According to Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44), at Nero’s instigation, wild animals had torn apart many members of the community. Moreover, exposure to beasts (*damnatio ad bestias*) was a very common and entertaining method of executing criminals, in use in Rome from the second century BCE, but more common during the Empire.<sup>206</sup> *Thērion* was the Greek equivalent to the Latin *bestia*, and

<sup>203</sup> He cites Hos 2:18; Isa 11:6–9; 65:25; *Sib. Or.* 3.788–95; Philo, *Praem.* 87–90; Job 5:22–23. On the latter, he does not notice that Job’s counsellor, Eliphaz the Temanite, who speaks of wild animals being at peace with the just man, is hardly a source of good advice, as his question in Job 4:7 shows: “Who that was innocent ever perished?”

<sup>204</sup> Gundry, *Mark* 54–61.

<sup>205</sup> Bauckham, “Wild Animals” 19.

<sup>206</sup> Victims were tied to posts or just left without weapons before beasts, naked or near naked, sometimes with the verdict (*titulus*) attached to them. It was a common penalty for slaves, foreign enemies and “free men guilty of a few heinous offences.” Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998) 53–54.

it is found in later writings of martyrdoms. Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century wrote of looking forward to facing the beasts, perhaps to encourage others not to shy away from facing martyrdom. On his way to Rome for trial and execution, he wrote to the Roman Christians: “Let me be fodder for wild beasts (*thērion*)” (*Rom.* 4.1), and to the Smyrneans, “Why, then, have I given myself up completely to death, fire, sword, and wild beasts (*thērion*)?” (*Smyr.* 4.2).<sup>207</sup> His language reflects the common dread of being forced to face the wild beasts in the arena. In the *Letter to Diognetus*, written ca. 129, perhaps by Quadratus in Asia Minor as an apology to Hadrian,<sup>208</sup> we find, “Do you not see they are thrown to wild beasts (*thērion*) to make them deny the Lord, and how they are not vanquished?” (7.7).

Although Mark alludes heavily to the Old Testament throughout his Gospel, especially in 1:1–11, there are problems with the many attempts to find a close biblical allusion, or composite allusions, for this phrase. Rather, a reader in Rome is likely to have first thought of the way in which their family members and friends had died recently, and the prospect that awaited them. To be “with the beasts” meant only one thing to a person in Rome—to be executed horribly as a criminal before the cheering crowds. In the light of the background of persecution revealed by the Gospel, *thērion* necessarily takes on a hostile meaning. Commentators have remarked on the fact that Mark does not name the animals, and this has added to the difficulty of finding biblical allusions. But Mark did not need to name them; being “with the beasts” was enough, as everyone understood this phrase.<sup>209</sup>

The scene could not have been intended to show that God would protect the innocent from death, as Jesus gets killed in this story, and so will his followers. If Mark was adopting the Jewish line of thought that the righteous would be protected from wild beasts in the Messianic age, he must have received a lot of questions from the friends and relatives of those who had died in the amphitheatre. The biblical texts speak of animals fleeing from the righteous person, but it would be unthinkable for Mark to suggest that the beasts would flee from those facing execution in the arena.

<sup>207</sup> For other uses of *thērion*, see Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.2; 5.2, 3; *Smyr.* 4.1.

<sup>208</sup> Richardson, *Fathers* 209–10.

<sup>209</sup> Lane (*Mark* 15) remarks that the mention of the beasts, only found in Mark, “was filled with special significance for those called to enter the arena where they stood helpless in the presence of wild beasts.”

With this early scene, Mark has attempted to evoke a strongly emotional response in his reader, and so demonstrates that he has the past martyrdoms of community members at the forefront of his mind. The phrase “with the beasts” would certainly have been effective anywhere in the Empire, but only in Rome had there already been the involvement of Roman authorities in executing Christians, and the reader reaction that seems to have been intended by the use of such a phrase strengthens the case for Rome.

Satan is subtly introduced into the narrative in this scene. Mark places him with the wild beasts as the one who is the source of testing.<sup>210</sup> Thus, Satan and the Roman authorities are placed side by side, and the reader notes right from the beginning that the two are somehow related.<sup>211</sup> The Romans, in forcing Christians to choose between denying their Christian faith and being executed, were testing the child of God, just as Satan did with Jesus in the wilderness. The Romans are therefore depicted as agents of Satan and, from this point in the narrative, demonic forces and Rome can be equated. It will be proposed in Chapter 4 that 3:22–27 and 5:1–20 reinforce this motif. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, Mark will also have God use the Romans as his instrument in destroying the Temple (see Page 152), so that the apparently powerful Roman authorities become mere tools in a contest behind the scenes. Satan disappears from the narrative early in the piece, after reminders of his influence (3:23, 26; 4:15; 8:33), but the reader is left with an understanding that he is behind attacks on those who do God’s will.<sup>212</sup> This confrontation between Jesus and Satan/Rome in the context of God’s providence sets the tone for the reading of the remainder of the Gospel.

Mark always combines a sobering warning with a word of comfort. In this scene, angels minister to Jesus—consolation for the Roman reader who had lost relatives, friends and community leaders in the arena, as well as a promise for those facing the same

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<sup>210</sup> Best (*Temptation* xvii) points out that the imperfect tense suggests that Satan is present throughout the whole time of testing.

<sup>211</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 140), noting that 1QM 1:1–13 calls the Romans “the army of Belial,” that is, Satan, says that 1:12–13 would strike a chord in the environment of the East during the war, combined with the declaration of God’s victory in 1:14–15. But the reader did not need to be in the war zone to ally Rome with Satan, as the Book of Revelation, written as the result of Roman persecution, would show.

<sup>212</sup> This idea of the behind-the-scenes attempts of Satan to defeat the children of God is developed far more obviously in the Book of Revelation, where “beast” stands not just for Rome, but also for its emperors.



situation.<sup>213</sup> In 13:27, it is promised that the angels would gather the ‘chosen’ to a place of safety. Thus, in the Gospel, angels play a role in serving the faithful and bringing them into eternal life.<sup>214</sup>

Martial extolled the *numen* of Titus that gave him power over wild beasts.<sup>215</sup> But Mark’s depiction of Jesus in this scene provides a contrast with such supposed powers of the emperor. Jesus’ survival may at first appear to suggest an extraordinary power but, pointedly, there is no sense that Satan and the beasts are defeated. It is just that he is not harmed at this time, because his destiny lies on a cross, not with the beasts. He is apparently only protected long enough to carry out his God-ordained mission to proclaim the gospel in the capital.

The wilderness scene appears directly after Jesus’ baptism, and Mark causes his reader to note how, in this strange Kingdom of God, the Spirit thrusts the baptised Christian into a struggle with Satan (Rome) and even makes them face wild beasts. But, as there is no thought that the individual reader would be spared martyrdom, this scene instead reflects the story of the Christian community that collectively faces the beasts, is faithful, and is then empowered and qualified, because of that experience, to proclaim the Kingdom of God (1:14–15). At the same time, it serves to remind that many in the community have already faced the wild beasts.

In Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ opening scenes, the combination of baptism, Satan, beasts and angels points to the fate of the baptised reader in Rome. The placement of this motif so early in the Gospel reveals not only that fear of martyrdom was a very real concern, but also that it was at the forefront of Mark’s purposes in writing this Gospel.

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<sup>213</sup> Ernest Van Eck, “The Baptism of Jesus in Mark: A Status Transformation Ritual,” *Neot* 30 (1996) 200, translates *erēmos* as “a lonely place,” arguing that, as Mark uses it elsewhere of a place where other people are not present (1:35; 6:31, 35), he may have meant the word as “a symbol for loneliness.” This would emphasise the isolation of the Christian facing the beasts, which Mark counters through the presence of the angelic mediators of God’s comfort.

<sup>214</sup> The angels present at the trial of the Christian in 8:38 are there for the same reason (see Page 240).

<sup>215</sup> The *numen* of Titus also has power over the sea, according to Martial, in a notable parallel to 4:35–41. Martial also praises Domitian’s *numen* that causes lions, eagles, leopards, boars, stags and elephants to perform, or to show mercy to their prey. See Warren Carter, “Contested Claims: Roman Imperial Theology and Matthew’s Gospel,” *BTB* 29 (1999) 59–60.

It is not enough that a Christian community elsewhere had heard of the executions by Nero. The readers of this Gospel suffered from memories of the loss of other Christians *and* feared imminent arrest and death at the hands of the Roman authorities. For both to be present in these early years, the intended readers of this Gospel had to be in Rome.

The provenance of the Gospel, in the end, will not be demonstrated just from the arguments discussed above; rather, the whole text must support it, as will be shown in the remainder of this study. Moving away from the traditional arguments for Rome, Donahue,<sup>216</sup> supported by Senior,<sup>217</sup> have recently argued that the mood and motifs of the Gospel match the persecuted church in Rome that was experiencing the need for healing after the crises of the Nero years and betrayal by fellow Christians. Their proposals have not been the impetus for this study, and a different dating and other rhetorical goals are advocated here. However, a similar approach is taken, focusing on the social, political and religious situation of the Roman Christians. The method that will be employed is to first examine the historical data for the climate in Rome at that time, and then to compare it with the rhetoric of Mark's text. The match between the two will considerably strengthen the case for Rome as the place of writing.

First, however, the most likely date for the Gospel needs to be determined.

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<sup>216</sup> John R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973) 217–224, had originally argued for a provenance somewhere in the region of Palestine for a Jewish Christian community caught up in the strife “during and immediately following the war.” In his 1992 survey of the search for the situation of Mark's community, he did not reach any conclusion on either the date or the location of the Gospel: “The quest for the community of Mark still continues” (*Quest* 838). However, in “Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel,” *CBQ* 57 (1995) 1–26, he applied literary tools to the Gospel and concluded that the Gospel was written in Rome in the early seventies. Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 1, 41, 46) place the Gospel in Rome “around 70,” partly because of the traditional links to Rome, and partly because of the way it matches the experience of that persecuted community. However, they make no decision whether it was written after the fall of the Jerusalem Temple, and do not consider the possibility of persecution in Rome after 70, nor do they systematically evaluate how the rhetoric fits that setting, only making passing references to the original readers.

<sup>217</sup> Donald Senior, “The Gospel of Mark in Context,” *TBT* 34 (1996) 215–21; “Swords” 14–19.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NO STONE UPON ANOTHER

EVIDENCE THAT THE TEMPLE HAD ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED

#### STUMBLING BLOCKS

*Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. (13:2)*

For many years, most scholars who accepted that Mark's Gospel originated in Rome repeated the traditional opinion that it was written some time between 64 and 68.<sup>1</sup> Following the reports of Papias and Irenaeus, it was assumed that Mark wrote soon after Peter died, and while Nero was still alive. However, there is no evidence that Peter died in 64, or that Mark wrote immediately after that.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, because of a greater awareness of the ways in which the Gospel points to the imminent or past destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the dating has moved away from 64 towards 70. However, some scholars maintain that Mark only anticipated the Temple's demise, while others argue that he wrote after its destruction in August 70. Others make no decision whether the Temple had been destroyed when Mark wrote,<sup>3</sup> and it is common for commentators to proceed on the basis that this knowledge is not important. It is proposed in this chapter that the Gospel provides strong evidence that the Temple had already been destroyed, and that, if we are to understand Mark's rhetoric, it is important to realise that his readers knew of, and had been affected by, this event.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Not everyone agreed with this date. Before the 1920s, Volkmar, Jülicher, Wellhausen, Weiss and Moffatt had already proposed that it was written after 70, according to Kealy, *Gospel* 105.

<sup>2</sup> Nineham (*Mark* 42) preferred closer to 75, because there was "no compelling reason" why Mark should have written immediately after Peter's death.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Donahue and Harrington, *Mark* 44.

<sup>4</sup> The arguments against a dating before the sixties are very strong, especially in view of Mark's attitude to the Jewish Law, the dominance of the Gentile mission, evidence of persecutions and allusions to the Jewish War. A good discussion of a number of issues that militate against a very early or a late dating is contained in Hengel, *Studies* 7–14, summarised and reviewed in Senior, "Swords" 11–12.

Commentators regularly perceive three major obstacles to a post-70 dating. All relate to different aspects of the mysterious Chapter 13.

#### THE LACK OF DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

First, there is the apparent difficulty that Mark makes no unequivocal reference to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. In particular, it is debated whether the prediction of Jesus—"Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (13:2)—was written before the event, or with the benefit of hindsight.

For instance, Raymond Brown was unable to decide between the late sixties or just after 70. On the one hand, he mused, the Gospel fails to "show any knowledge of the details of the First Jewish Revolt . . . and to mention the fall of Jerusalem"; if the city had been destroyed, it is likely that the author, like Jewish authors in succeeding years, would have made use of the significant event in some way. On the other hand, he acknowledged, "the failure of [all] New Testament works to make specific and detailed mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is very hard to explain."<sup>5</sup>

Hengel initially admits that the prediction in 13:2 is "best taken" as being after the event, but then argues against this view, saying: "It is extremely improbable that Mark should have written after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by Titus without clearly referring to it."<sup>6</sup> He points out that Mark only warns of the destruction of the Temple, but asserts that Luke 19:41–44 gives a "detailed description" of the destruction of the whole city.<sup>7</sup> However, those verses, together with Luke 21:6, 20–24, add only that the city will be destroyed, that there will be a siege wall, that many will be killed, and many "taken away as captives among all nations, and Jerusalem

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *Introduction* 163. Similar observations have been made by Roger Booth, *Jesus and the Laces of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 150; Guelich, *Mark* xxxi; Gundry, *Mark* 1042; Stock, *Method* 4–9; Kee, *Community* 100; Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 49; Witherington, *Mark* 345.

<sup>6</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 13, 20. He is not opposed to the idea of Mark including a *vaticinium ex eventu* in his Gospel, as he is confident that 10:39 is one. As evidence that the destruction of the Temple had been expected, he cites the prophecies of Agrippa II (*JW* 2.400) and of Jesus, son of Ananias (*JW* 6.300–9), claiming that such prophecies "must have been in circulation" (16). But these 'prophecies' were also written after the predicted event—by Josephus.

<sup>7</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 14.

will be trampled on by the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).<sup>8</sup> These add no element that was not present in the first destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Babylonians, when there was also a siege wall (cf. 2 Kings 25:1).<sup>9</sup> The same ingredients could have been expected in a Roman assault on the city.

However, Matthew added nothing to Mark’s account (cf. Matt 24:2, 15–22), and yet few doubt that Matthew’s Gospel was written after the destruction.<sup>10</sup> What is particularly striking is that both Matthew and Luke urge the inhabitants to flee in exactly the same circumstances as Mark. Luke even suggests fleeing after he has specifically mentioned the city being surrounded by armies and a siege wall in place (Luke 19:43; 21:20–21). If the criterion of lack of precision is to be applied uniformly, none of the Synoptic Gospels would be dated after the destruction of the Temple. There is no reason for commentators to conclude that Mark’s reason for including the prediction in 13:2 is any different from Matthew’s (Matt 24:2) or Luke’s (Luke 19:44). The absence of clear proof in any Gospel that the Temple had been razed forces us to ask different questions of Mark’s Gospel. The silence of the evangelists must be explained by factors other than whether the event had occurred.

In deciding whether 13:2 was written before or after the event, it should be noted first that, in Mark’s Gospel, all other predictions of events after Jesus’ death had already been fulfilled at the time of writing, other than those relating to his return (8:38; 13:26–27; 14:62), and Mark never gives details of such events.<sup>11</sup> Jesus promises that the disciples will be “fishers of men” without explaining what this will mean (1:17), and that they will meet him in Galilee without telling them where or when, or what they will do (14:28; 16:7). He speaks of rewards in this life and persecutions, but with no details

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<sup>8</sup> With these phrases, Luke points to a new Diaspora of God’s people, reminding of the Assyrian and Babylonian dispersions. Thus, as a stylised depiction of destruction, it is not evidence that he knew of the sale into slavery of Jews after Jerusalem fell in 70, which, in any event, was common practice.

<sup>9</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 278) calls Luke 21:24 “an unmistakable portrayal of the siege and fall of Jerusalem” in 70 CE, noting that this interpretation is seldom disputed.

<sup>10</sup> Nor does Matt 22:7 describe anything other than the common practice of a king towards a rebellious client nation: “He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.” Achtemeier (*Mark* 117) agrees that this verse is not specific enough either, so that there is an absence of clear references to the fall of Jerusalem in any of the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, he says, the differences in Matthew and Luke are “no indication at all that Mark was written prior to AD 70.”

<sup>11</sup> In addition, Jesus makes many predictions that are fulfilled within the story (2:20; 7:29; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 11:2; 14:8, 13, 18, 27, 30).

(10:30). He predicts that James and John will suffer in the same way as Jesus, but does not say how or when (10:39). He is not specific about future wars, natural disasters, or trials (13:7–9, 11), the false prophets and messiahs (13:6, 21–22), the governors and kings (13:9), or the situation in which betrayal will occur (13:12). Yet, the reader knew that all of these events had already occurred. *Prima facie*, then, it should be expected that the event described in 13:2 has already occurred, and it should be no surprise that Mark gives few details. Rather, Mark stays as far as possible within the story world, pointing to events that are in the future of the story characters, but which are in the reader's past. He would have betrayed himself as story narrator if he had given too much detail in these predictions.

Furthermore, if the war was in progress, Mark could not have been sure that the Temple would be completely destroyed (“not a stone upon a stone”), even if it was certain that the Romans would take Jerusalem. Hengel asserts that “the thorough destruction of a hostile city along with its sanctuaries was a widespread policy in war,” citing only the much earlier examples of Carthage (202 BCE), Corinth (146 BCE), Old Testament accounts of the destruction of cities (in Joshua and Deuteronomy), and the razing of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Further, he argues, eschatological threats against the Temple found in many Jewish texts meant that “Mark and his tradents” could well have imagined its future destruction, and the threatening situation in Judea could have given rise to a sentence such as 13:2.<sup>12</sup>

But the Romans had no policy of destroying the temples of defeated nations, and no observer could have expected it to happen as a matter of course. Indeed, there had been three attacks by Roman forces upon the Jerusalem Temple in recent times—Pompey (*Ant.* 14.54–76), Sossius (with Herod; *Ant.* 14.468–87; *JW* 1.343–53), and Sabinus (*Ant.* 17.254–98; *JW* 2.39–54). Although Roman troops laid siege to the city and the Temple was used as a fortress by the defenders on each occasion (*Ant.* 14.62, 477; *JW* 2.47), the Temple was never destroyed. Pompey did not touch the Temple, but only pulled down the walls of the city. These events hardly reflect a Roman policy of destruction of the temples of their enemies. Moreover, as Shalmaneser of Assyria had turned away after the siege in the time of Hezekiah, thanks to Yahweh's saving act (2 Kings 18–19), the same might happen again.

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<sup>12</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 15–16, 127 n. 87.

If Mark wrote 13:2 before August 70, it is difficult to believe that he did not have the current conflict in mind, and his readers would naturally think of it. If they heard soon thereafter that the Temple had not been destroyed, Mark's inclusion of 13:2 would have meant that Jesus had made a prediction that had not been fulfilled. It might be argued that such a saying had been circulating in the churches, and that Mark used it because he believed that any prediction of the historical Jesus would necessarily come true. However, even if he was confident about the accuracy of the tradition that brought him such a prediction, he still had to choose whether to include it. Faced with this prospect, it would have been safer to simply omit it. Both Matthew and Luke chose to include the prediction (Matt 24:2; Luke 19:44), but they both wrote after the event. It is most unlikely that the Mark who wrote "stay awake, because you never know when the time will come" (13:33) would be prepared to stake everything on his ability to predict the future.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Accuracy of 13:2*

The second obstacle has been the accuracy of the prediction in 13:2: "Not one stone will be left here upon another." Quite a number of commentators have stumbled here, claiming that, as the Temple was destroyed by fire, 13:2 is a clear indication that the event had not happened when Mark wrote.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, others

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it will be shown in Chapter 6 that 13:1–20 relate only to events in the readers' past.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include Taylor, *Mark* 501; Myers, *Strong Man* 417–18; Denis McBride, *The Gospel of Mark: A Reflective Commentary* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996) 18; Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 47; Flanagan, *Mark* 142, who calls it an "error in detail" that helps us to date Mark's Gospel, as Mark "guessed wrongly." E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 18, have said that Mark 13 could not be after 70 since 13:2 does not accurately describe what happened—stones can still be seen today. This is being rather pedantic, and Mark's description is good enough. He may only have heard that the Temple had been razed. In any event, the remaining stones are only part of the wall of the Temple enclosure. In recent archaeological investigations of the surrounds of the Temple Mount, it has been discovered that the pilastered western wall of the Temple Mount above ground level seems to have been still standing during Byzantine times, as its remains were found on top of seventh century pottery in the street below. Thus, the Romans had not destroyed all of the walls around the Temple platform, but perhaps only the sanctuary itself as well as the other major building, the stoa at the south end. Apparently, the Temple Mount could still be used as a formidable fortress in the early seventh century CE. Meir Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985 [Orig. Hebrew 1982]) 186. This, however, does not alter the ade-

regard it as an obvious reference to the Temple's destruction.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, Josephus does report that the Temple was set on fire, but he does so at an extraordinary length, using the words "fire" or "burn" in relation to the sanctuary or its surrounding buildings 69 times, and a further 20 times of the city.<sup>16</sup> But the opening words of his climactic scene show that he intends to depict the fire as a 'heavenly fire,' that is, as a punishment by God: "God, indeed long since, had sentenced [that building] to the flames" (*JW* 6.250; cf. 6.110: "It is then, God himself, who with the Romans is bringing the fire to purge his Temple"). Further, he draws parallels between this second destruction of the Temple and the first by the Babylonians (*JW* 6.104, 250, 268). Therefore, it is probable that he has unduly emphasised the fire for literary effect, and it may not have been as serious as he makes out. The Roman troops seem to have had no difficulty in rescuing the Temple furnishings from its rooms, and Temple treasures were still turning up well after the event "from the wall of the sanctuary" and other places (*JW* 6.387–91).<sup>17</sup> After the city was taken, Titus "ordered the whole city and the Temple to be razed to the ground" (*JW* 7.1). It is clear that the Temple structure still stood after the fire.

Although mentioning those still living among the ashes (*JW* 7.377), Josephus finally refers to "that sacred sanctuary so profanely torn down" (*JW* 7.379),<sup>18</sup> so that it was the tearing down of its stones that he regards as the unholy and ultimate act. Mark's focus in 13:2

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quacy of 13:2, as Jesus has been focusing in the Temple scenes on the destruction of the sanctuary as the place of worship. Moreover, Mark only uses *naos* in 14:58, 15:29 and 15:38—all allusions to the destruction of the Temple—whereas he uses *hieros* nine times elsewhere to do with the general Temple area. This suggests that Mark always has the destruction of the sanctuary in mind. See Note 17 for Josephus' similar use of *naos*. There is no archaeological or literary evidence that any stone of the sanctuary was left upon another.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Telford, *Mark* 23; Theissen, *Gospels* 259.

<sup>16</sup> The principal references are *JW* 6.250–82, 316, 346.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus uses *naos* here, which he seems to use for the sanctuary (as examples, *JW* 5.564; 6.271, 278, 316), rather than *hieros*, which he uses for the Temple enclosure generally (see *JW* 4.198, 200; 5.186). In *JW* 6.318–22, priests hold out against the Roman troops by climbing the wall of the *naos*, and hold out for five days *after the fire*. When they come down, Titus says that they should perish "with their *naos*," and executes them, prior to razing the Temple. Josephus makes much of this later recovery of Temple treasures, and he thereby shows that a significant part of the sanctuary still stood. By this means, he may have intended to emphasise Titus' unwarranted razing of the building, on which he makes no explicit comment.

<sup>18</sup> Thackeray translates *kataskiptomenēn* as "uprooted," but it more usually means "torn down"; see *Ant.* 4.313; 8.128.



of “no stone upon another” similarly draws attention to the final desecration, and serves to describe this conclusive act well.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is not correct to say that 13:2 does not reflect the actual event. Both Matthew and Luke, long after the event, saw fit to describe the Temple’s destruction in identical or very similar words (Matt 24:2; Luke 19:44).

There is also an ironic relationship between 13:2 and 12:10—the cornerstone has been rejected, and so all the stones must now come down. With the two mentions of “stone” so close to each other, the only uses of the word in the Gospel, it is likely that such irony was intentional. The irony of the phrasing—stones no longer upon another—only comes into play fully if the reader knew that the Temple had been razed to its foundations.

#### *The Plausibility of 13:14–18 as a Recent Event*

The third stumbling block has been the call to flight in the ‘oracle’ of 13:14: it is often claimed that it could not have been written after the Romans laid siege to the city, as flight was then irrelevant, and so 13:14–18 either result from the inclusion and re-interpretation of earlier material, or refer to an anticipated event. The call to flight, it is argued, means that Mark did not know of the last days of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup>

Hengel’s discussion is typical, and his proposal has been very influential.<sup>21</sup> He concludes that 13:14–19 must lie before the year 70 since any command to flee “must have seemed nonsensical” once the Roman siege walls had been built. He further argues that, for Mark to include it as he does, he must live in a place remote from Judea, as he has little, if any, knowledge of what is happening there.<sup>22</sup> The oracle, he notes, is expressed in general apocalyptic language, reminiscent of the Maccabean uprising and flight to the hills, indicating a time of severe stress for the Markan community. Unlike other com-

<sup>19</sup> Hillel Geva, “Searching for Roman Jerusalem,” *BAR* 23 (Nov/Dec 1977) 36, suggests that Jewish prisoners were used to destroy the Temple, calling this the “ultimate humiliation.” Perhaps Mark was aware of that when he chose to emphasize the Temple’s stones as he does, intimating their removal one by one.

<sup>20</sup> Many have dated the Gospel before 70 because of this problem; for example, Stock, *Message* 7–8; Vicky Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 122; W. A. Such, “The Significance of *to sēmeion* in Mark 13:4,” *IBS* 13 (1991) 149; Dahm, *Israel* 271–72.

<sup>21</sup> Among those to accept Hengel’s date and location are M. Robert Mansfield, *‘Spirit and Gospel’ in Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 153; Senior, “Swords” 12; McBride, *Mark* 18; Witherington, *Mark* 341.

<sup>22</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 16.

mentators who see the oracle addressed to the community in Jerusalem, Hengel believes that it was intended for readers in Rome who expected a *Nero redivivus* to appear in Jerusalem as the anti-Christ, and the oracle is a warning, using “previous images of apocalyptic terror,” of an expected resumption of persecution.<sup>23</sup> He considers that Mark’s text could not have been written after peace had been restored to the empire by Vespasian in the autumn of 70, and the likely date is in the middle of the trauma of the civil war in Rome in 69.<sup>24</sup>

Not only is Hengel’s proposal of the fear of a *Nero redivivus* implausible, but his foundational assumption is false, according to the only eyewitness report we have of Jerusalem’s last days.<sup>25</sup> Josephus frequently reports that people managed to leave the city after the Romans arrived in April 70. Indeed, immediately after the Roman encampment, many people fled the city: “Titus dismissed the majority into the country, whithersoever they could” (*JW* 5.422).<sup>26</sup> Only in June did the Romans debate whether to blockade the city, and a siege wall 4.5 miles long was finally built in mid-June, supposedly

<sup>23</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 25–27. Hengel admits to being highly speculative here; he begins this proposal with: “The following considerations must remain hypothetical. . . .”

<sup>24</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 22.

<sup>25</sup> The legend of Nero returning from the East appears in the *Sibylline Oracles*, and Hengel refers to the Fourth Oracle, which he admits was written ten years or more after Mark. Tacitus (*Histories* 2.8–9) mentions someone claiming to be Nero in the East in 69; he was quickly killed. Suetonius (*Nero* 57; cf. Dio, *History* 66.19.3, who follows his account) speaks of another impostor, who was supported by the Parthians, but says that this was twenty years after Nero’s death, and he gives no suggestion that anyone in Rome was alarmed at the prospect. In any event, Rome rejoiced when Nero died, according to Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Dio, *History* 63.29.1. The idea of a *Nero redivivus* seems to have only been in the East as a later expression of hope for Rome’s defeat. John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula, Mt.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), esp. 188 n. 46, dates the Fourth Sibylline Oracle, on which Hengel depends, as after 79. *Sib. Or.* 4.130–35 describes the Vesuvius eruption in 79, and the oracle does not speak of Rome being threatened, only riches being paid to the East. Donahue (“Quest” 831–32) points out, that for any such rumours to have any role, one would think that it would place the Gospel later than 70. Recently, Jan Willem Van Henten, “*Nero Redivivus*: The Coherence of the Nero Traditions in the *Sibylline Oracles*,” *JSP* 21 (2000) 3–17, has argued that the idea of the *Nero redivivus* “is a modern scholarly construct,” especially in regard to the Sibylline Oracles, as the visions in those oracles consist only of recycled stereotypes of tyrannical rulers, and do not refer to the return to life of Nero.

<sup>26</sup> The defenders seem to have had considerable mobility, as there were numerous sorties, desertions and attacks on the Romans’ water supply through underground passages. See Dio, *History* 66.4.4–5. In recent years, archaeologists have found a large network of subterranean drains and water channels. Jonathan Price, *Jerusalem under Siege: The Collapse of the Jewish State 66–70 C.E.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992) 286–90. Although Dio wrote ca. 193 and is clearly not familiar with the layout of the Temple (cf. 65.6), his account contains information that is likely to have come from sources other than Josephus; *JW* 1.1 refers to other accounts of the War.

in three days (*JW* 5.499–508).<sup>27</sup> Titus admitted that he did not have enough troops: “To encompass the city with troops would, owing to its extent and the obstacles presented by the ground, be no easy matter” (*JW* 5.496).<sup>28</sup> Later, Josephus reports that many priests who escaped after the fall of the second wall, were spared and sent to Gophna (*JW* 6.113–16).

Furthermore, the call to flight could even apply to the time after the Roman attack on the sanctuary itself. It will be argued below that 13:14 refers to the desecration of the Temple by the Romans, so that the call to flee must relate to the time after the Temple was taken. Josephus describes a scene of particular interest at this point: while Titus’ troops were burning and looting the sanctuary and its adjacent storage rooms, in “the one remaining portico of the outer court . . . the poor women and children of the populace and a mixed multitude had taken refuge” (*JW* 6.283). It is certainly true that the onlookers could have fled at this point, as the rebels had escaped to Herod’s palace in the Upper City. Instead, they were all killed.

Titus then ordered his troops to burn the Lower City and to attack the rebels in the palace, which was difficult to storm because of its walls, its towers and the steepness.<sup>29</sup> He sent for wood for siege engines, but needed to obtain it from more than twelve miles away since all nearer material had been used for earlier platforms. It took eighteen days to build them before the final assault began (*JW* 6.363–92). A period of 25–28 days occurred between the sacking of the Temple (10 Loös) and the capture of the palace on 8 Gorpaios (*JW* 6.435).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This extraordinary claim casts some doubt on the efficacy of the wall, especially in view of the problems obtaining material. See *JW* 5.496–500 for the compromise reached on the enclosure constructed.

<sup>28</sup> The siege proper lasted only two or three months. *JW* 5.29–30 is sometimes quoted to justify the statement that the citizens of Jerusalem could not escape during the siege: “Fear and utter despondency filled the hearts of loyal citizens: they had no chance to effect a change of policy, no hope of compromise or flight if they desired it.” However, they were unable to flee, not because of the Romans, who had not even arrived at Jerusalem at that stage, but because *the rebels would not allow it*. If anything, this text would be evidence that there could not have been flight *before* the Romans arrived.

<sup>29</sup> In Titus’ speech to the rebels prior to the attack, he mentions his sparing of deserters who had not been involved in the fighting (*JW* 6.345).

<sup>30</sup> Because of the considerable uncertainty about the calendar Josephus used, exact dates of these events cannot be established; see the discussions in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987) 596–99, and Helmut Schwier, *Tempel und Tempelzerstörung: Untersuchungen zu den theologischen und ideologischen Faktoren im ersten jüdischen-römischen Krieg (66–74 n. Chr.)*

During the fighting, others escaped or hid in the sewers, although some were made captives; “Although multitudes were slain, a far larger number escaped” (*JW* 6.382).<sup>31</sup> The townspeople were then allowed to leave. Titus appointed officers to decide who “might deserve punishment,” and “the number of those sold was prodigious; of the citizens there were spared upwards of forty thousand, whom Caesar allowed to retire whither each one’s fancy led him” (*JW* 6.383–86).<sup>32</sup>

Although Josephus is always concerned to show how moderate Titus was, and his reports of leniency do seem to contradict Titus’ later widespread execution of prisoners, it is likely that the broad picture of many people fleeing constitutes the historical reality. The Roman legions arrived at Passover when there were very large crowds in the city, in addition to those who may have fled there for protection. Josephus claimed that there had been 3,000,000 people at the Passover in 65 CE, and 2,700,200 at the Passover in 70, based on 256,500 Passover “sacrifices” (*JW* 2.280, 6.424–25). Regardless of his tendency to exaggerate, there is little doubt that there was a very large temporary population in Jerusalem when the Romans arrived. Josephus would need to mention escapes if there were inhabitants of Jerusalem still alive who had witnessed the events. There is no evidence that every inhabitant was killed or sold into slavery.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it is not true that flight was impossible once Titus and his troops laid siege to the city, nor even after they entered the Temple. Verses 14–18 may indeed refer to the suffering and chaos that occurred from the final assault on the Temple to the capture of the towers of the Upper City, and not to the earlier siege of Jerusalem, as has been previously assumed. It may have been in the

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(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989) 37. It is most likely, however, that the Temple was burnt in late August.

<sup>31</sup> A priest named Jeshua and the Temple treasurer handed over the Temple items and were given “the pardon accorded to the refugees” (*JW* 6.391).

<sup>32</sup> The sale price of slaves was very low due to the great supply (*JW* 6.386). Simon ben Gioras and many of his followers were only captured weeks after the final battle when they emerged from the tunnels (*JW* 7.26–36). Later, Lucilius Bassus found many who had escaped from the siege of Jerusalem in the Forest of Jarden (*JW* 7.210–11). Some of the Sicarii even managed to flee to Alexandria (*JW* 7.410).

<sup>33</sup> Some people apparently continued to live among the ruins of the city. Josephus says (*JW* 7.377) that only a few old men and women were living there. It is possible that he returned in later years and saw the situation there, as he was given land in Judea by Vespasian (*Life* 425), and held it for many years, since Domitian made it tax-free (*Life* 429). Kenneth W. Clark, “Worship in the Jerusalem Temple after A.D. 80,” *NTS* 6 (1960) 273–74, has claimed that “a considerable Jewish population remained in and about Jerusalem” after 70.

confusion of the final attack on the Temple mount and the Upper City, when the Roman troops were most concentrated, that escape was most possible. It was then that people would particularly have been looking for a place to hide or escape.

However, in order to show that Mark's mention of flight forms part of a plausible representation of the fall of the Temple, given what his readers knew, other aspects of 13:14–18 still need to be considered.

### THE DEVASTATOR

*But when you see the detestable  
thing that devastates standing where  
he/it ought not be . . . (13:14)*

There have been many interpretations given to the mysterious figure in 13:14a—the “abomination of desolation,” or “detestable thing that devastates,” that “stands where he [or it] should not be.” Mark's readers presumably understood what he meant (“may the reader understand”).<sup>34</sup> It has been regarded as an unfulfilled prophecy, the meaning of which is lost to us,<sup>35</sup> a personal, satanic, Antichrist expected to rule Jerusalem,<sup>36</sup> imperial standards in the Temple in 19 CE,<sup>37</sup> the expectancy of an idol in the Temple based on memories of Caligula's abortive attempt in 40,<sup>38</sup> the expectancy of a new Antiochus-like figure,<sup>39</sup> the

<sup>34</sup> Hurtado suggests that this was a note for the person who read the text out in the assembly, so that the text's real meaning could be explained. L. W. Hurtado, “The Gospel of Mark: Evolutionary or Revolutionary Document?” *JSNVT* 40 (1990) 29. If the destruction had just occurred, no more than a “wink at the reader” would be needed, as Camery-Hoggatt (*Irony* 8) remarks.

<sup>35</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future* (London: Macmillan, 1954) 106–7, 72–73, following Johannes Weiss and Maurice Goguel.

<sup>36</sup> Streeter (also Rawlinson and Lohmeyer), cited in Beasley-Murray, *Future* 67–68, 108–10; Taylor, *Mark* 511; Geddert, *Watchwords* 237; Hengel, *Studies* 20; Morna Hooker, “Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII,” *BJRL* 65 (1983) 90, suggesting that it is based on the same tradition as 2 Thess 2:3–12; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976) 18; Stock, *Message* 336.

<sup>37</sup> According to Robert Eisler, this was what prompted Jesus to come forward. Cited in Beasley-Murray, *Future* 92.

<sup>38</sup> Pfeiderer, cited in Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13,” in Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.1134; also Sanders and Davies, *Synoptic Gospels* 17; Theissen, *Gospels* 260.

<sup>39</sup> C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968) 81–82.

Roman army before Jerusalem,<sup>40</sup> Jesus' own prophecy,<sup>41</sup> the occupation of the Temple by Eleazar in 67/68,<sup>42</sup> the installation of Phanas as High Priest in 67,<sup>43</sup> and the expectation that Titus would enter the Temple.<sup>44</sup> The variety of interpretations shows how successful Mark was in keeping his meaning hidden from those not 'in the know.'

Much attention has been paid to what this 'oracle' in 13:14–18 had originally been in a supposed earlier tradition.<sup>45</sup> Less attention has been paid to the meaning it had for the Markan audience. Although it is conceivable that the inclusion of old oracles in order to interpret the current situation is possible, it is much more likely that Mark composed 13:14–18 to stir the emotions of his readers in Rome after they had received the news of the Temple's destruction. Moreover, it is unlikely that a Christian reader anywhere would be very concerned about the rebel struggles for power in Jerusalem, their actions in the Temple, or who was appointed High Priest. The event of far greater significance was the destruction of the Temple and its desecration by the Romans, as will become apparent in Chapter 4.

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<sup>40</sup> G. Volkmar, cited in Hengel, *Studies* 130; also Desmond Ford, cited in Collins, *Beginning* 85; J. J. Gunther, cited in Theissen, *Gospels* 129.

<sup>41</sup> Mann, *Mark* 522; Strelan, *Boundaries* 20.

<sup>42</sup> Marcus, "Jewish War" 451–52; Witherington, *Mark* 345; also S. Sowers, cited in Theissen, *Gospels* 129.

<sup>43</sup> Balabanski, *Eschatology* 55–134. She follows Marxsen and Kee in relying on the Pella tradition, claiming that refugees from Jerusalem brought the oracle to Pella. However, it is very difficult to see why the installation of a new High Priest would be of such concern to Christians as to call it a blasphemy and a horror, nor why the escape of Christians from Jerusalem should be included in the list of catastrophes and trials in Chapter 13, as God had *not* rescued Christians from the other trials in that chapter. She does accept that the Gospel was written after 70. If so, it is difficult to see why Mark would not refer to the far greater sacrilege that occurred at the time of the destruction, rather than a dispute over the High Priest some years earlier.

<sup>44</sup> Such, "Significance" 143–47. Keith D. Dyer, *The Prophecy on the Mount: Mark 13 and the Gathering of the New Community* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998) 227, has proposed that the abomination causing flight is an image of Vespasian on a coin. He cites an undated denarius, which shows Vespasian in military dress. He argues that Christians in Judea might have seen a coin like it, so that he would appear to them as the "would-be destroyer of Jerusalem standing where he ought not to be."

<sup>45</sup> When T. Colani first raised the theory in 1864 of the 'Little Apocalypse' as the source of much of this chapter, he was concerned to argue that Jesus could not have held the eschatological views of the chapter, and it was therefore the work of Jewish Christians at about the time of the flight to Pella early in the Jewish War. The history of the theories on this earlier oracle is well described by George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourses* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993); see 14–20 on Colani. For a survey of opinions on the abomination of desolation, see Collins, *Beginning* 83–86.

It is generally agreed that 13:14 relates to the Temple. If not, then Jesus does not reply at all to the disciples' question in 13:4. He is explicitly said to be "sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple" during this discourse (13:3). His speech first predicts events that, for the reader, had already occurred. In Chapter 6, an analysis of this speech shows that vv. 5–6, 21–22 frame a description of past events, which the reader might misinterpret if they heeded the false prophets and messiahs who were attempting to lead them astray.<sup>46</sup> It is only with vv. 23–24 that the speech begins to refer to the reader's future with the new textual beginning: "But be alert. I have already told you everything. But in those days, after that suffering. . . ."<sup>47</sup> The final and climactic item in Mark's list of past events, then, is the most recent 'bad news' received by the reader—the destruction of the Temple (vv. 14–18). This first section of the speech begins with Jesus' prediction of its demise (13:2) and climaxes with a description of its fulfilment (13:14–18) in a realistic and emotionally charged depiction of events surrounding its destruction. These verses are shaped to produce a certain type of response in Mark's readers, and his emotive language begins with the "detestable thing that devastates."

On the basis that 13:14a refers to the attack on the Temple, there are only two options for the object or person behind this phrase. First, after the sanctuary had been taken, the Roman soldiers brought their standards into the "Eastern Court" of the Temple, and offered sacrifices before them (*JW* 6.316).<sup>48</sup> Reaction to the presence of Roman standards had occurred once before in Jerusalem: Josephus tells us that procurators prior to Pilate had always chosen military units for Jerusalem that did not have "Caesar's effigies" upon them. But Pilate, on his appointment as prefect, brought such standards into the city by night, and caused "immense excitement among the

<sup>46</sup> Christopher M. Tuckett, "The Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in Porter (ed.), *Handbook* 479–80, observes that "the close similarity . . . of the warnings suggests that both are thought to be real and present for Mark," so that, even at v. 22, the text has not yet moved into Mark's future.

<sup>47</sup> It will be proposed that vv. 21–37 relate to responses to that event, reassure the reader, and exhort the adoption of correct attitudes.

<sup>48</sup> Schmithals has suggested this event as the referent, cited in Theissen, *Gospels* 130, as does Tuckett, "Synoptic Gospels" 479, among others. Hooker (*Mark* 314) suggests that the verse alludes either to the standards, or to the figure symbolised by them, perhaps Titus. Tacitus (*Annals* 5.4) tells us that, during the time of Tiberius, the troops chose images of their generals and emperors for their standards. On this basis, the person represented by the standards of Titus' troops could be either Titus or Vespasian, or both. The troops did acclaim Titus as *imperator* at that point (*JW* 6.316).

Jews . . . [who considered that] their laws had been trampled under foot, as those laws permit no image to be erected in the city.” The angry mob bared their necks to the swords of Pilate’s troops called to quell the riot, and Pilate was forced to withdraw the unit to Caesarea (*JW* 2.169–74; cf. *Ant.* 18.55–59).<sup>49</sup> There was a similar reaction when Gaius Caligula attempted to place his statue in the Temple in 40 (*Ant.* 18.257–309).

The religious significance of the Roman standards should not be underestimated. Webster comments:

The standards were the religious focus of the army and could be said to embody the ‘soul’ of the unit. They were kept in a special shrine (*sacellum*) in the *principia* of the fortresses and forts and played an important part on religious festivals. . . . There was doubtless some totemic influence at work in the images chosen of eagle, bear, bull, fox etc.<sup>50</sup>

Tacitus, Dio Cassius and Tertullian refer to the reverence that Roman soldiers had for their standards.<sup>51</sup> Even a casual observer would see the religious significance of the military standards.<sup>52</sup> The images of animals alone would be “abominable” for Jews.<sup>53</sup> It is possible, too,

<sup>49</sup> The subsequent text in both *Antiquities* and *Jewish War* describes Pilate’s massacre of Jews who objected to his use of Temple treasury monies to pay for an aqueduct. This did not give rise to a violent reaction as had the religious affront caused by the standards. In *Ant.* 18.258, Josephus remarks that all other subjugated peoples had statues to the emperor in their temples. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) 162, has suggested that 3 Kislev commemorates the removal of Pilate’s standards from Jerusalem: “In that case, the annual commemoration shows how deep an impression Pilate’s action made on the Jewish mind.”

<sup>50</sup> Webster, *Army* 133–34. He adds (136–37): “The *imago* was of special importance in bringing the Emperor into a closer relationship to his troops” and was carried on a special standard. Standard-bearers wore animal-skins over their uniform, following Celtic practice, with the head of the animal carried over the man’s shoulders and its teeth on his forehead.” For similar descriptions, see also J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 96.

<sup>51</sup> See Tacitus, *Annals* 1.39; Dio, *History* 40.18.1–3. Tertullian (*Apol.* 16) thought that the soldier “venerated the standards, swore by the standards, set the standards before all the gods.” Pointed out by G. W. H. Lampe, “A.D. 70 in Christian Reflection,” in Ernst Bammel and C. D. F. Moule (eds), *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 162, who considered it “possible” that 13:14 refers to the actions of the soldiers in the Temple. He also cites *IQpHab* 6.3–5: “[The Kittim] sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war.”

<sup>52</sup> Tacitus refers to the emperor’s portrait on the standards in *Histories* 1.41; 4.62, and, in 3.10, he speaks of Antoninus turning to them and praying to “the standards and the gods of war.” The standards probably also contained images of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. John Helgeland, “Roman Army Religion,” *ANRW* II, 16.2 (1978) 1473–74; he also cites Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.12: “They prefer the standards to Jupiter himself.”

<sup>53</sup> There was uproar when Herod tried to attach an eagle to the Temple wall (*Ant.* 17.151–55).



that it was a pig that was sacrificed (see Page 192). Overall, such an event would have been repulsive for Jews. The question, however, is whether this act would have had such a strong impact on Mark's readers, even for those of Jewish birth, for it to figure in the suffering of Christians listed in 13:6–20.

A more likely candidate for the 'devastator' is Titus. In 13:14a, the mixing of the masculine participle (*hestēkota* = "standing") with the neuter noun (*bdeugma* = "detestable thing" or "abomination") has led most commentators to look for a person behind this enigmatic saying. Theissen says that the verse reads like "the thing *who* stands where it should not stand."<sup>54</sup> Mark adapts the language of the Book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), which refers to the erection of an altar to Zeus in the Jerusalem sanctuary by Antiochus in 167 BCE, and so this phrase seems designed to remind the readers of a well-known occasion when a foreign interloper desecrated the Temple. David Daube has pointed out that Mark seems to be imitating as best as he could the Hebrew grammatical construction of Dan 12:11, which should be translated "the abomination which devastates" or "the abomination of a devastator."<sup>55</sup> Mark therefore points to some form of sacrilege but, in particular, to one that 'devastates.' Whereas the standards only qualify as a sacrilege, Titus fits both requirements, as he entered the sanctuary and then destroyed it, along with the city. The description "the abomination who devastates" fits him very well.

Josephus pointedly tries to absolve Titus from blame for the fire, which he claims was caused by a defender. He has Titus "resting in his tent" when the Temple was set alight (*JW* 6.254).<sup>56</sup> He says that Titus *ran* to the Temple and did his best to command his troops to put out the fire, but they "neither heard his shouts, drowned in the louder din which filled their ears, nor heeded his beckoning hand, distracted as they were" (*JW* 6.256).<sup>57</sup> Titus, "finding himself

<sup>54</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 160.

<sup>55</sup> Daube notes that Mark's phrase is highly compatible with later Rabbinic methods and with both Old Testament and New Testament texts where the message conveyed is of "a particularly secret, dangerous nature," citing especially Rev 13:18 and *Ep. Barn.* 4.5–6 as examples of secret allusions that the reader is invited to understand, both of which relate to a beast that is a symbol of the Roman emperor. He also cites Philo, *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* 30.141, where a grammatical problem is used on purpose to indicate a second meaning. David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Salem: Ayer Company, 1984 [Orig. 1956]) 418–37.

<sup>56</sup> In *JW* 6.249, Josephus reports that Titus retired to "the tower of Antonia" but, in 6.254, he is in his tent, apparently with all of his generals.

<sup>57</sup> Josephus goes on to say that they later "pretended not even to hear Caesar's

unable to restrain the impetuosity of his frenzied soldiers,” entered the Holy Place “with his generals,” only after his failure to have the fire quenched (*JW* 6.260). It all seems like an attempt to deny that Titus intentionally defiled the Holy Place.

Historically, of course, Titus was unlikely to have had qualms about entering the sanctuary of a defeated city’s temple, as a conqueror traditionally proclaimed his victory and declared his sovereignty over the defeated by offering sacrifice in their temple.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, Pompey entered the sanctuary when he captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE. Tacitus described the occasion in this way:

Pompey was the first Roman to subdue the Jews and set foot in the Temple by right of conquest. That is the source of the information that the Temple contained no image of any god: their shrine was empty, the innermost sanctuary void. (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9)

However, Josephus expressed horror in remembering this event:

Of all the calamities of that time none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes of the Holy Place, hitherto screened from view. Pompey indeed, along with his staff, penetrated to the sanctuary, entry to which was permitted to none but the high priest. (*JW* 1.152; cf. *Ant.* 14.71–73)<sup>59</sup>

This reaction suggests that Titus’ entry into the Temple should have been abhorrent to Josephus, and yet he does not criticise him. Barclay has proposed that Josephus, who “goes out of his way to distance Titus from this drastic act,” tries to clear him of a charge of impiety against the Temple, despite Titus parading the Temple items in his triumph in Rome. He describes Josephus as “acting as an imperial toady.”<sup>60</sup> However, Josephus seems to have made much of Titus’ public display in Rome of the Temple vessels, and he may have been subtly pointing to Titus’ impiety by earlier including both his account of Pompey in the Temple, and his report of Gaius’ attempt to erect his statue there (*JW* 2.184–203). In the latter case, he reports the

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orders,” and continued to throw firebrands (*JW* 6.258). Dio (*History* 66.6.2), however, says that Titus had to force his soldiers to enter even the Temple enclosure “because of their superstition.”

<sup>58</sup> Paul Brooks Duff, “The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark’s Account of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem,” *JBL* 111 (1992) 58–62, gives examples of triumphal entries in the ancient world, and the significance of the sacrifice offered by the conqueror in the temple of the local god.

<sup>59</sup> Josephus goes on to emphasise that the Temple was cleansed afterwards.

<sup>60</sup> Barclay, *Jews* 353.

Jews pleading “that they were forbidden to place an image of God, much more of a man, not only in their sanctuary but even in any unconsecrated spot throughout the country” (*JW* 2.195). Another pointer may be his mention that both Pompey and Titus entered the Temple with their associates. From these reports, one could only conclude that Josephus regarded Titus’ similar actions as gross sacrilege.<sup>61</sup>

As mentioned earlier, while the fire was in progress, a large number of people fled to the porticos, presumably at the south end. As Josephus depicts the scene, they would have been looking on as Titus and his commanders entered the sanctuary (*JW* 6.277, 283).<sup>62</sup> Perhaps Mark describes this very scene—the sacrilege of Titus standing in the Holy Place, not just as a Gentile, or even as Rome’s general, but effectively as the joint emperor.<sup>63</sup>

Titus is much more likely to be the concern for Mark and his readers than the issue of the standards. It will be shown later that the Christians of Rome had good reason to fear him, and stressing his irreverence in 13:14a is likely to have stirred up the readers’ concerns about his reputation. If so, this would best explain Mark’s secrecy and his need to be careful in what he wrote.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, in 13:14a, Mark effectively writes: ‘When you see the sacrilegious devastator standing where he ought not to be (you know who I mean). . . .’<sup>65</sup>

Streeter commented that the grammar points to a permanent state of affairs,<sup>66</sup> and some have found it difficult to categorise the inci-

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<sup>61</sup> Josephus (*Life* 361, 363) says that he presented *War of the Jews* to Titus, who insisted on its publication. Steve Mason, “Should Any Wish to Enquire Further (Ant. 1.25): The Aim and Audience of Josephus’ Judean *Ant./Life*,” in Steve Mason (ed.), *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 74–77, argues that Josephus’ primary patrons were probably not the Flavians, but perhaps Agrippa II, his family and friends in Rome. Regardless, *Flavius* Josephus seems to have been supported by the Flavians in Rome (*Life* 423, 428). Eusebius (*E.H.* 3.9) reports that a statue was erected to him. At this early stage of his career, he may only have been able to drop these hints of his disapproval of Titus’ actions.

<sup>62</sup> According to Josephus (*JW* 6.283), they included women and children. Mark writes: “Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days” (13:17).

<sup>63</sup> In one speech, Josephus has Titus speak of himself and Vespasian in these terms: “When we were made emperors . . . when we were no more than generals in the army, but the government devolved on us” (*JW* 6.341), suggesting that he regarded them as joint emperors. See Page 177 for more discussion on this.

<sup>64</sup> After all, the desecration of a Temple was considered a capital offence in Roman law. Lane, *Mark* 534.

<sup>65</sup> Donald H. Juel, *Mark* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990) 179, has also concluded that the abomination of 13:14 was Titus standing in the sanctuary.

<sup>66</sup> Burnett H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924) 492, as does Hengel, *Studies* 18.

dent of Titus in the Temple as such.<sup>67</sup> But the taking of the Temple surely initiates a new state of affairs for both Temple sacrifice, for Judaism, for the authority of the new Flavian dynasty, and perhaps for the Roman Christians.

A further difficulty in interpreting 13:14 has been the phrase “in Judea”; if the warning relates to Jerusalem’s destruction, a command to flee should refer to the people in the city only. However, “in Judea” reads well if it was written from a remote location. In particular, “Judea” is the way it would be referred to in Rome, and is the name of the Roman province. For example, Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) puts the origins of the Christian superstition “in Judea,” although referring to the place of Jesus’ execution and the beginnings of the Christian movement, both of which occurred in the city of Jerusalem, not the Judean countryside.

This leads to the question of the addressees of 13:14–18. In this speech of Jesus in Chapter 13, Mark has to carefully incorporate the perspectives of the story characters (Jesus and the disciples), the watchers of the scene alluded to (the people of Jerusalem), and his readers. When, in 13:14a, he uses “you,” it is a general, inclusive, term covering all those who, in the future, should recognise this event for what it is. But 13:14b should be distinguished from 13:14a. “When you see” (13:14a) refers to the reader’s perception, but “those in Judea” (13:14b: *hoi in tē Ioudaia*) begins to refer to those who had been present in Jerusalem when the Romans took the Temple. In the verses that follow, Mark interprets for his readers the tragedy that had recently occurred in Judea.

#### WOE TO THOSE IN THE CITY OF GOD

*... the one in the field must  
not turn back. (13:18)*

It would be a mistake to read 13:14b–18 as a lament over the loss of the Temple. Rather, it evokes *pity* for those caught up in the disaster:

Those in Judea must flee . . . [and] must not . . . take anything away . . . must not turn back . . . woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants. Pray that it will not be in winter.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Balabanski, *Eschatology* 124.

It is similar to the pathos found in ancient descriptions of disasters. Here, it is in the form of a woe statement. Most prophetic woe statements warn of the future consequences of wrong action (see, for example, Hos 7:13; Jer 13:27; Ezek 24:6–14; Matt 11:21–24), and that is true here, not from Mark’s point in time, but from the perspective of Jesus bemoaning the fate of the future inhabitants of the city.

The warning is sometimes compared with the call to flee to the mountains at the time of the Maccabean revolt (1 Macc 2:27–28),<sup>68</sup> but the textual link is weak and ‘the hills’ in those verses are not those surrounding Jerusalem, but are those in Modein. Moreover, there is no reason why Mark would want his readers to contemplate the Maccabean revolt, as he would not want to suggest that armed resistance against Roman power is desirable.

Instead, Mark seems to be alluding to another, more relevant, biblical image of urgent flight to the hills—the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Gen 19. This allusion is sometimes rejected on the grounds that the textual parallels are not close, but the phrase “into the hills” is simple language, and the difference between Mark’s *eis ta orē* and the *eis to oros* in Gen 19:17 (LXX) is minor.<sup>69</sup> The Sodom story has a close parallel in the command not to “look back or stop” (Gen 19:17) compared with the command not to “turn back” in 13:16 (also implied in 13:15). In the Sodom story, Lot’s wife dies because she looks back, and in the Targums, a reason is given for her doing so—“to see what would be the end of her father’s house,” as she was “from the daughters of Sodomites” (*Tg. Neof.* 1: Genesis 19:26). She loses her life because of her attachment to her home. This can be compared to Mark’s injunction not to take anything out of the house or to turn back (13:15–16), and suggests that anyone delaying for the sake of their property is doomed since, as with Sodom, everything must be destroyed. The LXX has the angels say “save yourself on the mountains,” as do the Targums, adding to the image of saving *only* yourself, and not your property.

In Mark, those fleeing are told: “The one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; the one in

<sup>68</sup> For example, Hengel, *Studies* 17.

<sup>69</sup> Balabanski (*Eschatology* 120, 127) chooses 1 Macc 2:28 because its *eis ta orē* is identical to 13:14. Looking for the exact similarity in such a simple phrase can result in missing the wider sense of the allusion. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is likely that Mark cited most of his biblical allusions and quotations from memory, and adapted them as necessary.

the field must not turn back to get his coat" (13:16). The three terms used in vv. 15–16 are "house," "field" and "coat"—terms used in the Old Testament to relate to the heritage of an Israelite (Ruth 4:5; Exod 22:26; Deut 24:13), and the latter is a reminder of the cloak of the poor man (cf. 10:50). It is also used in a similar way to the vignette in 14:52 where an anonymous man discards his *sindōn* and flees hastily, along with the other would-be disciples, escaping from another "horror"—arrest and crucifixion.

As "house" here refers to houses of the city, "field" means everywhere else (*agros*, commonly meaning "countryside"), so that vv. 15–16 seem to cover all the land (cf. Deut 28:3, 16), and the use of these terms make clear that everything will be lost, and must be left behind. They stress the extent of the devastation and the depths of the disaster. Along with the focus on the devastator in v. 14a, the whole image speaks of extensive destruction.

In Jerusalem in August 70, the fighting in the Temple would have been best observed from the rooftops of the Upper City by those inhabitants not involved in the struggle. From there, they could look down from the higher hill into the Temple courts. Mark appears to have known the city layout and topography, and such a view of the Temple conflict may be reflected in the warning, "The one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away." Commentators have long pointed out the strangeness of the verse, which seems to suggest that the person on the rooftop should not even go down off the roof before escaping. However, for those in the Upper City, the warning may mean not to go down the western hill towards the Temple, as well as not to stop and take anything from the house, both being very sound pieces of advice in the situation, as Roman troops would soon loot the city.

There is a comparable scene in Josephus' account: immediately after his description of Titus in the sanctuary with his troops, and a reminder to his readers of the earlier destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, Josephus describes the scene of the burning Temple *from the perspective of those in the city*:

With the cries on the hill were blended those of the multitude in the city below; . . . when they beheld the sanctuary on fire, gathered strength once more for lamentations and wailing. Peraea and the surrounding mountains contributed their echoes, deepening the din. . . . You would indeed have thought that the temple hill was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame. (*JW* 6.274–75)

In contrast to the ‘mountains singing for joy’ on the return from Exile (Isa 49:13), now the mountains echo the groans and cries. Even the mountain on which the Temple stood is being destroyed with fire.<sup>70</sup> It reminds of the scene where Abraham “looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace” (Gen 19:28). In Gen 19:25, it was not just the city that was burnt, but “what grew on the ground,” so that the earth itself suffered as well as the inhabitants.

Earlier, Josephus had explicitly compared the destruction of Jerusalem with that of Sodom, writing that, if the Romans had not stormed the city when they did, it would have “tasted anew the thunderbolts of the land of Sodom. For it produced a generation far more godless than the victims of those visitations” (*JW* 5.566). In Rome in the seventies, Josephus, at least, was comparing the destruction of Jerusalem with that of Sodom, but Mark seems to have preceded him with this comparison. Like Josephus, Mark warns of ‘evil tenants’ who would be destroyed (12:9), and, in 13:14–18, he describes the cult’s destruction in the form of a woe ‘oracle,’ cast in the mould of the Sodom story, that warns the inhabitants to flee God’s judgement on the city, as Lot had. It is similar to woe oracles like Jer 4:13–31, also about the destruction of Jerusalem: “Woe to us . . .,” which also ends with a pregnant woman, who cries, “Woe is me!” For Mark’s readers, this portrayal evokes pity on those caught up in this act of God, carried out using the Roman forces. From the perspective of Jesus in the story, his strong advice to the inhabitants is not to stay and fight, but to flee, abandoning the Temple, because God had decreed its destruction.

Mark was not the first writer to employ the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example in predicting the judgement of God upon Jerusalem, as similar uses occur in Lam 4:6; Deut 29:23; Isa 1:9–10.<sup>71</sup> Both Matthew and Luke use Sodom and Gomorrah in a number of woe statements against those who reject Jesus’ message (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Luke 10:12; 17:29) suggesting that this was

<sup>70</sup> In 11:23, Jesus speaks of the mountain being destroyed (see Page 147).

<sup>71</sup> It is clear from other Jewish literature that Sodom could be used as an example in relation to sins not of a sexual nature. *3 Macc* 2.5 says that God “made Sodom an example to later generations.” *Jub.* 22.20 has: “Just as the sons of Sodom were taken from the earth, so (too) all of those who worship idols shall be taken away.” *T. Naph.* 4.1 speaks simply of “every lawlessness.”

a popular motif in Christian thinking. Indeed, Paul had cited Sodom and Gomorrah in writing to the Roman Christians: he cited Isa 1:9, which originally referred to the survivors of the invasion of the Assyrians, but he used it to explain that God saved a ‘remnant’ (the Gentiles) after Israel had failed (Rom 9:29).

This ‘warning’ of Jesus in 13:14–18 therefore served not only to remind readers of the recent cataclysm in Jerusalem, but also to interpret that event for them. Although the motif of God destroying the Temple as a judgement upon Israel is usually seen to be only evident in Matthew, Luke and later New Testament writings, it becomes clear that it is already present in Mark, a few months after the event.<sup>72</sup> This motif is another pointer to the Temple being destroyed at the time of writing.

In the same decade as Mark, Josephus repeatedly asserted that God was against the Jews because of their behaviour in the Temple (beginning with the cessation of sacrifices on behalf of Gentiles, including the emperor).<sup>73</sup> He speaks of the Romans coming to “purge” Jerusalem, “for you were no longer God’s place,” and of “that God who devastated you” (*JW* 5.19).<sup>74</sup> Both writers in the city of Rome came to the same conclusion. But, while Josephus was emphasising the fire, Mark may well have been reluctant to speak of a purging fire after the Christian community had been blamed for the conflagration in Rome in 64. Perhaps Christians were known to speak of the fire that reveals and saves (cf. 1 Cor 3:13, 15).

Hengel is correct, therefore, in saying that such an ‘oracle’ as 13:14–18 may be delivered to a place other than Jerusalem or its environs and still be meaningful.<sup>75</sup> The likely reaction of Mark’s readers to the loss of the Temple will be discussed further in Chapter 4 but, rhetorically, Mark’s presentation of this event is one which serves

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<sup>72</sup> In the opinion of David Seeley, “Jesus’ Temple Act,” *CBQ* 55 (1993) 276, “Mark pondered the meaning of the Temple’s destruction and concluded that it was a punishment for Jewish rejection of Jesus.” Karel Hanhart, “Son, Your Sins Are Forgiven,” in Van Segbroeck et al. (eds), *Four Gospels* 2.997, sees Mark as a Paul-inspired attempt to interpret the events of 70.

<sup>73</sup> See in particular *JW* 5.412; 6.110, where Josephus declares that God was on the side of the Romans.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 89–92, has observed that the response of Judaism to the destruction of the Temple was that it was God’s judgement for sin.

<sup>75</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 28. Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 36) also reads 13:14–20 as a portrayal by an outside observer, not one involved in the events.



to note the irreverent character of Titus and to depict the Temple's destruction as God-ordained.

Overall, 13:14–18 can be seen to be a vivid and accurate depiction of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, indicating that Mark and his readers knew of the event. These verses were composed as a plausible, if cryptic and rhetorical, representation of the climactic moment of Titus' attack on, and desecration of, the Temple.<sup>76</sup>

As Jerusalem did not fall until late September, news of the Roman victory would not have reached Rome until at least late November, even if couriers ignored the normal closure of shipping in October/November 70. If the news was sent by road, Romans would not have heard of it before very late in 70, at best.<sup>77</sup> However, this is likely to have provided only a sketchy report. Greater detail would only have reached Rome in the summer of 71, when Titus returned with his sizeable entourage, and the Triumph was held. Apart from Josephus and the family of King Azates who were taken to Rome (*JW* 6.356–57), 700 prisoners were also shipped there to be dis-

<sup>76</sup> The command in 13:18 to “pray that it may not be in winter” has sometimes been seen as an indicator that the destruction has not yet occurred, and that Mark is urging prayer for the expected distress to be alleviated. However, the final assault on the Temple occurred in late August, at the end of summer. This verse is another reflection of knowledge of the actual event, and it serves to reinforce the accuracy of Jesus' warnings.

<sup>77</sup> It took a significant amount of time for news to reach Rome from the East. It could take anywhere from 50 to 100 days for travel by ship between Palestine/Alexandria and Rome against the prevailing winds, but typically two months. There was little sea travel outside May to October. M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce in the Roman Empire* (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1961 [Orig. 1924]) 43–44; Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 270; *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974) 149. Titus could not get back to Rome to obtain instructions from Galba on Vespasian's hearing of his accession to the throne. He was still travelling along the Greek coast by short daytime coastal hops in a military galley in mid-winter (the safest way to travel, and the only way used in winter, except in extreme emergencies; cf. Casson, *Travel* 149), when he heard that Galba had been assassinated after a seven month reign, and returned immediately to Vespasian (*JW* 4.497–502). By road from Alexandria to Italy took two months, if all went well. Casson, *Travel* 149. Boudewin Sirks, *Food for Rome: The Legal Structure of the Transportation and Processing of Supplies for the Imperial Distributions in Rome and Constantinople* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1991) 42–44, concludes that two grain cargoes per year for a ship working the Alexandria–Puteoli route would have been rare. He cites a later Roman military handbook that up to 10 November was considered reasonable for sea travel, and as early as 10 March, and claims that many ships did sail in winter, but his evidence on the grain ships suggests that such trips were exceptions. Richard Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 25–27, estimates that a voyage took between 30 and 80 days from Alexandria to Rome, based on inscriptions and papyri, and shows that, even ca. 1500 CE, Alexandria to Venice took 65 days.

played in the Triumph (*JW* 7.118). As far as we know, only the leader Simon was killed in the Forum at the end of the procession (*JW* 7.154–55), and it is likely that the remainder were sold as slaves.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Titus is likely to have been accompanied by many of the individual adventurers who travelled from Rome and Italy to Palestine to join him at the beginning of the attack on Jerusalem, hoping to ingratiate themselves with the new emperor (see Tacitus, *Histories* 5.1). It would not take long for the full story to be told around Rome from these sources,<sup>79</sup> and it is only from them that the details that Mark seems to know are likely to have been obtained—Titus entering the Temple, the possibility of flight during the attack on the Temple, the horror of the scene, the role of the Tenth Legion (see Page 191), and the razing of the Temple.<sup>80</sup>

The principal obstacles that have been raised for a post-70 dating therefore do not stand up to close examination. Other indications of the Temple's destruction, outside of Mark 13, will now be considered.

#### THE TEMPLE THAT COULD NOT BE CLEANED

*He went to see if he could find any fruit, but . . .  
he found none. (11:13)*

In 11:1–11, when Jesus enters Jerusalem, he is welcomed like a conquering king but, unusually for a victor, he does not offer sacrifice in the Temple. He just looks around, “as it was late by this time, being the hour” (*hōra*), and departs.<sup>81</sup> The next day, he comes back, not to offer sacrifice, but to attack the way in which the Temple is being used. The whole depiction of Jesus' return visit to the Temple

<sup>78</sup> Josephus indicates (*JW* 7.118) that the prisoners returned to Rome with Titus, so that they had no opportunity to tell their story until Titus arrived, although separate travel might have resulted in them arriving slightly earlier. Barclay (*Jews* 310) suggests that Josephus became a spokesman for the cause of these prisoners in Rome.

<sup>79</sup> No doubt, Josephus came to Rome eager to tell the story, and others would soon write about it; a few years later, Josephus mentions their presence in Rome, and says that they relied on “hearsay” (*JW* 1.1–2).

<sup>80</sup> Although it would have taken considerable time to knock down Herod's Temple with its massive stones, including the stoa on the southern side, Mark seems to be confident enough in his knowledge of events to know that the demolition was complete or almost complete (13:2).

<sup>81</sup> This is normally translated “as it was already late,” but it loses the impact of the three time references in this verse—“late,” “now” (or “by this time”) and “hour”—all are significant in view of the Temple's lack of readiness (11:13).

is filled with foreboding. On the way (v. 12), he is hungry (*epeinasen*), a word often used to mean a deep desire or yearning (cf. Matt 5:6; John 6:35).<sup>82</sup> When he comes to the fig tree, his hunger cannot be satisfied, because there is no fruit. It is not ready, nor is the Temple or those responsible for its affairs.

In the Temple, Jesus lodges a complaint: "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of bandits.'" (11:17). This incident occurs in the Court of the Gentiles, just after Jesus had 'made some space' for those for whom it had been intended, driving out the merchants<sup>83</sup> and not allowing "anyone to carry anything" (*skeuos*) through it (11:15–16).<sup>84</sup> Jesus' actions hardly amount to an attempt to halt sacrifices or to restore correct worship.<sup>85</sup> They are merely a dramatic illustration of the sorry situation of the cult.<sup>86</sup> His first complaint about the situation

<sup>82</sup> Its only other use in Mark's Gospel is in 2:25, in which, in an altered telling of the story in 1 Sam 21, David is described as entering the "house of God" and taking the bread that was necessary to satisfy him and his companions. In 11:17, Jesus enters the Temple and expresses his dissatisfaction.

<sup>83</sup> There is no suggestion in the text that the merchants were acting dishonestly. The reaction of the chief priests and scribes (11:18) indicates that they considered themselves to be the targets.

<sup>84</sup> *Skeuos* can mean any useful object, even a table, although it often means a container of some type. BAGD 754. Mark may have meant baskets and other containers that people used for carrying goods up the southern steps from the lower city, through the Court of the Gentiles, and out of the western gates to the upper city (or vice versa). For references on the practice of taking shortcuts through the Temple, see Betz, "Purity" 457 n. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Seeley ("Temple Act" 274) claims that Jesus is halting the carrying of vessels to be used in the cult, and is thus making sacrifice impossible. But it would be a very obscure way of doing so, and Jesus does not object to the use of the animals, only their sale in the Court of the Gentiles. Nor does he object to people offering sacrifices, or supporting the Temple, and even applauds the widow for doing the latter (12:43–44). Only recently had the High Priest allowed traders into the Temple precincts. They would normally have operated from the street outside, and they could simply have resumed business there. Moreover, there is no motif of a hoped-for restoration of the Temple cult anywhere in the Gospel. Mark did not need to have a fig tree episode if Jesus' aim was to 'cleanse' the Temple. In any case, the fig tree *died*; it was not just sick.

<sup>86</sup> There has been widespread discussion recently on what the historical Jesus supposedly meant by these actions; see E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985) 61–76; Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 (1989) 237–70; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Recent Research on the Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Assessment," *BBR* 8 (1998) 187–216; Craig A. Evans, "From 'House of Prayer' to 'Cave of Robbers': Jesus' Prophetic Criticism of the Temple's Establishment," in Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation: The Quest for Context and Meaning* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 417–42; Jacob Neusner, "Money-changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's

is that the Temple is not open to people of “all nations” for prayer, as the Court of the Gentiles was now filled with commercial activity and traffic. The vision of Deutero-Isaiah had not been fulfilled—foreigners could not come “to my holy mountain . . . [to be] joyful in my house of prayer” (Isa 56:6–7). This failure renders the Temple useless in God’s plan—it has been taken over exclusively by Israel.

Mark takes the phrase “den of bandits” from Jer 7:11, reminding the reader of the dramatic scene there of Jeremiah at the gate of the Temple foretelling its doom because of its misuse. Through Jeremiah, Yahweh had warned, “Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people” (Jer 7:12). Shiloh was in ruins at the time. In Mark’s scene, the sense is clear: the Temple is doomed because it is excluding Gentiles.

There is some evidence that the exclusion of Gentiles from the Temple was a sensitive issue in Rome in the seventies. In his *Jewish War*, Josephus depicts the rebels’ action in halting sacrifices for foreigners as a distortion of customary practice, claiming that they forced it upon the priests and elders; this, he says, “laid the foundation of the war” (*JW* 2.409–10). He seems to be on the defensive, going on to insist that this aberration of the Jewish cult was the reason why God decreed the Temple’s end.<sup>87</sup> However, later in his composition, he has Titus, in a speech to the defenders just before driving them out of the Temple, complain bitterly about the exclusion of foreigners. He does not refer to the halting of sacrifices on their behalf, but criticises at length the barrier that had long prohibited Gentiles from entering the inner courts on pain of death (*JW*

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Explanation,” *NTS* 35 (1989) 290; Hans Dieter Betz, “Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18): A Comparative Religion Approach,” *JBL* 116 (1997) 455–72. George Wesley Buchanan, “Symbolic Money-changers in the Temple,” *NTS* 37 (1991) 280–90, argues that the historicity of the Temple cleansing must be considered doubtful, since it is difficult to imagine Jesus being allowed to take this action by the Temple guards. Most recently, David Seeley, “Jesus’ Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P. M. Casey,” *CBQ* 62 (2000) 63, concludes: “Mark constructed it to meet his narrative needs.”

<sup>87</sup> James S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaism in the First Century CE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 86–87, shows how Josephus only begins to say that war was inevitable once the sacrifices on behalf of foreigners were stopped, and that, in Josephus’ view, they were thereafter doomed to suffer the punishment of God. It has often been suggested that Mark alludes to the cessation of sacrifice for Gentiles in 11:17; for example, Söding, *Evangelist* 40 n. 15.

6.124–26).<sup>88</sup> No doubt, there is a comparison here with the openness of Greco-Roman temples everywhere. Through this tirade, Josephus reveals the Roman disdain of this exclusive Jewish practice, suggesting that the practice of excluding Gentiles from worship and sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple, not just by the rebels, but also in the customary manner, was a bitter complaint in Rome.<sup>89</sup> Within months of the fall of Jerusalem, Mark seems to have partly sided with the Roman view: through the Temple scenes in Chapter 11, he explains that the exclusion of Gentiles was contrary to God’s plan, not because of any actions by the rebels, but because the religious leaders had earlier established practices that had made it impossible for Gentiles to worship there. This, he said, was the reason why God had decreed the Temple’s destruction, not recently, but forty years earlier, on the day that Jesus had visited it.<sup>90</sup>

It is generally agreed that the fig tree that Jesus ‘cursed’ stands for the Temple, Israel or the religious authorities.<sup>91</sup> In the Old Testament, the fig tree can represent Israel (Hos 9:10) but, in Isa 34:4, the nations will “wither like fruit withering on a fig tree,” and it is used there simply as an image of doom (cf. Isa 34:2). According to Ezekiel, however, trees near the Temple should be full of life: “Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary” (Ezek 47:12). For Mark, the Messianic Age had come, a time when Israel and the Temple should be especially fruitful (Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). Mal 3:1 warns that the Lord will come to his Temple

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<sup>88</sup> For the inscriptions that have been found, see David Jacobson, “Sacred Geometry: Unlocking the Secret of the Temple Mount. Part 2,” *BAR* 25 (September/October 1999) 60; they read: “No foreigner may enter within the railing and enclosure that surround the Temple. Anyone apprehended shall have himself to blame for his consequent death.”

<sup>89</sup> Criticism of Jewish exclusivity seems to have persisted until the nineties: Barclay (*Jews* 357, 358 n. 50) notes that, in *Ant.* 8.116–17, Josephus modifies Solomon’s prayer to make the Temple open to non-Jews to try to rebut “the notion that the Jews were anti-social” and, in *Ant.* 4.180, Josephus reverses the Abrahamic promise and has Moses invite Israel to share in the blessings of all humanity.

<sup>90</sup> In describing the Temple layout, Josephus does not say in his description of the outer court (of the Gentiles) that it was a place of prayer or worship (*JW* 5.190–92), whereas he does do so in his description of the court of the women (*JW* 5.198). If so, it would appear that Mark was correct: Isaiah’s vision had not been fulfilled—Gentiles had no place for worship in the Temple.

<sup>91</sup> There are exceptions: Gundry (*Mark* 672–76) sees no symbolism in the fig tree at all, as he does not believe that Mark’s audience would have understood Old

“suddenly.” Therefore, it should always be ready—bearing fruit should not be seasonal.<sup>92</sup> Like Ezekiel’s stream, Mark’s fig tree is placed on the east side of the Temple, on the way from Bethany, but this tree has no fruit. In Ezekiel’s terms, the Temple is not life-giving and, in a dramatic allusion to the ‘death’ of the Temple, while Jesus stands in the Court of the Gentiles pronouncing judgement, the fig tree outside Jerusalem is dying.

Mark’s picture of doom does not read like a warning of God’s future action against the Temple. It appears to be explaining why the Temple had been destroyed. Unlike Jeremiah in the corresponding Temple scene (Jer 7:5–7), Jesus gives no call to repent. In this Gospel, Jesus is always ready to forgive and restore all who fail, no matter how serious the sin (see Chapter 7), and yet the Temple is given no second chance. This indicates that Mark knew that there *could be* no renovation of the cult, because the Temple lay in ruins as he wrote.

Fig trees were significant in the city of Rome. For the Romans, the fig tree was regarded as a gift from the gods; its leaves had medicinal qualities, and it was a symbol of fertility.<sup>93</sup> Around Mark’s time, Pliny the Elder spoke of a fig tree “at the spot where, when the foundations of the empire were collapsing in a portent of disaster, Curtius had filled up the gulf.” He was referring to a legend that a chasm had opened up in that spot in 362 BCE, and soothsayers said that it could only be filled with Rome’s greatest treasure, at which M. Curtius mounted his horse and leaped into it, and the earth closed over him (Pliny, *Natural History* 15.78).<sup>94</sup> For Rome, this fig tree was a reminder of a disaster avoided. In a similar portent, Tacitus begins his account of the year 59 (the year in which Nero

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Testament allusions or symbols. He considers that Jesus cursed the fig tree to demonstrate the power of faith. Juell (*Mark* 156) says: “The picture of Jesus is unflattering, and the miracle is devoid of religious significance. One can only with difficulty imagine why such a story would be told among the faithful”; it is a “display of power” like apocryphal stories, “performed out of anger.”

<sup>92</sup> The scenes in the Temple might remind of Mal 3:1–12, the day when the Lord suddenly comes and brings judgement on the leaders who oppress the widow, orphan and foreigner (Mal 3:5; cf. Mark 12:40).

<sup>93</sup> William R. Telford, “More Fruit on the Withered Tree: Temple and Fig-tree in Mark from a Greco-Roman Perspective,” in W. Horbury (ed.), *Templum Amicitiae: Essay on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 272, 277–82, 291–303.

<sup>94</sup> M. Curtius “filled up the gulf with the greatest of treasures: I mean virtue and piety and a glorious death.” Pliny refers to Livy (1.19; 7.6) who spoke of a circular pavement called the *Lacus Curtius* that marked the spot.

killed his mother) in this way: the fig tree called “Ruminalis” that also grew in the Forum, at the Place of Assembly, and which, he claimed, had sheltered the babies Romulus and Remus 830 years earlier, seemed to die and its trunk withered, but it later revived, growing fresh shoots (*Annals* 13.58). This portent seemed to point to a very sick Rome, which (in retrospect) recovered.<sup>95</sup>

Not long before Mark wrote, a famous withered fig tree became for Rome a sign of a crisis averted. If this story was known, which is quite possible in Rome where portents were closely heeded, his readers could compare it with the story of the Jerusalem fig tree. That tree did not recover, and neither could the Temple it stood for, as the readers well knew.<sup>96</sup>

#### THE NEW HOUSE OF FORGIVENESS

*Do not doubt in your heart . . . when you stand praying . . . (11:24–25)*

There are other indications in Chapter 11 that Mark was dealing with the situation that existed after the razing of the Temple, and that he was both responding to his readers’ questioning about God’s role in the affair and using the event to make an important comparison with the new situation in the house-churches.

Comparatively little attention has been paid to the verses that follow the recognition of the dead fig tree. Few seem to notice the *oddness* of Jesus’ response to Peter’s exclamation, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered” (11:21). Jesus replies:

Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (11:22–25)

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion of these trees, see Telford, “More Fruit” 298–99. However, he proposes (303) that Mark compares known portents of the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty with Jesus’ prediction of the end of the Temple institution in Jerusalem forty years earlier.

<sup>96</sup> Mark will go on to show that Jesus destroyed both the fig tree and the Temple (see Page 153).

Commentators have written of these verses as if they are simply sayings on faith, prayer and forgiveness inserted at this convenient place, having little (if any) connection with the preceding series of scenes.<sup>97</sup> There is certainly an abrupt shift from Peter's remark to this series of exhortations by Jesus. Moreover, Jesus suddenly begins to speak of forgiveness. Something is going on here that is not immediately obvious to a modern-day reader. But Mark is not sloppy, and the first possibility to be explored is that he remains focused on the destruction of the Temple, as 11:27–12:11 further addresses that issue.<sup>98</sup>

With these verses, Mark turns the reader explicitly to the situation in their house-church, which has now become the new house of prayer (11:25: "when you stand praying . . ."), and he focuses the reader on the issue of forgiveness there. In Jewish Law, forgiveness could only be obtained from God by sacrificing in the Temple, but there had been hints earlier in the Gospel that the sin offering was no longer necessary. Indeed, the turning point in Jesus' ministry occurs when, away from the Temple, he dispenses forgiveness to a paralytic (2:5) who, even if his friends had been willing to carry him to Jerusalem, would not have been allowed entry into the Temple when he arrived (cf. Acts 3:2, 8; John 5:3, 14). There is no sacrifice required, nor confession of sin; indeed, there is not even any request for forgiveness. It is given without any stipulations or preconditions. The onlookers "give glory to God," and say, "We have never seen anything like this!" (2:12). This is the only place in Mark's Gospel where anyone gives glory to God (the only use of *doxazō*), and its uniqueness is

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<sup>97</sup> A number see the verses as a stand-alone collection of sayings to teach the community about faith, prayer and forgiveness, or to give assurance to the disciples. See Lane, *Mark* 406; Mann, *Mark* 452–54; Taylor, *Mark* 466–67; Stock, *Message* 298–300; Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 400; Stephen H. Smith, "The Literary Structure of Mark 11:1–12:40," *NovT* 31 (1989) 116. Hooker (*Mark* 269) describes them as sayings "collected together at some stage." In none of these cases is there an attempt to relate the saying on forgiveness to the previous text. See also Gundry, *Mark* 654; Tolbert, *Sowing* 94. Myers (*Strong Man* 304–6) is even reluctant to include 11:25 in the received text because of its incongruity. John Painter, *Mark's Gospel* (London: Rutledge, 1997) 160, sees them linked only by the "catchword" of prayer; similarly, Juel, *Mark* 160; Strelan, *Boundaries* 163. William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) 118, considers that they were added to remove "embarrassment" over the wonder-working elements of the mountain-moving saying.

<sup>98</sup> It is clear from 11:27–33 that the chief priests, scribes and elders reject, not just the authority of Jesus, but the authority of the Father who sent him, and in the parable that follows, the tenants recognise the son but kill him anyway, resulting in their own destruction (12:9).



stressed by the crowd's acclamation.<sup>99</sup> With this act early in his ministry, Jesus seems to do away with the need for priest, sacrifice and, most importantly, the Temple, as the place of forgiveness of sins.<sup>100</sup>

When the issue of forgiveness is raised in 11:25, a reader might remember that it had been a key element in Solomon's prayer of dedication of the first Temple:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, Yahweh my God . . . that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there' . . . Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; *heed and forgive*. (1 Kings 8:27–30)

This prayer is loaded with Deuteronomic irony. David had offered to build Yahweh a house (after he had built his own). Effectively, Yahweh had replied, "Build *me* a house! I didn't need a house before. Instead, I will build you a 'house' (a dynasty)" (2 Sam 7:1–17). And so, when Solomon consecrates the first temple, he admits in his speech before all the people (1 Kings 8:27) that Yahweh is not there! Rather, he says, this will just be the place from which Yahweh will hear their prayers and from which forgiveness will be dispensed.<sup>101</sup> Jesus' words in 11:22–25 hark back to that prayer of dedication—both refer to a house of prayer that is a place of forgiveness (11:25; 1 Kings 8:29, 33–34), and 11:17 had pointedly reminded the reader that the Temple was meant to be a house of prayer.<sup>102</sup> But with the

<sup>99</sup> Dowd (*Prayer* 115) calls it "a choral response." She notes "the neglect of 11:22–25 in Markan scholarship," but she only concludes that Chapter 11 is arranged to teach on the efficacy of prayer (2–5, 45, 53, 127).

<sup>100</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 188–89, notes that 2:5 revolves around the fact that "forgiveness comes outside any cultic requirements." John the Baptist also seems to have been proclaiming forgiveness apart from the Temple (1:4–5).

<sup>101</sup> Solomon's speech in 1 Kings 8 is followed by Yahweh's promises in regard to the Temple, including the threat to destroy it if Israel is unfaithful. 1 Kings 9:8 has: "This house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'Why has Yahweh done such a thing to this land and to this house?'" This may well be a question that Mark's readers were asking, just as the Jews asked it after the first Temple was destroyed (see Ps 44:9–25; 79:1–10).

<sup>102</sup> It was common in Jewish literature to cite Solomon's prayer of consecration: Evans ("House of Prayer" 437–40) has observed that Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 both allude to it, and the Targum is even clearer. He further observes that Josephus not only alludes to, and cites, Solomon's prayer and Isa 56:7 (*JW* 4.262; *Ant.* 8.116–17), but also implies that Israel had lived up to the ideals expressed in them. Evans cites Midrashim that link Isa 56:7 and 1 Kings 8:41–43.

words, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (11:14), Jesus has now pronounced the old house of prayer useless, and has reversed Solomon's action.<sup>103</sup> He has 'deconsecrated' the Temple.<sup>104</sup> No longer can it be a point of contact with God.

With the teaching on prayer and forgiveness in 11:22–25, Mark tells his readers that the mountain has been removed, that is, the Temple is no longer where it was, at the centre of things—it has been thrown into the sea (destroyed).<sup>105</sup> The Temple is no longer necessary for those who have faith, and so Jesus begins his response: "Have faith in God" (11:22). For Mark's readers, God is present whenever, and thus wherever, they pray, and he will hear their prayer and respond.<sup>106</sup>

Members of Mark's community who had a Jewish heritage were used to thinking of the Temple as the place of forgiveness, not just individually, but corporately, through the Day of Atonement.<sup>107</sup> However, some may have also thought of it as the dwelling-place of God. G. Davies has concluded that, for Mark's time, the evidence shows that there was a widespread belief among Jews that God did dwell in the Temple.<sup>108</sup> Post-exilic texts such as Ps 135:21, and the Qumran Temple Scroll 29.7–10 show continued belief in God's presence.

<sup>103</sup> Both Duff ("Divine Warrior," 68–69) and Geddert (*Watchwords* 117) are of the opinion that Jesus disqualifies the centre of Jewish worship.

<sup>104</sup> The term "deconsecration" has been deliberately chosen to indicate the *permanent* reversal of the dedication of the Temple (or consecration) by Solomon, and its function as a holy place. The Dedication of the Temple by Solomon has been regarded as "the model for the consecration of churches by Christians." J. G. Davies, *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1972) 150–51.

<sup>105</sup> "This mountain" referred to in v. 23 is the Temple mount, that is, the subject of Jesus' words and action. So Duff, "Divine Warrior" 68–69; Telford, *Barren Temple* 57–59; Watts, *Israel* 332–37; Geddert, *Watchwords* 123. Watts and Geddert argue against those, including Gundry, who claim that "this mountain" must be the Mount of Olives, since that is where Jesus is standing. However, in explaining the withering of the fig tree, Jesus is still addressing the function of the Temple, not standing on the next mountain discussing other matters.

<sup>106</sup> With some similarity to Mark, Josephus has this further explanation for the new state of affairs in Titus' taunt to the defenders: "The world was a better temple for God than this one" (*JW* 5.458).

<sup>107</sup> Philo (*The Special Laws* 1.235–37) speaks of the necessity of going to the Temple with the sin offering "to implore remission of the sins which he has committed . . . curing him of the disease which would cause death," and that an intentional offence required him to "openly confess the sin which he has committed and implore pardon"; see also 1.66–70, where Philo says that Moses had ordered "all men to rise up, even from the furthest boundaries of the earth, and to come to this temple," and that one purpose of such a pilgrimage is "to implore pardon and forgiveness." It is not clear, however, what was the common belief of Diaspora Jews about the way in which forgiveness could be obtained for those unable to go to the Temple.

<sup>108</sup> G. I. Davies, "The Presence of God in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Doctrine," in Horbury (ed.), *Templum* 32–36.

Josephus believed that God dwelt there: he describes a violent movement out of the sanctuary and a cry, “Let us go hence,” that occurred at Pentecost just before the War began (*JW* 6.299).<sup>109</sup> Josephus inserts this story into his narrative as a ‘flashback’ at the point just before the soldiers offer sacrifice to their standards in the Temple. For Josephus, God was no longer residing there when Titus desecrated the place. Mark, however, gives no impression that God had ever dwelt there.<sup>110</sup> Although some Jewish Christians may have regarded the Temple as God’s dwelling place, Mark considers the question irrelevant. He focuses the reader on the transfer of the place of forgiveness to the new house—the meeting place of the Christian church.

A further indication that Mark is dealing with the loss of the Temple is that his view is similar to Jewish attitudes following the fall of the Temple, indicated by the statement that the love of God and love of neighbour are “much more important than any burnt offering and sacrifice” (12:33). This can be taken as a reminder of Hosea’s prophecy that Yahweh desired *hesed* and knowledge of God, rather than sacrifices (Hos 6:6).<sup>111</sup> But it also points again to Jeremiah’s prophecy of doom for the Temple: in Jer 7:22, Yahweh complains “For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.”<sup>112</sup> In 12:33, Mark again relativises the Temple. The idea of “no more sacrifices” would have been particularly meaningful to those who had seen the golden table from the Temple paraded through the streets of Rome in the Triumph of Vespasian and Titus (see Page 164).

Similar thoughts developed in rabbinical Judaism in reaction to the loss of the Temple:

Once as Rabbi Yohanen ben Zakkai was coming out of Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed him, and beheld the Temple in ruins. “Woe to us,” Rabbi Joshua cried, “that this place, the place where the iniquities of

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<sup>109</sup> See also *JW* 5.412: “The Deity has fled from the holy places.” Tacitus (*Histories* 5.13), perhaps drawing on Josephus, has a similar story in relation to the destruction of the Temple: “The doors of the shrine suddenly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to proclaim that the gods were leaving, and at once there came a mighty movement of their departure.” Similarly, he tells of a divine form rushing out of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus before it was burned in 69 (*Histories* 1.86).

<sup>110</sup> “My house” in 11:17 is a direct quotation from Isa 56:7.

<sup>111</sup> See Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 380, for many other Old Testament references where sacrifices are denounced.

<sup>112</sup> Jeremiah’s prophecy ends with the picture of corpses piled up in Jerusalem and the land being laid waste (Jer 7:33–34).

Israel is atoned for, is laid waste.” “My son,” Rabbi Yohanen said to him, “be not grieved. We have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said, ‘For I desire mercy not sacrifice’” (*Abot R. Nat.* 34).<sup>113</sup>

Neusner speaks of this as “an exceedingly important affirmation of the cult’s continuing validity among people burdened with sin and aching for a mode of atonement,” pointing out that the destruction of 70 brought about a crisis, since sacrifice was no longer possible for the restoration of the psychological stability of the community at large.<sup>114</sup> If Christians in Rome, particularly those of Jewish origin, believed in the significance of the Temple, its destruction would have been troubling and even distressing. By his affirmation that prayer would be heard and forgiveness granted where they are, Mark seems to be responding to this concern (11:23: “Do not doubt in your heart”).

The sudden switch to the sayings on prayer and forgiveness in 11:22–25 and the mention of ‘this mountain’ suddenly alert the reader to the connection between the Temple, prayer and forgiveness.<sup>115</sup> Mark reassures his readers that the house of prayer is now every house-church where they “stand praying,” and where forgiveness is freely available to all. His aim, however, is not to reassure readers about the loss of the Temple, but to stress that their house-church is to be the new holy place characterised by inclusion and forgiveness. Forgiveness by God is no longer conditional upon the proper sacrifice, but upon the forgiveness of others.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps there is also an implied warning that the house-church, too, may be decommissioned and destroyed if it does not fulfil its role.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Cited by Neusner, *Judaism* 96, who adds that the *Clementine Recognitions* has a similar understanding. He describes (98) a dramatic change in understanding within rabbinical Judaism that is similar to Mark’s: “With the destruction of the Temple, the realm of the sacred had finally overspread the world. We must now see in ourselves, in our selfish motives to be immolated, the noblest sacrifice of all. . . . The holy altar must be the streets and marketplaces of the world.”

<sup>114</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to Professor E. P. Sanders* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 33, 167.

<sup>115</sup> Donald H. Juel, *Messiah and Temple* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) 135–37, has pointed out that the Targum on Isa 5:1a–2 has the watchtower replaced by a temple at which Yahweh gives them a place for the atonement of their sins. If so, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (12:1–11), which follows on from this scene, may also remind the reader of the Temple as the place of forgiveness.

<sup>116</sup> Confirming the proposal that 11:25 alludes to forgiveness under the Temple system, the saying is expressed as a statement of what is required for forgiveness to be granted by God, paralleling the requirements for forgiveness under the Jewish Law (cf. Lev 4:27–35).

<sup>117</sup> Chapter 7 will show that one of Mark’s most important aims is to address the issue of forgiveness within the house-churches.

## CLOSING DOWN THE TEMPLE

*May no one ever eat fruit from you again. (11:14)*

There are four other statements that allude to the Temple's destruction, all of which occur in the narrative only after Jesus predicts its devastation in 13:2. Each of them adds to the impression already obtained from the Temple scenes that both Mark and his readers know that the Temple is in ruins. The characters in the story, of course, do not know that this will happen, so that irony is strongly in play. Indeed, the statements about the Temple in the scenes of Jesus' trial and crucifixion are so unlikely, so out of place and so strange in the story that irony is suspected, even upon a superficial reading.

The first allusion occurs at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, when he is accused by false witnesses: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with human hands'" (14:58).<sup>118</sup> Mark has not reported Jesus making such a prediction, and he calls the witnesses' testimony "false" (14:57). Indeed, the accusation is patently absurd; how, exactly, was Jesus supposed to be able to do such a thing? But the reader has been trained, and knows that these accusations are true on another level.<sup>119</sup> She or he knows that what his accusers say is exactly what *has* happened—Jesus has destroyed the Temple, and has already built another (spiritual) temple.

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<sup>118</sup> This prediction is unlikely to allude to Jesus' resurrection, as it would be odd to refer to Jesus' resurrected body as a "temple not built with human hands." Instead, it is generally taken to refer to the new spiritual temple of the Christian community. See Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 163–99, 223, 225 on the idea of the spiritual temple, including Qumran parallels. In the early fifties, the church of Corinth had been familiar with the idea of the Christian community as the new temple. Paul had written to them: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? . . . For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16; cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21). The Rome-Corinth route was heavily trafficked, and Prisca and Aquila were familiar with both cities (Acts 18:2; Rom 16:3). Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth, and the familiarity between the church in Rome and Corinth is evidenced by the greetings in Rom 16 not just by Paul, Timothy and others, but, perhaps by his amanuensis; see Richards, *Secretary* 171. It is likely, then, that the Roman reader knew this concept. Mark implies that the Christian community is the new temple in 11:25.

<sup>119</sup> See Juel, *Messiah* 171–208, for an analysis of the nature of the accusation by the false witnesses. He concludes (49) that Mark intended to portray the charge as false, knowing that his readers would recognise that Jesus had never made such a statement.

In addition, the phrase “made with hands” typically refers to idols in the Old Testament and other Jewish writings (Dan 14:5; Jdt 8:18; Wis 14:8; Isa 2:8; 31:7; *Jub.* 20:8).<sup>120</sup> Although Mark may have only intended to compare the physical temple with the Christian community as the new spiritual temple as Paul did, it is likely that he also intended it to be a put-down of the Temple, given the strong imagery of 11:12–25.<sup>121</sup> In Israel, any idols were to be smashed, burnt or thrown away (Deut 7:5; 12:3; Isa 2:20; 10:11; 30:22; 31:7; Jer 51:52; Ezek 6:6; Mic 1:7), and by the allusion to idols, Mark may again be pointing to what had been done to Israel’s Temple.

In the second allusion, a few verses later, at the climactic moment in his trial, Jesus says to the High Priest, “You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (14:62). It is a vision of judgement upon the authorities, and a prediction that Jesus will bring it about. It is unlikely that it refers to the Parousia, or even to his exaltation.<sup>122</sup> The phrase “you will see” apparently refers to an event that will occur when the priests of the Temple were still in office. By the time Mark wrote, it had become clear that the Jerusalem authorities would not see the Parousia; nor would they recognise the exalted Jesus as Son of Man/Son of God. The prediction certainly emphasises an exercise of power, assigning to God the unusual title, “the Power.”<sup>123</sup> It is probable, then, that it alludes to that powerful event that has just occurred, when the ‘tenants’ ‘saw’ the power of the Son of Man coming to destroy them (12:9).

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<sup>120</sup> Although the phrase can also mean anything made by human beings, compared with those things made by God—cf. Philo, *The Special Laws* 1.67, comparing the Temple “made with hands” with the heavens—it is likely that Mark means more. Luke, perhaps having perceived such an allusion already in Mark’s similar scene, more obviously treats it as a derogatory phrase in Acts 7:41, 48. See Dowd (*Prayer* 51–52) for the use of the term “made with hands” as “anti-idolatry polemic” directed at both idols and temples. Geddert (*Watchwords* 132) considers that Mark casts the Temple as a pagan idol with the use of this phrase, as does Juel, *Messiah* 149.

<sup>121</sup> There are close parallels between the accusation in 14:58 and the trial and speech of Stephen in Acts 6:13–7:56. In Acts 6:13–14, the Jewish authorities use false witnesses to accuse Stephen: “We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place.” Irony obviously applies there, and this ‘prediction’ was, of course, written well after the Temple had been destroyed.

<sup>122</sup> On 14:62 as judgement and exaltation, see Gaston, *Stone* 389–92, who argues that it does not relate to the Parousia.

<sup>123</sup> For further discussion on the import of 14:62, see Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 449–51, who notes that “the Power” was not a term used in Judaism as a substitute for the divine name.

This promise operates in conjunction with the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (12:1–11) to provide further irony. There, the leaders are told that they would be “destroyed” by God as a response to their murder of his son (12:9), but 14:58 and 14:62 make clear that Jesus himself will initiate and supervise their destruction. Ironically, although it appeared to be Titus, the son of the emperor, who destroyed the Temple, in reality it is Jesus, the supposedly murdered son of the Father, who does it. Jesus’ power over Rome and its legions is demonstrated in 13:26, which proclaims his superiority over any earthly or heavenly power, and 5:7–13, which show that the legions must obey him. The two similar ‘predictions’ in 13:14 and 14:62 emphasise the irony: the first (13:14: “when you see”) refers to seeing the son (Titus) in the Temple carrying out God’s judgement, and the second (14:62: “you will see”) refers to the ‘tenants’ seeing the effects of the Son coming with his destroying (Roman) forces. Unlike 13:26, where the Son sends angels to do his work of gathering, in 14:62, no angels are sent, because it will be the Roman legions acting as God’s destroying forces. Both 13:14 and 14:62 refer to the destruction of the Temple, and the Son of God is shown to be the real power at work behind the son of the emperor (‘son of god’) in removing the tenants.

In 12:9, moreover, the religious leaders are told that ‘Israel’ (the vineyard) will be “given to others” after they (the tenants) are “destroyed.” This parable would have little rhetorical effect unless the Temple and its ‘tenants’ had already been destroyed. After all, Mark’s readers should not care what was happening with the Jerusalem priesthood or the leadership of Israel if the Temple was still functioning when he wrote. But if the Temple had recently been destroyed, the question, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?” (12:9) is powerful, because they know what the owner has just done, and now they know why he did it.

The third allusion provides confirmation that Jesus initiated the destruction of the Temple. It occurs when Jesus is on the cross, where “those passing by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘Ah! The one destroying the Temple and rebuilding it in three days!’” (15:29).<sup>124</sup> Ironically, it is true: he *is* in the process of destroying it and building a new one, commencing with his willingness to die so

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<sup>124</sup> This verse is better translated by emphasising its present participle, and it almost becomes a title: “The One Destroying the Temple.”

that all will hear the gospel. As the readers know that the new temple, the Church, had already been built, for the irony of 15:29 to work fully, the Temple, too, must already have been destroyed.<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, in the following verse, the onlookers go on to question Jesus' saving power—"Save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (15:30). The image is of the apparently powerless Jesus on the cross, unable to save himself. Combined with v. 29, a strong link is established between the power of Jesus, his ability to save, and his ability to destroy the Temple. If the Temple is in ruins, there is considerable irony here: Jesus does have power to destroy the Temple, and so could save himself and others. But if the Temple has not already been destroyed, Mark has presented a scene where the reader is brought to a realisation that Jesus has not yet been shown to have that power. A reader might well ask, "Does he have the power, then, to save others?"

The fourth allusion to the Temple's destruction occurs with the tearing of the veil of the Temple (15:38).<sup>126</sup> This tearing is an act of destruction aimed at the Temple, and shows that the process of demolition has been initiated.

In all of these allusions, Mark seems to be answering the doubts of his readers about Jesus' power to save. After all, the Temple was not destroyed by Jesus, but by the Romans, forty years after his death. Moreover, Jesus seems to have had no power to save them during their years of suffering. Mark's response to this questioning is to show that Jesus had begun the process by deconsecrating the Temple prior to its demolition, and that the Risen Jesus had just used the Romans to carry out the task, just as the Babylonians had been used by God in an earlier era (2 Kings 24:2-3).<sup>127</sup>

In 11:14, Jesus speaks to the fig tree on the way into the Temple, and the reader sees that it has died after he left. So, too, the reader sees that Jesus' words in the Temple resulted in its destruction after he left (died), but only if it has been razed as this text was read.

<sup>125</sup> The idea of the new, spiritual temple does not point merely to the *rejection* of the Temple, as Dowd (Dowd, *Prayer* 53 n. 84) maintains. There is a language of destruction in 11:23; 12:9; 13:2; 14:58; 15:29, but there is no theme of rejection.

<sup>126</sup> For further discussion on the tearing of the veil, see Page 202.

<sup>127</sup> The Temple "stands under God's judgement, which will be executed in the year 70." George W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative," *HTR* 73 (1980) 178.



## THE EMPHASIS ON THE TEMPLE

*Master, look at the size of those stones! Look at the size of those buildings! (13:1)*

In Mark's narrative, considerable attention is paid to the Temple. In a Gospel of just over fifteen chapters, three of them (11–13) are set in or near it, and there are repeated predictions of, and allusions to, its devastation. And yet, there had been no polemic against the Temple in Paul's writings. Rather, in Rom 9:4, Paul spoke of "the worship" as one of the God-given gifts to Israel. Mark's Gospel is the first Christian writing that condemns the Temple, suggesting that something significant had happened since Paul wrote.

Mark could have told his story without placing such an emphasis on the Temple.<sup>128</sup> Instead, he has Jesus pointedly address the use of the Temple as soon as he arrives in the city, pronounce its complete destruction on the second day (11:13–20), and look back at its future ruins as he leaves (13:2). Jesus' backward look at the Temple from this adjacent hill is a scene that further reminds of the destruction by God of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>129</sup> The moment after Jesus dies, the veil of the Temple is torn, apparently by God (15:38: "from top to bottom")—a display of power, directed at the Temple. The extent of this motif goes far beyond what one would expect if Mark was merely intending to warn that the Temple would or might be destroyed in the future. Indeed, given the rejection of Jesus by the authorities, one would expect Mark's prophecy of doom to be primarily directed at them, but instead he only does so once (12:9), and time and time again directs his warnings against the Temple, including a prolonged prophecy of doom in 11:11–25. This indicates that there was more than just an expectancy or hope that God would act. It reeks of certain knowledge.

A number of commentators have observed Mark's over-arching concentration on the Temple.<sup>130</sup> Radcliffe remarks: "This obsession

<sup>128</sup> Balabanski (*Eschatology* 99) calls Mark's emphasis on the "disqualification of the Temple" as "the strongest indication in the Gospel (although by no means incontrovertible)" of a post-70 date.

<sup>129</sup> Jesus' placement has often been seen as an allusion to Zech 14:4, but here he sits on the Mount of Olives, not stands, as if in judgement.

<sup>130</sup> Kelber (*Mark's Story* 88) asks: "Why is Mark preoccupied with the Jerusalem

with the doomed sanctuary would have made no sense if it was still standing when Mark wrote.<sup>131</sup> In this Gospel, Mark's eyes are firmly on the Temple, and the extent of his emphasis points to its recent destruction, an event that required much reflection and interpretation by both Jews and Christians.

The most likely date for the writing of this Gospel, therefore, is after news of that event reached Rome. In the next chapter, examination of the situation in Rome at that time will bring to light additional evidence that places its writing more specifically in the latter months of 71, after the return of Titus, "the desecrator who devastates."

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Temple and its destruction?" Theodore J. Weeden, Sr., "The Cross as Power in Weakness (Mark 15:20b-41)," in Werner H. Kelber (ed.), *The Passion in Mark: Studies in Mark 14-16* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 121, states: "There are a number of mystifying features about the Temple motif that make it difficult to fathom Mark's interest in it." For similar comments, see Geddert, *Watchwords* 114-23; Juel, *Messiah* 57; *Mark* 19.

<sup>131</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, "The Coming of the Son of Man: Mark's Gospel and the Subversion of the Apocalyptic Imagination," in Brian Davies (ed.), *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987) 180.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CLIMATE

#### HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR, AND ALLUSIONS TO, THE TENSE SITUATION IN ROME

#### HAVE THE GODS ABANDONED US?

*Rome was depressed, and beset by manifold anxieties. (Tacitus)*

Although Rome after June 71 has been identified as the most likely setting, it now has to be demonstrated that the concerns of the Gospel, especially the possibility of further arrests and executions, are compatible with the city's social and political climate at that time. It will be shown that, if the Gospel is read from that point of view, it appears to contain a significant number of allusions to events that had occurred or had become known in the city from late 69 to mid 71. Although no individual allusion can be proven, the coexistence of so many is unlikely to be coincidental. Taken together, they strengthen the case for a setting in Rome in late 71. If so, Mark's frequent use of such allusions indicates that he had his eye firmly on the external pressures upon his readers as he wrote.

The Christians of Rome were not just suffering from their own particular stresses as they had also experienced, with the other residents of Rome, the uncertainty, fear and hardships of the turmoil of the years 64 to 70. Before that, Rome had been enjoying the long *Pax Romana*, inaugurated by Augustus in 27 BCE after the civil war that had ended the Republic, but Nero's increasingly erratic behaviour in the early sixties gave rise to increasing anxiety. The most severe trauma for the general populace, however, was the fire. In the early hours of the morning of 19 July 64, a fire broke out in the shops at the rear of the Circus Maximus, swept up the hill, ignited the palace, and spread around the valleys and hills of Rome (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38–41). For seven days, it continued unabated, despite attempts to stop it by levelling buildings in its path. After a brief lull, it broke out again in the Campus Martius and continued for three days, eventually destroying all buildings in four of the four-

teen districts of Rome, and very severely damaging seven others. Many lost their lives. The trauma that the fire caused the people of Rome is reflected in every Roman historian of the period.<sup>1</sup>

The mood of Tacitus' report of this period is sombre. After the fire, Italy was exhausted by demands for money, and the provinces were ruined (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.45).<sup>2</sup> In April 65, the failed Piso conspiracy saw the death of a large number of prominent Romans (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.48–72), and Nero became more afraid. Also in 65, a hurricane devastated Campania and almost reached Rome,<sup>3</sup> and 30,000 died from a plague; “the houses were filled with lifeless forms, and the streets with funerals” (Tacitus, *Annals* 16.13).<sup>4</sup> There were military setbacks in Britain, Armenia and Syria (Suetonius, *Nero* 39: “large numbers of Romans and allies massacred [in Britain] . . . a disgraceful defeat in the East . . . we almost lost Syria”), and war broke out with the Parthians (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.34). With a disaffected army, Vindex revolted in March 68, and Nero suicided on 9 June. From June 68 to December 69, Rome had five emperors. Galba was murdered in January 69, and Otho was forced to commit suicide in April. During Otho's reign, Rome suffered its most severe flood; the oldest bridge across the Tiber collapsed, and parts of Rome thought flood-free were inundated. People were swept away in the streets, and *insulae* collapsed. Food shortages caused famine among the poorer classes,

<sup>1</sup> “Disaster followed. . . . Now started the most terrible and destructive fire that Rome had ever experienced” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38). “The calamity which the city then experienced has no parallel before or since, except in the Gallic invasion” (Dio, *History* 62.18.2). Suetonius (*Nero* 38) emphasises the temples and other national treasures lost, and Nero's subsequent looting and defrauding of the people. That this calamity was long remembered is evident from an inscription found in Rome on an altar erected by Domitian for the offering of sacrifices because of the “fire that lasted nine days.” CIL VI 826, cited in Donald R. Dudley, *Urbs Roma* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1967) 20.

<sup>2</sup> Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London: Batsford, 1984) 123, 130, says that severe financial strain followed the fire and rebuilding was not complete four years later, and cites an inscription of the period referring to the roads being in bad condition due to neglect. Dio (*History* 62.18.5) reports that Nero stopped the free distribution of grain after the fire, and imposed heavy taxes. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.46) reports news of other disasters in this period. Although Tacitus was trying to emphasise the depths to which Rome had sunk under Nero and an ineffectual Senate, the mood of his writing is probably a good reflection of the gloomy and pessimistic attitude in the city in these years.

<sup>3</sup> “A year of shame and of so many evil deeds, heaven also marked by storms and pestilence” (Tacitus, *Annals* 16.13).

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus describes the plague as an invisible killer that added to the visible murder of citizens by the emperor. “Such was the wrath of heaven against the Roman State.” Tacitus, *Annals* 16.13, 16. Suetonius (*Nero* 39) says that 30,000 deaths from plague were recorded at the Temple of Libitina in one autumn.

and the price of food rose (Tacitus, *Histories* 1.86, 89).<sup>5</sup> Rumour, conspiracy and revolt by army units characterised this period.

Vitellius followed Otho, but was soon challenged by the forces supporting Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor by the troops in the East in July 69, and who quickly cut off Rome's food supply from Egypt. In the conflict that followed, Roman forces fought each other in northern Italy. Twice, Roman troops sacked Roman towns (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.56, 3.26–33). Nichols comments: "Tales concerning the sack of Cremona [24 October 69], horrible enough in reality, surely arrived in an exaggerated form in Rome and would have terrorised a civilian population already on the verge of starvation."<sup>6</sup> When the pro-Vespasian forces attacked Vitellius in December 69, large numbers of troops fought within Rome, and there was much looting of the city by armed mobs (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.83, 4.1; Dio, *History* 65.19.3–65.20.1).<sup>7</sup>

J. H. W. G. Leibeschuetz has highlighted the depth of the anxiety present in Roman writings of the sixties, characterised by the poems of Lucan during the reign of Nero, expressing a lack of hope or belief in a beneficent universe. His poem on the crossing of the Rubicon shows "Rome suffering because the character of the people made civil war inevitable."<sup>8</sup> This atmosphere of "religious worry"<sup>9</sup> is also reflected in the *Octavia*, a play thought to have been written soon after Nero's death:<sup>10</sup> "Look, the very heavens are polluted by the fearful breath of our cruel emperor; the stars threaten unparalleled disaster to the people ruled by an impious leader" (*Octavia*

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<sup>5</sup> Plutarch (*Otho* 5.1–2) mentions an unprecedented great flood, with "a great part of the city being under water, especially the corn market," leading to food shortages, and also mentions rumours of battles.

<sup>6</sup> John Nichols, *Vespasian and the Partes Flaviana* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978) 165–66.

<sup>7</sup> Dio claims that 50,000 people perished.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. W. G. Leibeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 146, 148. Citing Arrowsmith, J. P. Sullivan, "Petronius 'Satyricon' and its Neronian Context," *ANRW* II, 32.3 (1985) 1669–73, argues that Petronius' *Satyricon*, written in the late Neronian era, reflects the despair of a society corrupted by luxury, "a culture which turns men into the living dead."

<sup>9</sup> Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 164.

<sup>10</sup> C. J. Herington, "Octavia Praetexta: A Survey," *CQ* 11 (1961) 29–30, dates it between 68 and 90, and concludes that the author had lived through the Neronian era, and may even have attended Nero's funeral. However, Edwin S. Ramage, "Denigration of Predecessor under Claudius, Galba, and Vespasian," *Historia* 32 (1983) 210 n. 32, more narrowly dates it during the reign of Galba or the early years of Vespasian.

235–37).<sup>11</sup> Leibeschuetz regards Tacitus' strong focus on adverse portents during Nero's reign as a memory of the religious anxiety of that time, arguing that it was present in his written sources. Signs are only recorded, he suggests, if they impress many people, especially in times of "great emotional tension."<sup>12</sup>

Tacitus was probably living in Rome at the time of the fire, as he was born around 55–57,<sup>13</sup> and, although nothing is known of his early life, it is generally assumed that he was educated there.<sup>14</sup> From the beginning of his career in the city in the seventies, he had access to many leading men and women who had been connected with Nero's reign. Syme comments that Tacitus would have been able to capture "the atmosphere of Neronian Rome, given the time of his birth."<sup>15</sup> Opening his account of the year 69, Tacitus reveals the deep religious foundations of the anxieties of those years:

Besides these manifold disasters to mankind, there were portents in the sky and on the earth, some doubtful, some obvious. Indeed, never has it been proved by such terrible disasters to Rome or by such clear evidence that the gods are not concerned with our peace of mind, but rather with vengeance. (Tacitus, *Histories* 1.3)

<sup>11</sup> Seneca's *Oedipus* has a very similar atmosphere. Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 164.

<sup>12</sup> Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 155–66, quote on 160. Michael M. Sage, "Tacitus' Historical Works: A Survey and Appraisal," *ANRW* II, 33.2 (1990) 943–44, says that Tacitus saw the civil war as a divine punishment.

<sup>13</sup> He was probably born in southern Gaul or northern Italy. His father may have been the procurator of Gallic Belgica, serving there until 58. R. M. Ogilvie and Sir I. Richmond (eds), *Tacitus: De Vita Agricolae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 1.63. Tacitus (*Histories* 1.1) acknowledged that he owed the beginnings of his career to Vespasian, but that "from Galba, Otho and Vitellius, I have experienced nothing either to my advantage or hurt." This probably means, not his absence from Rome, but that he was too young to be involved in public life in 68–69, as he goes on to attribute his rise to Vespasian; otherwise, he would not say that the previous emperors were in a position to influence his early life at all. His *Dialogue on Oratory* suggests that he was a pupil of Quintilian in the seventies, according to Ogilvie, *Tacitus* 8. Pliny (*Letters* 7.20) has Tacitus as a famous orator in his early manhood.

<sup>15</sup> Syme, *Tacitus* 1.298–303. As one example of anecdotes available to Tacitus, Syme cites the story of Vespasian falling asleep at one of Nero's performances (*Annals* 16.5). See also his "Tacitus: Some Sources of his Information," *JRS* 72 (1982) 68–82, for details of the men of Nero's reign to whom Tacitus had access. Syme speaks of the "mass of knowledge" that he must have accrued. Similarly, Ronald Mellor, *Tacitus* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 32, 39; Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (London: Macmillan, 1937 [Orig. 1905]) 22; Ronald Martin, *Tacitus* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1981) 102. G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 25, points out that Tacitus would have spoken with many contemporaries, including Verginius Rufus who died as late as 97. In his *Dialogue on Oratory*, the

Perhaps the greatest calamity for Romans was the burning of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus by Vitellius' troops during the fighting in December 69. Tacitus expresses the gravity of the event:

Since the foundation of the city no such deplorable and horrible disaster had ever befallen the people of Rome. It was no case of foreign invasion. Had our own wickedness allowed, the country might have been enjoying the blessings of a benign Providence; and yet here was the seat of Jupiter Optimus Maximus—the temple solemnly founded by our ancestors as the guarantee of their imperial greatness, which not even Porsenna, when Rome surrendered, nor the Gauls, when they took it, could have defiled—being brought utterly to ruin by the mad folly of rival emperors! (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.72)

The Temple of Jupiter was more than just one of Rome's many temples. Jupiter overlooked the city and protected it, and his Temple was a sign of the ongoing welfare of both the city and empire. In the Flavian period, Silius Italicus wrote his *Punica*, ostensibly of the defeat of Hannibal in his attack on Rome. In it, he depicts the people of Rome crying out to Jupiter: "They held their hands up humbly towards the lofty Capitol and wreathed the temple on the hill with festal laurel," calling on the "supreme father of the gods." Jupiter thundered, Hannibal was turned away, and the people flocked to the Capitol to celebrate (Silius, *Punica* 7.635–45, 657, 730, 740). The Temple of Jupiter symbolised the invincibility of Rome, and so the Gauls were encouraged to revolt when they heard that it had been destroyed:

But above all, the burning of the Capitol encouraged them to believe that the empire was coming to an end. Once in old days the Gauls had captured Rome, but Jupiter's home was left unscathed and the empire stood firm. But now (so the Druids with superstitious folly kept dinning into their ears) this fatal fire was a sign of Heaven's anger, and meant that the Transalpine tribes were destined now to rule the world. (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.54)

Another to see Tacitus' writings as an accurate reflection of the Roman anxiety of those years is Catherine Edwards.<sup>16</sup> She shows, too, that 'the eternity of Rome' was a concept that appeared in the Augustan period, citing especially Virgil's exclamation: "The Capitol's unyield-

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earliest of his works, Tacitus recounts his participation as a young man in a supposed dialogue between orators and advocates, including Maternus, who discussed poetic works from Nero's era, and he depicts himself as eager to learn and to hear such stories (*Dialogue* 1–2, 11).

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Edwards, *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 86.

ing rock and the Roman father hold the empire” (*Aeneid* 9.448–49).<sup>17</sup> The loss of the Temple must have deeply worried the religious Romans. A Roman temple was primarily regarded as a sacred space from which the sky, Jupiter’s domain, was observed for unusual signs. If unfavourable signs were noticed, the business of government and the administration would not proceed. What greater omen could there be than Jupiter not even protecting his own temple? Jupiter upon the Capitoline hill was like the *paterfamilias* in his raised *tablinum* at the centre of the Roman house, presiding over the religion of the house, and the welfare of his children.<sup>18</sup>

Frederick Ahl considers that Statius’ poem, *Thebaid*, laments the war between brothers that had torn Rome apart. His poems, dressed in the robes of myth, attempt to express the horror of the reality, perhaps particularly the terrible battle of Cremona.<sup>19</sup> With memories of that struggle for power still fresh, he says, “it would have taken a concentrated effort [for a reader] to keep one’s thoughts from straying between history and myth.”<sup>20</sup> It would appear that, within a decade of Mark, Romans writers such as Statius, Silius Italicus and Valerius Flaccus were similarly commenting on the contemporary situation in Rome by using stories from an earlier age.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, the evidence points to a depressed Rome, with considerable religious and political anxiety prevailing during the whole period from 64 to 69. This was exacerbated by the outbreak in 66 of the Jewish War, threatening the stability of the Empire in the Syrian

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<sup>17</sup> Edwards, *Writing Rome* 88. A. J. Gossage, “Virgil and the Flavian Epic,” in D. R. Dudley (ed.), *Virgil* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1969) 67–93, shows how the Flavian poets adopted Virgil’s style and motifs because of the similarity of their eras—post civil war, and longing for peace. For them, Jupiter was again to play a key role in guaranteeing, not only Rome’s survival, but also its path to greatness.

<sup>18</sup> John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988) 214.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Ahl, “Statius’ *Thebaid*: A Reconsideration,” *ANRW* II, 32.5 (1986) 2803–912.

<sup>20</sup> Ahl, “*Thebaid*” 2812.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Ahl, “Silius Italicus,” *ANRW* II, 32.4 (1986) 2492–561, also considers Silius Italicus’ *Punica* to be a meditation on Flavian Rome, “an epic of mourning” depicting the Romans’ thirst for glory and greed for power. Similarly, P. Ruth Taylor, “Valerius’ Flavian *Argonautica*,” *CQ* 44 (1994) 212–35, argues that Valerius Flaccus, writing in the reign of Vespasian, was following Virgil’s *Aeneid* in using mythological events to comment on contemporary figures. She agrees with Ahl (217–18) that Statius’ *Thebaid* is “a treatment of a contemporary theme in the guise of an ancient mythological tale,” and argues (218–32) that Valerius glorified the new dynasty in *Argonautica*, with the Argo symbolising the Roman state and the quest for its destiny, and Jason and Medea echoing the relationships between Vespasian, Titus and Berenice.



region until the danger was overcome in late 70. During this whole period, there was considerable unrest on the frontiers, and stories circulated in Rome that caused concern about the future of the Empire. In January 70, after Vespasian had been acclaimed emperor (20 December 69), but before he returned, “Rome was depressed and beset by manifold anxieties. Apart from the real miseries of the moment, it was plunged into a groundless panic on the rumour of a rebellion in Africa” (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.38).

“Wars and rumours of wars” (13:7) is a very good description of this climate from the perspective of those living in Rome. Tacitus refers to other rumours circulating: revolts and military disasters in Germany, Gaul, Sarmatia and Dacia, and Roman commanders going over to the enemy (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.54, 59). As late as mid-70, rumours about revolts in Gaul and Germany caused anxiety; “at Rome, everything was exaggerated into a disaster” (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.68). In Trier, before Vespasian returned to Rome, there had been a rumour that he had died in the East, leaving Rome leaderless, but that the news had been suppressed (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.75).<sup>22</sup> It was a time of great anxiety for all Romans, and the Empire itself seemed to be on the brink of collapse through internal divisions, if not because of the judgement of the gods.

Only in late 70 did the Romans receive their first good news for a long time. The restoration of peace by Vespasian’s forces and the victory in Judea must have seemed as if their time of punishment was over and the gods were again smiling upon Rome. Around October 70, Vespasian arrived in Rome, soon followed by the news of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>23</sup>

Titus remained behind to take Jerusalem (April–September 70), but did not return to Rome immediately afterwards, possibly because there was insufficient time before winter set in. Instead, he toured the East, putting on lavish shows at which he executed many prisoners—a display of Roman power now that the threat had been overcome,

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<sup>22</sup> Rome, too, had heard that rumour, as details of it were sent to Domitian (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.75).

<sup>23</sup> T. V. Buttrey, *Documentary Evidence for the Chronology of the Flavian Titulature* (Meisenheim: Anton Hain, 1980) 12, 21–22, concludes that Vespasian returned in October 70, citing dedications dated 13 October and 17 November. After commissioning Titus to take Jerusalem in March 70, Vespasian had to wait in Alexandria for favourable winds (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81), and Josephus (*War* 7.21–22) reports that he returned via Rhodes and several other cities, and then via Greece. The news of the fall of Jerusalem is unlikely to have arrived until November.

and a warning to any others who might contemplate resistance to Roman hegemony.

It is normally said that the triumph of Vespasian and Titus was held in Rome in June 71, but Titus did not reach Alexandria until 25 April 71, and could hardly have left before early May.<sup>24</sup> Sailing against the winds, he stopped at Reggio on the way to Puteoli, and no doubt required some period of preparation once he reached Rome. As a journey from Alexandria to Rome would average 60 days,<sup>25</sup> it is unlikely that the Triumph could have been as early as June, and July or August 71 is to be preferred.<sup>26</sup>

Vespasian had returned to Rome as the saviour of the Roman peace, and one of his first acts was to turn the soil to begin the reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter.<sup>27</sup> Titus now returned as conquering general, and as destroyer of the Temple of Yahweh.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF THE GODS

*For the city of Rome kept festival that day for her victory in the campaign against her enemies, for the end of her civil troubles, and a beginning of hopes for future happiness. (Josephus)*

According to Josephus, no one in the city stayed at home, as the triumphal procession wound its way through the packed streets of the city, with barely enough room for it to pass.<sup>28</sup> It probably travelled

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<sup>24</sup> P. Oxy. 2725 is a letter dated 29 April, speaking of "Caesar's" arrival four days earlier. B. W. Jones and R. D. Milns, *The Use of Documentary Evidence in the Study of Roman Imperial History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1984) 148. Suetonius (*Titus* 5) mentions that he attended the Apis ritual in Alexandria after Jerusalem had fallen, indicating that he spent some time there after his arrival.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion of sailing times on Page 138.

<sup>26</sup> Buttrey (*Documentary Evidence* 21) selects June 71 as the likely date, and considers that Vespasian must have prepared the triumph before Titus' arrival. However, he had no way of knowing when Titus would arrive, and Suetonius (*Titus* 5) says that Vespasian was not expecting him. Josephus (*JW* 7.121) reports that the Senate gave notice of the exact day on which the Triumph would be held.

<sup>27</sup> Suetonius says that Vespasian carried away the first basketfuls of rubble in the autumn of 70 (*Vespasian* 8, confirmed by Dio, *History* 66.10.2). However, Tacitus (*Histories* 4.53) reports that the Senate entrusted rebuilding to Lucius Vestinus, who began work on 21 June 70 with the laying of the foundation stone. It is possible that the other accounts reflect Vespasian's desire to speed up the work.

<sup>28</sup> For his lengthy description of the Triumph, see *JW* 7.121–57.

from the Campus Martius through the Circus Maximus, around the Palatine hill, and along the Sacred Way through the Forum Romanum.<sup>29</sup> The route was traditional, established so that the maximum number of people could see the triumphs of Rome's victorious generals. Josephus glowingly reports:

It is impossible adequately to describe the multitude of those spectacles and their magnificence. . . . The wonderful and precious productions of various nations . . . on that day displayed the majesty of the Roman Empire. . . . But nothing in the procession excited so much astonishment as . . . the moving stages . . . three or four storeys high. The war was shown by numerous representations . . . affording a very vivid picture of its episodes . . . [a] country devastated . . . the enemy slaughtered; here a party in flight, there others led off into captivity . . . temples set on fire . . . general devastation and woe. . . . The art and magnificent workmanship of these structures now portrayed the incidents to those who had not witnessed them, as though they were happening before their eyes. (*JW* 7.132–46)

A “great number” of Jewish captives were paraded (*JW* 7.138). Then came the spoils from the Temple—the golden table, the golden seven-branched lampstand, and other Temple vessels, all of which would end up in Vespasian's new Temple of Peace. Finally, the sacred Books of the Torah itself were displayed in triumph. At the rear of the procession, Vespasian and Titus, both wearing laurel crowns, dressed identically in purple and riding in the traditional four-horse chariots (*JW* 7.124), were the triumphators heralding the Flavian peace. It was a joint triumph, father and son side by side, proclaiming, not just victory, but the foundation of Rome's second dynasty. The faces of Vespasian and Titus would have been painted red in imitation of the terra-cotta statue of Jupiter in his temple on the Capitoline hill, identifying the triumphators with that god.<sup>30</sup> The procession terminated at Jupiter's temple, where they awaited the announcement that the Jewish commander, Simon, had been executed in the Forum,

<sup>29</sup> For the route, see Ena Markin, “The Triumphal Route with Particular Reference to the Flavian Triumph,” *JRS* 11 (1921) 25–36, who estimates the seating capacity of the Circus as 150,000, as does O. F. Robinson, *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration* (London: Routledge, 1992) 126. Pliny (*Natural History* 36.102) gave it as 250,000.

<sup>30</sup> H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 78–82, 92; Stambaugh, *Roman City* 238. According to Versnel, the purple clothes of the emperor remained on the statue until needed for important ceremonies. Pliny (*Natural History* 35.157) describes the statue of Jupiter as being of clay, and regularly painted with cinnabar, with statues of four-horse chariots outside the temple.

and offered sacrifice (*JW* 7.153–55).<sup>31</sup> On that day, Josephus observed, Rome celebrated “an end to its civil troubles, and a beginning of hopes for future happiness” (*JW* 7.157).

This triumph was both religious and political. It proclaimed the beginning of a new era for Rome, accentuated by the coins issued by Vespasian over the next few years, with constant themes of PAX, FORTUNA and CONCORDIA.<sup>32</sup> One coin of Vespasian has him raising up a kneeling Liberty while an armed Rome looks on, with the legend “Liberty Restored.”<sup>33</sup> Vespasian issued a long series of coins to commemorate the triumph in Judea, with the inscriptions IUDAEA CAPTA and DEVICTA IUDAEA; the main issue was in 71, but they continued until 73 and were resumed in 77–78, and typically depicted a mourning Jewish woman, and perhaps a captive, with a soldier, thought to be Titus by some, and a victory shield.<sup>34</sup> Douglas Edwards points out that Rome had earlier celebrated victory over the Jews at Pompey’s triumph in 61 BCE, and at Sosius’ triumph ca. 37 BCE, and coins were struck for the latter, serving as a proto-type for the later Flavian series. However, he adds that the scale of the propaganda was far greater with the Flavians, with coins reflecting the victory in various ways over twelve years, together with sculptures and arches. The defeat of the Jews “became one of the primary symbols for Flavian power and prestige.”<sup>35</sup>

Upon his return, Vespasian commenced a building program that

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<sup>31</sup> This ritual murder of the conquered foe in the Forum represented “the vanquishing of the threat to Rome.” Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 42. For the tradition, supposedly dating back to Romulus, see Livy 1.10.

<sup>32</sup> For coins showing the triumph, see Clive Foss, *Roman Historical Coins* (London: Seabury, 1990) 80, 83, 86; for *pax*, 69. Jones and Milns (*Documentary Evidence* 41) describe an aureus of Vespasian (BMC II, p. 81) with the legend “The Triumph of the Augustus,” with Vespasian on the reverse in a triumphal carriage showing Victory crowning him, and a bound captive in front of the horses.

<sup>33</sup> P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London: Weidenfeld, 1975) Plate 15.

<sup>34</sup> Smallwood, *Jews* 330.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas R. Edwards, “Religion, Power and Politics: Jewish Defeats by the Romans and Iconography and Josephus,” in J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan (eds), *Diaspora Jews and Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 295–305. Flavian propaganda and the link of the victory to Jupiter’s help persisted well into Domitian’s reign in the court literature: Silius Italicus (*Punica* 3.600–1) extols the majesty of Titus’s victory. His poem ends with a triumphant procession to the Capitol. Papinius Statius (*Silvae* 3.3.138–42) credits the triumph to Jupiter, and Valerius Flaccus (*Argonautica* 1.531, 536, 560) depicts Jupiter “the father” granting power to the Flavians. “All these events were laid down by me long ago . . . Now, I shall reveal to you what I have decreed in my providential care . . . and to whom I can, in safe assurance, entrust the reins of power.”

echoed the restoration of the city and the renewal of religion by Augustus after the first civil war. His new Temple of Peace was regarded as “one of the noblest buildings the world has ever seen,” and adjoined the Forum of Augustus, providing new space in the centre of the city, with a library and lecture halls. He seems to have deliberately imitated Augustus, “using buildings to establish the place of his dynasty in the life of the city.”<sup>36</sup> Flavian coins took on Augustan motifs.<sup>37</sup>

Warren Carter has pointed out the strong Jovian theology behind the Flavian propaganda.<sup>38</sup> Jupiter was regarded as “the governor and preserver of all things” and increasingly regarded as a moral and spiritual power during this period.<sup>39</sup> He was not just the sky and weather god, as in Roman tradition, but had become identified with Rome’s divine mission to rule the world.<sup>40</sup> He was even sought for healing.<sup>41</sup>

Helmut Schwier has argued that Titus decided to destroy the Jerusalem Temple as a political-religious act linked to the Flavian propaganda in order to proclaim both the superiority of Jupiter over the God of Israel, and Jupiter’s support for the Flavian dynasty.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, through the display of the cultic items from the destroyed Jerusalem Temple in the triumphal procession, Rome was reassured of Jupiter’s invulnerability and sovereignty.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Stambaugh, *Roman City* 72.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (New York: Arno, 1975 [Orig. 1936]) 23–26.

<sup>38</sup> Carter, “Roman Imperial Theology” 58–63; see also J. Rufus Fears, “The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology,” *ANRW* II, 17.1 (1981) 71–80. Carter proposes (62) that more attention should be given to the Roman political and religious background to Matthew’s Gospel, particularly the propaganda on the accession of Vespasian but, although he emphasises how Matthew’s Gospel countered these claims, he does not consider the extent to which the counter-propaganda was already present in Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>39</sup> Dill, *Roman Society* 543, based on inscriptions throughout the empire. Domitian built a small chapel to “Jupiter the Saviour” in remembrance of his own escape from the Capitol during the attack by Vitellius’ troops (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.74).

<sup>40</sup> Fears, “Cult of Jupiter,” 38, 40.

<sup>41</sup> An inscription from Aquineum/Budapest (CIL III 6456) has: “To Jupiter, Best and Greatest Who Saves,” in thanks for healing Lucius Serenius Bassius after a serious illness. Cited in Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedermann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1991) 32.

<sup>42</sup> Schwier, *Tempel* 313–16, 331–32; Theissen (*Gospels* 262) agrees with Schwier that Titus was declaring that the Jewish cult had ended by taking the temple vessels to Rome. Similarly, Helgeland (“Religion” 1503) argues that the bringing of the standards into the Temple was “a symbolic proclamation that the eagles had conquered Yahweh . . . the Romans were in effect saying that Roman sacred space had triumphed over Jewish sacred space.”

<sup>43</sup> Schwier, *Tempel* 332. He proposes (351) that both Christians and Jews would be asking why Yahweh had allowed this to happen.

This climate in Rome, it is proposed, strongly influenced the shape of Mark's Gospel. It will be shown that its rhetoric reflects the backdrop of euphoria in the city, but in the foreground stands the contrasting doubts and anxieties of the Christian spectators of the Triumph. Although there are certainly other significant issues for Mark's readers, the Gospel is partly designed to assuage the despondency of its readers following that event.

Mark seems to have deliberately reminded his readers of that spectacle in his depiction of Jesus as king. T. E. Schmidt has argued, building on the work of Versnel, that Mark modelled his crucifixion procession in a way that evokes the traditional pattern of a Roman triumph, although he does not seem to have considered whether Mark specifically alluded to the triumph of Vespasian and Titus.<sup>44</sup> It has long been recognised that the purple robe and crown of thorns in Mark's account portrays Jesus as king in a contrast to the Roman emperor. Schmidt, however, points out a number of other connections to the typical Roman triumph, including the gathering of the whole guard, the name Golgotha as a pointer to the Capitol (meaning 'head' = *capita*), and the time of day.<sup>45</sup> He proposes that, in 15:20, the purple robe alludes to the robe worn by the emperor in the triumph, and that Mark's 'triumph' depicts Jesus as the true triumphator.<sup>46</sup>

Versnel emphasises that the triumphator was considered an exceptional bearer of *dynamis*, and that the Roman triumph had its roots in the arrival of the *sotēr*, the man or god who had saved people from distress. The arrival of the *sotēr* was celebrated as "the parousia of a god," and he was seen to be the bearer of good fortune, bringing peace and prosperity.<sup>47</sup> Josephus says that the cities of the East celebrated with festivals the *euangelion* of Vespasian's acclamation as the new emperor (*JW* 4.618).<sup>48</sup> But, for Mark, the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ (1:1) is a very different announcement of 'good news'—one that leads to wild beasts and crucifixion.

<sup>44</sup> T. E. Schmidt, "Mark 15.16–32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession," *NTS* 41 (1995) 1–18.

<sup>45</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 435) suggest that the soldiers' mocking acclamation, "Hail, King of the Jews" (15:18), "deliberately echoes the Latin greeting to the Roman emperor, *Ave Caesar* ('Hail, Caesar').".

<sup>46</sup> In 15:19, the soldiers spit on Jesus. Vespasian had supposedly used spittle to heal others (see Page 171); now, in this parody of a triumph, the soldiers of the 'king' spit upon him and lead him off to his execution.

<sup>47</sup> Versnel, *Triumphus* 371, 378–87.

<sup>48</sup> See also *JW* 4.656, where Josephus uses *euangelion* of the receipt of news in the East of the triumph of Vespasian's troops in Rome.

Indeed, Mark has constructed the Jerusalem portion of his Gospel in such a way that there are two triumphal processions: one upon Jesus' entry when he does not sacrifice (11:1–11), and the other to the Place of the Skull at which he sacrifices himself (15:16–27). Jesus enters Jerusalem as saviour, not driving a *quadriga*, but riding on a colt. In an anti-climax, the crowd just melts away when Jesus does not claim kingship of the type that they want. Instead, Jesus' second triumphal procession leads to the true climax. It is a parody of the recent Roman triumph: here, the crowd mocks the triumphantor, failing to perceive that, in contrast with the ruler of Rome, this is the right sort of king—one who is prepared to give himself totally for the benefit of others (cf. 10:42–45).

#### THE SAVIOUR OF ROME

*Vespasian . . . the one Saviour and . . . god  
Caesar . . . Vespasian . . . Lord Augustus.  
(Egyptian papyrus, July 69)<sup>49</sup>*

Compared with a visibly powerful emperor, however, the dead Jesus of Nazareth must have seemed powerless. In the face of the Roman propaganda, Mark needed to reassure his readers of the far greater power of God, showing how it had been made evident in Jesus, the true saviour. Yet, at the same time, he would have had to be careful to avoid using titles of Jesus that might make his text appear to be a political document, or might confirm suspicions that Christian groups were part of a political conspiracy.

It is striking that, although *kyrios* is commonly used of the emperor, Mark never explicitly uses it as a title of Jesus. Rather, it is a term used of God (1:3; 11:9; 12:11, 29, 30, 36, 37; 13:20) or is used ambiguously so that it can mean God or Jesus (5:19; 11:3). Considering that Paul used “Lord” 163 times, almost always as a title of Jesus,<sup>50</sup> it is odd that Mark does not use it once.<sup>51</sup> Of the evangelists, only

<sup>49</sup> P. Fouad 8, written at the time of Vespasian's acclamation in Egypt in July 69. Robert K. Sherk (ed.), *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome. Vol 6: The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 124.

<sup>50</sup> This count has been taken from the seven letters generally accepted as being written by Paul: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon.

<sup>51</sup> “Mark seems to draw back from identifying Jesus with the *kyrios*.” Marcus,

Mark avoids applying the title *kyrios* to Jesus.<sup>52</sup> Adolf Deissmann observed that there had been a large increase under Nero in the use of *kyrios* as a title of the emperor, with *Nero kyrios* being used in even remote villages in the East. He commented that a phrase such as “Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . could not but sound politically dangerous to a Roman official.”<sup>53</sup> Domitian would later insist that *kyrios* be applied to him: “‘Lord and God’ became his regular title both in writing and conversation” (Suetonius, *Domitian* 13).

Josephus says that, when Vespasian returned to Rome, the crowd called him “their Benefactor and Saviour” (*JW* 7.71).<sup>54</sup> Mark never calls Jesus “saviour,” although he is said to save (*sōzō*: 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:26, 52; 13:13; 15:30, 31). He calls Jesus “king” six times, but only as the ironical charge against him (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). Moreover, it is with a pronounced ambiguity that the centurion calls Jesus “God’s son” (15:39), a phrase commonly used of emperors.<sup>55</sup>

All of this may indicate Mark’s consciousness of the need to be careful. Indeed, we may have a subtle piece of irony by Mark in 10:18. One title used of Nero was “the Good God” (*agathō theō*),<sup>56</sup> and Mark has Jesus respond, tongue-in-cheek, to the rich man who calls him

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*Way* 39. He concludes that Mark’s treatment implies both inseparability, and yet separation. This shows the ambiguity in the text.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Matt 7:22; Luke 7:13; John 6:23.

<sup>53</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927) 350–56. Deissmann’s study was only of the East.

<sup>54</sup> See also *JW* 3.459 for the same acclamation in Tiberias. The idea of the emperor as ‘saviour’ was not new. Nero was venerated in the East as *sōsikomos*, “Saviour of the World.” Deissmann, *Ancient East* 364–65. On an inscription at Ptolemais (60–62 CE), Nero is “the saviour” (*ho sotēr*) and “Lord of the whole world” (*ho tou pantos kosmou kyrios*). Collins, *Sibylline Oracles* 82. These terms also appear on a marble stele in 67, and other inscriptions apply “heavenly Zeus” and “Son of God” to Nero. Sherck, *Translated Documents* 110–15. For the use of *sotēr* and similar terms for Vespasian, see Scott, *Imperial Cult* 20–21. The understanding of the divinity of the Roman emperor during this period has been much discussed. Duncan Fishwick, “*Genius and Numen*,” *HTR* 62 (1969) 364, concludes that the *numen* of the emperor did not make him a god, but “a mediator through whom divinity could function.” See also S. R. F. Price, “Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult,” *JHS* 104 (1984) 79–95, who concludes that the emperors were considered god-like. But how the general populace understood the matter when such high titles were in constant use is difficult to assess.

<sup>55</sup> See Price (“Gods and Emperors” 79) on the Greeks calling the emperor *theou hyios*. Tac Hun Kim, “The Anarthrous *hyios theou* in Mark 15,39 and the Roman Imperial Cult,” *Bib* 79 (1998) 225, says that Mark’s readers would immediately “see the significance of the centurion’s confession.” However, Earl S. Johnson, Jr., “Mark 15,39 and the So-called Confession of the Roman Centurion,” *Bib* 81 (2000) 409, 413, argues that it would not be seen as a reference to any divine claims of the emperor.

<sup>56</sup> Inscriptions have been found at Cos and in Egypt. Deissmann, *Ancient East* 345.



“good”: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.”

In addition, some scenes may have been designed to counter the propaganda about Vespasian’s supposed powers. According to Josephus, Vespasian considered that “divine providence had assisted him to grasp the empire” (*JW* 4.622), and the propaganda echoed his belief. Tacitus reports that, while Vespasian was in Alexandria in 69 on the way back to Rome, he restored a blind man’s sight using spittle, and healed another man’s withered hand; these were seen as signs of “a certain favour of Providence towards him” (*Histories* 4.81). Suetonius and Dio repeat these stories, showing how well known these miracles became, no doubt encouraged by Vespasian himself and by his supporters (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7; Dio, *History* 66.8.1).<sup>57</sup>

This propaganda can be compared with the emphasis given to Jesus’ extraordinary powers in the first half of Mark’s Gospel, in which everyone (except the authorities) concludes that, in some way, Jesus is blessed by God. But, after it becomes clear that his followers and the public, because of his powerful acts, have a false understanding of his nature and role, miracles and healings disappear from the story almost entirely. In the capital, his credentials are established only by his teaching authority as God’s son (11:27–12:11), and by his willingness to be faithful to God’s will. The lack of miracles and healings during Jesus’ crucial days in Jerusalem thus provides a clear contrast with the new emperor’s perception that his authority would be better established in the capital by claiming to have miraculously healed people.

Of the Evangelists, only Mark has Jesus use spittle for healing, and he does so twice, curing a deaf mute (7:32–37) and a blind man (8:22–26).<sup>58</sup> They both occur soon before the key question about Jesus’ identity: “Who do you say I am?” (8:29). Both Tacitus and Suetonius emphasise that Vespasian healed with spittle in full view of an expectant crowd of bystanders whereas, in both Markan stories, Jesus pointedly takes the men away from the crowd (7:33; 8:23),<sup>59</sup> and instructs them not to tell people about what has happened (7:36;

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<sup>57</sup> The extent of the debate in Rome about the reliability of these stories is suggested by Tacitus’ comment: “Those who were present still attest both miracles today, when there is nothing to be gained by lying” (*Histories* 4.81).

<sup>58</sup> Dewey (“Interwoven Tapestry” 229) notes the considerable “vocabulary overlap” between the two spittle healings.

<sup>59</sup> In 8:23, Jesus takes him outside the village and, as there is no mention of the presence of, or any reaction by, a crowd, the reader naturally takes them to be alone.

8:26). These actions and commands of Jesus have puzzled commentators, but they take on meaning as a contrast against the publicity of Vespasian's encounter.<sup>60</sup> The emperor's use of these stories for political purposes is contrasted with Jesus who heals in a quiet, hidden way. Moreover, Mark's readers are shown that Jesus does not just open the eyes of the blind, but also makes the deaf hear—a Messianic attribute, surprisingly exclaimed by Gentiles in Mark's story, who quote Isaiah (7:37; cf. Isa 35:5).

There are also parallels between the story of Vespasian's healing of the blind man, and Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus (10:46–52). In Mark's narrative, the blind man is said to be a beggar who pleads with Jesus (twice), and he acclaims Jesus with a royal title, expressed publicly for the first time in the Gospel: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"—a title that Jesus later questions (12:37). In the Vespasian story, the blind man is described as being "a commoner," who implores the emperor to heal him (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81).<sup>61</sup> Mark locates his story as Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem for his moment of glory on the cross; Vespasian was about to return to Rome for the glory of political power.

In another miracle attributed to Vespasian, he 'heals' by stepping on a man's withered hand.<sup>62</sup> Mark has an account of Jesus healing a withered hand in 3:1–6. Jesus merely speaks for the healing to occur, exercising God-like authority and power (cf. Gen 1). His healing of a crippled man leads to a plot against his life by a political group, the Herodians. In contrast, Vespasian used the healing of a crippled man to strengthen his political power.

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<sup>60</sup> The commands to silence have often been studied as part of a supposed "Messianic Secret," that began with W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971 [Orig. German: 1901]), who claimed that the theme is a way of explaining how Jesus was only acclaimed Messiah after his death. His theory has been widely rejected, but there has been extensive discussion over the motif. Recent studies of the "Messianic Secret" include that of Cook ("Persuasive" 311–29), who concludes from his linguistic analysis that it is a way of drawing the reader into the text, and Fendler (*Studien* 104–46), who sees it as emphasizing the salvation event. No study of Mark's commands to secrecy has explored their literary use in the context of persecuted readers within Roman society.

<sup>61</sup> Adding weight to the comparison is the observation by Eckstein ("Markus 10,46–52" 41–42) that the Bartimaeus scene is portrayed as "an ancient royal audience," where a citizen cries out to the king for merciful help.

<sup>62</sup> Tacitus (*Histories* 4.81) reports that Vespasian first consulted doctors, who advised that the dislocation in the man's hand could be corrected, and that the blind man's sight might be able to be restored. His mention of these medical opinions again indicates that he was sceptical of these stories.

It is as if Mark has split the Vespaian story into a number of parts. In particular, he frames the central teaching on self-sacrificial love (8:31–10:45) with allusions to the contrasting glory seeking of the emperor. That section of text leads up to Jesus' confrontation with the authorities, and includes an explicit contrast between the wealth, ambition, power and earthly glory of those who "lord it over" others (10:42) and the self-sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrates and teaches. The greatest number of paradoxes appears in this section: to save your life you must lose it (8:35), to gain everything you must lose everything (8:36–37), those first must be last (9:35; 10:31), those who want to be great must be the least (10:44). All of these come in a section that is essentially paradoxical—true glory is shown in the death of the martyr who dies rejected as a criminal. Mark's king is one who rules from a cross, the greatest paradox.

If these stories were meant to counteract the Vespaian propaganda, the Gospel must have been finalised after 70, since the stories could not have preceded Vespaian's return to Rome in October 70. Neither of the 'spittle' pericopes (7:32–37; 8:22–26) appear in Matthew or Luke, and they are the only omissions by Matthew of any substance. It is possible that both Matthew and Luke were loath to retain these stories as in the eighties there was no need to counter Vespaian's propaganda. They might even have considered Mark's use of these healings unwise, caught up, as he was, in the post-triumph atmosphere, as their inclusion could make suspect the other stories of healing by Jesus.

Of course, Mark may have just been referring to the well known healing qualities of spittle,<sup>63</sup> but there are some remarkable coincidences here, and it is more likely that he shaped these scenes to provide a contrast with the ways of the new emperor. The need for this contrast could not have been greater than at that time when Rome was rejuvenated by the display of Roman might under its new Flavian masters.

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<sup>63</sup> Spittle was known as a healing agent: in Suetonius, *Vitellius* 2, a woman mixes spittle with honey to rub on the throat and jaws as a medicine. See also Donahue and Harrington, *Mark* 240.

## A FLAVIAN PEACE?

*Do you imagine that Nero will be the last of the tyrants? (Montanus, in his speech to the Roman Senate, early 70, reported by Tacitus)*

With other Romans, the Christians would have hoped for peace with the advent of Vespasian, but only time would tell if their hopes would be realised. In 71, the members of Mark's community could still see the effects of the fire of 64,<sup>64</sup> reminding them of Nero's outburst against them, and the damage still visible from the inter-legionary fighting within the city in December 69 would remind them that civil chaos was only a few months behind. Moreover, after the Jewish War, brought to mind especially by the Triumph, there may have been added pressure on the Jewish members of the Christian community because of anti-Jewish feelings in Rome.<sup>65</sup> It is possible, too, that Vespasian had already ordered the construction of his huge new amphitheatre. Christians knew what happened in amphitheatres in Rome.<sup>66</sup>

When the Senate issued its decree on 20 December 69 recognising Vespasian as Emperor, he was given power to do "whatever he decides."<sup>67</sup> Although he is said to have been a benign emperor, those reports all came from the upper class, and were written after his reign had been shown to be mild.<sup>68</sup> But we do not know the attitudes

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<sup>64</sup> A coin in the reign of Galba in 69 has ROMA RESURGENS, probably commemorating rebuilding after the 64 fire. There is a similar coin in the year 70. Foss, *Coins* 74–81. Vespasian allowed anyone to build on remaining empty sites "as the city was unsightly from former fires and fallen buildings." Suetonius, *Vespasian* 8. An inscription mentions Vespasian restoring the streets after years of neglect. See Ramage, "Denigration" 213.

<sup>65</sup> Barclay (*Jews* 351) argues that, after the triumph, Rome was full of "anti-Jewish slanders," and that Josephus was responding to them in his *Jewish War*, especially evident in 1.2, 7–8.

<sup>66</sup> Suetonius lists this initiative along with the Temple of Peace as another building work designed to follow the programs and style of Augustus (*Vespasian* 9), and so it is likely to already have been announced, if not commenced, within a year of Vespasian's return. Jeffers (*Greco-Roman* 33) notes: "We have no evidence that Christians were persecuted in the Colosseum. It was not opened to the public until A.D. 80, long after the persecutions under Nero in A.D. 64." But he assumes that Christians were killed only in 64. Romans executed criminals in the most public way possible, and the long history of this policy should be noted when considering where people like Ignatius of Antioch were executed.

<sup>67</sup> On a bronze tablet found in Rome (CIL VI 930). Sherk, *Translated Documents* 124.

<sup>68</sup> For positive views of Vespasian, see Dio, *History* 66.10.1–67.11.3; Suetonius,

of Romans of any class towards him in the first year or two. In those early months, people might remember that Nero, Otho and Vitellius also began their reigns with tolerance and moderation. Romans would have still been assessing this newcomer and comparing him with the tyrannical emperors that preceded him.

Vespasian was known as someone who had fared well under Nero, and who had been invited to tour Greece with him. Indeed, Vespasian and his sons had distanced themselves from those who had attempted to kill Nero.<sup>69</sup> He was appointed on 8 November 66 to put down the Jewish revolt, and was seen as Nero's general.<sup>70</sup> In some ways, he seemed not to disown Nero's era: he left in place the enormous golden statue (the Colossus), which Nero had erected of himself near his 'Golden House' adjoining the Forum, and his amphitheatre became known as the Colosseum.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the Flavians continued the religious policy initiated by Nero of the re-establishment of Jupiter in a central position in Roman religion, after Augustus had relegated him to a minor position.<sup>72</sup>

The Christians would not yet have known Vespasian's policies towards them, and they may have feared new investigations in view of their known Jewish connection and secret meetings. Vespasian would show that he did become personally involved in investigations: probably some time after Masada fell in 73 or 74, he initiated a probe, albeit "at the intercession of Titus," against a Jonathan who had made false accusations against Jews, including Josephus, in Alexandria

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*Vespasian* 12–17; Tacitus, *Agricola* 17; *Dialogue* 9.8. Tacitus said that he "was the first emperor who ever changed for the better" (*Histories* 1.50), which suggests that he had heard unfavourable reports of his earlier years.

<sup>69</sup> Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 20. Titus even divorced Marcia, whose uncle Soronus was involved in the Piso conspiracy. This means that Vespasian and Titus were in Rome in 65. We do not know whether Vespasian was in Rome during the persecutions in late 64, but it is likely, as he returned from his proconsulship in Africa and had to engage in mule trading to improve his financial situation before the trip to Greece with Nero in 66. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4.

<sup>70</sup> He was probably chosen because he was in Greece with Nero when the revolt broke out, and could quickly reach Syria. Moreover, he was perceived as an unlikely threat to the emperor, and he had gained valuable military experience in Germany and Britain. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4.

<sup>71</sup> It was a rather visible reminder of Nero, being 120 Roman feet high, with golden rays coming from its head. Martial commented: "Here where the heavenly colossus has a close view of the stars/and high structures rise on the lofty road,/ There once shone the hated hall of the cruel king,/and one house took up the whole of Rome." Cited in Griffin, *Nero* 138. See also Pliny, *Natural History* 34.45; 35:51.

<sup>72</sup> Fears, "Cult of Jupiter" 56–66.

and Rome. He had Jonathan tortured and burnt (*JW* 7.437–50). It would have been presumed that Vespasian, like Nero before him, would investigate Christians if enough pressure were applied.

Rome had suffered from years of political intrigues and murders, and Vespasian's attempt to found a new dynasty, for all its initial popularity, did not assure the future. Not of an important Roman family,<sup>73</sup> he had been unpopular in his early career, and his current "wife in all but name" was a former slave (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 3). Further, he imposed heavy new taxes and doubled others, a program hardly likely to win friends (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 16). Moreover, stories were circulating of the devotion of Vespasian and both his sons to the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis.<sup>74</sup>

There are indications, too, of political tensions among senators in this period, with possible animosity between Flavian supporters and those families associated with his predecessors.<sup>75</sup> Suetonius, in his final words on Vespasian, makes this revealing comment on the tenseness of the political situation at the beginning of the Flavian dynasty: "Despite frequent plots to murder him, he dared tell the Senate that

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, *Titus* 6; Dio, *History* 66.10.3. As late as the reign of Domitian, the poet Statius was still acclaiming Jupiter's choice of Vespasian despite his "obscurity of birth" (*Silvae* 3.3.142). Nichols (*Vespasian* 165–66) finds no evidence of significant pro-Flavian support in Rome among the ruling classes before the Battle of Cremona.

<sup>74</sup> For Tacitus' cynical comments about the origins of Vespasian's devotion to Serapis in Egypt, see Tacitus, *Histories* 4.82–84. Vespasian and Titus spent the night before their triumph in Rome in the Temple of Isis, which Josephus is quick to point out (*JW* 7.123). For the first time, that temple appeared on a coin during Vespasian's reign, and an obelisk at Beneventum shows Domitian being crowned by Isis. Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 186. Domitian had escaped in the guise of a follower of Isis when Vitellius' troops stormed the Capitol. Suetonius, *Domitian* 1; Tacitus, *Histories* 3.74. Josephus tells us that Vespasian was first proclaimed emperor in Syria (*JW* 4.617), while Tacitus (*Histories* 2.79) has Egypt. Jones (*Titus* 62) has suggested that Josephus changed the order of the acclamations because of concern about Vespasian's devotion to Serapis.

<sup>75</sup> See Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 167. There must have been considerable jockeying for position in the early years of the new dynasty, especially as Vespasian would have felt obligated to reward those who helped in the war and aided his rise to power. Tacitus (*Dialogue on Oratory* 8), looking back to the early seventies, notes that among "the most powerful men in Rome" were two advocates, Eprius Mercullus and Q. Vibius Crispus, who had neither high birth nor wealth, but who took "the leading place in [Vespasian's] circle of friends, and [got] their own way in everything." In *Histories* 4.5–11, Tacitus describes the unrest and positioning for power soon after the Senate affirmed Vespasian as emperor: "Thus the Senate quarrelled; the defeated party nursed their grievances" (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.11). One of those prominent in that turmoil was the Stoic, Helvidius Priscus. Vespasian had him executed for "rudeness," according to Suetonius (*Vespasian* 15).

either his sons would succeed him or no one would” (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 25).<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, the Roman mob was fickle, and emperors well knew that the common people could change their loyalties very quickly, perhaps as soon as the next food shortage. Troops had to force a way for Claudius through a hostile crowd because of food shortages, so that he made sure of the grain supply after that, even attempting to arrange ships in winter (Tacitus, *Annals* 12.43; Suetonius, *Claudius* 18).<sup>77</sup> Nero used to keep the crowd happy by showering them with tokens redeemable for gold, silver, jewels, slaves, horses and even ships, houses and farms (Suetonius, *Nero* 11; Dio, *History* 61.18.1). In Mark’s account of the Roman trial of Jesus, Pilate gives in to the mob (15:15).<sup>78</sup>

All of the short-lived emperors of 69 had been welcomed as saviours.<sup>79</sup> Vitellius had entered Rome to the acclamation of the crowd in July 69; “They had learnt the usual flatteries by heart,” Tacitus (*Histories* 2.90) adds cynically. But within five months, the mob was mocking him as he was led off to his execution (Suetonius, *Vitellius* 17; Tacitus, *Histories* 3.84). Tacitus remarks how quickly the attitude of the people changed towards Vitellius: “The mob in their perversity abused him in his death just as they had flattered him in his lifetime” (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.85; cf. Dio, *History* 65.20.2–3).<sup>80</sup>

In a striking parallel to Mark’s scene of the arrest of Jesus (14:47), Tacitus reports that, when Vitellius was arrested on 20 December 69, and was taken to the Forum for his execution, one of his supporters came up and cut off an ear of the tribune guarding him (*Histories* 3.84). He was being led away at night, amidst the mockery and abuse of the crowd. If Mark’s readers knew of this event (and Tacitus’

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<sup>76</sup> Dio (66.16.3–4) mentions that Vespasian put a stop to the conspiracy of Aelianus and Marcellus. Titus arranged for Aelianus to be killed at a meal.

<sup>77</sup> Sirks (*Food for Rome* 43) indicates the limited ability Claudius had to arrange two voyages per ship from Alexandria, emphasising the fragility of the situation. Thus, Vespasian’s blockade of the Egyptian grain supply during the civil war—“with the object of bringing starvation upon Vitellius’ defeated troops and the inhabitants of Rome” (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.48)—was a powerful threat, and would not have been forgotten by Romans.

<sup>78</sup> For the awareness of the emperors that they needed to keep the people content, see P. A. Brunt, “The Roman Mob,” *PP* 35 (1966) 27.

<sup>79</sup> On a sestertius of Galba, we find: “Because of citizens saved”; on an aureus of Otho: “Peace of the whole world.” On an inscription in Egypt, dated 8 July, 68, is an edict from the prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Julius Alexander, acclaiming Galba as “the one who, for us, has illuminated the way to the salvation of the whole human race.” Cited in Sherck, *Translated Documents* 117.

<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the mob quickly turns against Jesus (11:9–10; 15:11–13).

report shows that it was known in the city), Mark's inclusion of this incident would have served as a reminder of the fate of the previous emperor, and it would bring to mind the recent civic chaos less than two years earlier when Vespasian gained power through armed force. In contrast, Mark has Jesus discouraging the use of force (14:48–49), and such a reminder may be a veiled suggestion to what, in turn, might happen to Vespasian.<sup>81</sup> In view of the fragile political situation, many people may have been wondering how long the new emperor would last.

### THE AMBITIOUS SONS

*For they had been arguing with one another  
who was the greatest. (9:34)*

Probably of greater concern for the Christians, however, was Titus, the heir and virtual co-ruler.<sup>82</sup> When he returned to Rome, he came as the destroyer of Jerusalem and its Temple, and he would always be remembered as such. An inscription on an arch that once stood in the Circus Maximus recorded this dedication on behalf of the Senate: "Titus son of the deified Vespasianus . . . because . . . he tamed the race of the Jews and destroyed the city of Jerusalem."<sup>83</sup> Valerius

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<sup>81</sup> Benedict T. Viviano, "The High Priest's Ear: Mark 14:47," *RB* 96 (1989) 71–80, contends that the servant was really the deputy of the High Priest, and the action was meant to be seen as a punishment, as this form of penalty had been used in the East. He claims that it shamed the High Priest and made his deputy unfit for office. But Mark shows no interest in such issues, and *doulos* is an unlikely term for the High Priest's deputy. Indeed, as Vespasian was *Pontifex Maximus*, Mark may have used the phrase "servant of the high priest" to allude to the Vitellius incident, as it was a tribune of Vespasian that was attacked. This would mean that Mark portrays the disciples here like the legionary forces that relied on force during the civil war, a motif that fits well with Mark's use of them (see Chapter 7).

<sup>82</sup> Titus was "all but co-emperor." Buttrey, *Documentary Evidence* 22. "Titus was a genuine co-ruler." Perry M. Rogers, "Titus, Berenice and Mucianus," *Historia* 29 (1980) 90. Against this, Jones (*Titus* 58) argues that Vespasian was firmly in control and Titus was subordinate as heir apparent. However, Pliny the Elder, writing before Titus became emperor upon Vespasian's death on 23 June 79, speaks of the balsam "exhibited in the capital by the emperors Vespasian and Titus" (*Natural History* 12.111). He wrote this after 75 as, in 12.118, he speaks of the sale of balsam "within five years of the conquest of Judea." His work was published in 77. Suetonius (*Domitian* 2) depicts Vespasian and Titus sitting together in their "official chairs," with Domitian sitting behind them.

<sup>83</sup> CIL VI 944, cited in Sherk, *Translated Documents* 126.



Flaccus would write, probably late in the reign of Vespasian, of Titus “foul with the dust of Solyma, as he hurls brands and spreads havocs in every tower” (*Argonautica* 1.13–14), an image suggesting that Titus was thought of in Rome as the one who burnt the Temple.<sup>84</sup> If so, Titus returned to Rome with a reputation for having desecrated the centre of the Jewish religion, and Christians would hardly have expected him to show respect for an offshoot of Judaism.

Titus had toured the East for eight months after the fall of Jerusalem, putting on lavish shows at which many prisoners were cruelly executed.<sup>85</sup> Titus must have returned to Rome with quite a reputation for brutality among the Jewish community. Moreover, he was wounded in the War, and his left arm was always weaker (Dio, *History* 66.5.1), with the result that he was constantly reminded of the Jewish revolt.<sup>86</sup>

He had played the key negotiating role between Vespasian and Mucianus, commander of the legions in Syria, with the result that Mucianus became an ally of Vespasian and leader of the attack on Vitellius; these negotiations were critical to Vespasian’s rise to power.<sup>87</sup> Upon Titus’ return to Rome, Vespasian made it clear that he would succeed him as emperor, and proceeded to endow him with unprecedented powers. Suetonius reports:

[Titus] now became his father’s colleague, almost his guardian. . . . He bore most of the burdens of government and, in his father’s name, dealt with official correspondence, drafted edicts and even took over the quaestor’s task of reading the imperial speeches to the Senate. (*Titus* 6)

It is possible that Titus had been involved with the persecution of Christians under Nero, as he had acted as a quaestor in Rome from

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<sup>84</sup> Sulpicius Severus (*Chronica* 2.30.6–7) reports (ca. 400) that Titus deliberately destroyed it. See T. D. Barnes, *Early Christianity in the Roman Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984) 227–28. Hugh Montefiore, “Sulpicius Severus and the Council of War,” *Historia* 11 (1962) 156–70, proposes that the source of Severus’ information was Marcus Antonius, who was present at Titus’ council of war at Jerusalem. If so, despite Josephus’ account, Rome was being told that Titus had intended to destroy the Temple. After all, he did raze it to the ground.

<sup>85</sup> Citing *JW* 7.37–40, Jones (*Titus* 59) says that Titus displayed “excessive cruelty” to Jewish prisoners, indicating “a less pleasant side of his character, one that was to cause comment in the next ten years.” For details of these executions, see *JW* 6.418, 420; 7.23–40, 373; *Life* 420–21. In *JW* 7.373, Josephus says that half-devoured prisoners were preserved in order to be devoured again, “affording merriment and sport for their foes.” Z. Yavetz, “Reflections on Titus and Josephus,” *GRBS* 16 (1975) 415–30, argues that Josephus attenuates Titus’ ruthlessness, attempting to show his clemency when the rumours were circulating about him in Rome.

<sup>86</sup> Vespasian was also wounded—in the foot. *JW* 3.236.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, *Titus* 43–46.

December 63 to December 64.<sup>88</sup> A quaestor had, as one function, the investigation of crimes.<sup>89</sup> In 71, he was made consul and Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, and was thus given “a concatenation of powers without precedent or subsequent parallel.”<sup>90</sup> When he returned from the war, Titus brought back with him the apostate Jew Tiberius Julius Alexander, who probably shared the Praetorian Prefecture with Titus, and thus “continued in Rome a partnership which had succeeded brilliantly in Palestine.”<sup>91</sup>

Titus has been described as “the enforcer” of the new regime,<sup>92</sup> having complete control over both the Praetorian Guard and the administration of justice, and he probably had control of prisoners awaiting trial.<sup>93</sup> Suetonius reports that Titus conducted himself in an arrogant and tyrannical fashion: “If anyone aroused his suspicion, Guards detachments would be sent into theatre or camp to demand the man’s punishment as if by the agreement of everyone present, and he would then be executed without delay” (*Titus* 6). This is a chilling indication, not only of Titus’ character, but also of the swift and summary way in which he would deal with someone suspected of an offence.

Titus murdered Caecina by inviting him to dinner and having him stabbed; “Actions of this sort . . . made Titus so deeply disliked at the time,” according to Suetonius (*Titus* 6). He added: “He was believed to be profligate as well as cruel . . . and immoral, too. . . . He also had a reputation for greed . . . [so that] it was even thought and

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<sup>88</sup> For the dates, see Jones, *Titus* 17, 20, who suggests that he became quaestor at the minimum legal age in his 24th year. Suetonius (*Titus* 4) has this event soon before 66, but does not state the year. Titus was 31 years old in 71.

<sup>89</sup> F. M. Heichelheim and Cedric Yeo, *A History of the Roman People* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 89. Quaestors were first appointed during the Republic, and the quaestorship was an order of magistrate below praetor. They seem to have acted as an instrument of the consul at times (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.34) or of the emperor (*Annals* 16.27), but also laid accusations (*Annals* 1.74; 3.67). See also *Annals* 4.27, 31; 12.64; 13.42.

<sup>90</sup> John A. Crook, “Titus and Berenice,” *AJP* 72 (1951) 164.

<sup>91</sup> For his career, see E. G. Turner, “Tiberius Iulius Alexander,” *JRS* 44 (1954) 54–64, especially 61–64, which discuss an Egyptian papyrus that indicates his appointment as Prefect of the Praetorian Guard some time after his arrival in Rome. He had been brutal in suppressing Jewish uprisings in Alexandria, and was second-in-command during the siege of Jerusalem (*JW* 5.45–46, 510; 6.237–42). Turner suggests that he might be one of the doubtful companions of Titus mentioned by Suetonius (*Titus* 7).

<sup>92</sup> Jones, *Titus* 100.

<sup>93</sup> Jeffers (*Greco-Roman* 170) gives evidence that the Praetorian Guard had control of prisoners sent to Rome from the provinces.

prophesied quite openly that he would prove to be a second Nero” (*Titus* 7).<sup>94</sup> His reputation seems to have been widely and publicly discussed around Rome.

Moreover, both Titus and Domitian were suspected of conspiracy and ambition. Titus is described as an impressive, capable and attractive man.<sup>95</sup> Suetonius (*Titus* 2) mentions that a physiognomist had predicted during Nero’s reign that Titus would be emperor. The rumours about Titus seemed to gain strength with his abortive trip to see Galba in early 69: it was said that Galba was going to adopt him, and there were oracles and omens that supported the rumour (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.1). After turning back from the journey to Rome in 69, Titus consulted the oracle of Venus at Paphos and was told of “his prospects of wearing the purple” (Suetonius, *Titus* 5). After the victory over Jerusalem, Titus was forced to hurriedly return to Rome in May 71 when he learned that there had been rumours in Rome of his rather regal behaviour in the East, including his grand shows.<sup>96</sup> Rome knew of his hopes and ambitions, and he may well have been building his own political support.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Vespasian had returned to Rome after hearing rumours about his other son when he reached Alexandria:

Vespasian now . . . received an unfavourable report of Domitian, who seemed to be trespassing beyond the natural sphere of an emperor’s youthful son. He accordingly handed over the flower of his army to Titus, who was to finish off the war with the Jews. (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.51)

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<sup>94</sup> He also used his influence and took bribes. Suetonius, *Titus* 7. He adds that, when Titus became emperor in 79, he became kindly by nature. Dio (*History* 66.18.4–5), however, was of the opinion that it was only by good fortune that Titus was remembered well, as his harshness would have become apparent if he had lived longer (he died in 81). Sylvie Franchet D’Espèrey, “Vespasien, Titus et la littérature,” *ANRW* II, 32.5 (1986) 3086, gives evidence that Titus encouraged poets and was “essentially of the *literati*,” and that this was the reason why Romans feared that he would be ‘another Nero.’

<sup>95</sup> “He was capable of filling any position. His appearance lacked neither charm nor dignity,” wrote Tacitus (*Histories* 2.1), who knew him personally. Suetonius (*Titus* 1, 3) referred to his “winning ways,” his muscular and handsome appearance, natural talents and oratorical skills.

<sup>96</sup> On the rumours, see Jones, *Titus* 57–58, 85–87; Suetonius, *Titus* 5. Malalas (*Chron.* 261) has Titus acting arrogantly in Antioch, suggesting that Josephus may have downplayed his behaviour on the triumphal tour.

<sup>97</sup> Crook (“Titus and Berenice” 162–75) has argued that there was considerable conflict in the seventies between the supporters of Mucianus and Titus, suggesting an atmosphere of conspiracy in this period. Against this view, and arguing that Titus simply built his own group of supporters, see Rogers, “Titus” 86–95, and Brian W. Jones, “Titus and Some Flavian *Amici*,” *Historia* 24 (1975) 455, who, however, describes the political atmosphere in Rome as “tense.”

According to Tacitus (*Histories* 3.86), when Vitellius was killed, Domitian “presented himself to the generals of his party. The crowds of soldiers hailed him as Caesar, and . . . escorted him to his father’s house.” There, he “played the role of emperor’s son by devoting himself to rape and adultery” (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.2). As Domitian was only 18 years old, it is likely that people were reminded of the young Nero. Suetonius (*Domitian* 1) reports that Domitian was made “City Praetor with consular powers” after Vitellius was killed, and that he exploited his position with “lawlessness.” If this position is that of Urban Prefect, he oversaw all cases against Christians brought before magistrates from 1 January 70. Tacitus (*Histories* 4.38) also calls him “Urban Praetor,” and says that all edicts were issued under his name during this period. We do not know how long he held this office, and it may well be that Vespasian made a change when he returned late in 70.

It was said that Domitian was tempted to seize power when he embarked on his abortive expedition against Germany and Gaul in 70 (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.86; Suetonius, *Domitian* 2). When Vespasian met Domitian at Beneventum on his way back to Rome, Domitian was ill at ease because “of what he was planning and of what he had already done” (Dio, *History* 66.9.3). Suetonius says that Domitian was reprimanded for his “unnecessary” expedition into Germany and Gaul, and seems to suggest that he was less than happy with being overshadowed generally, having to ride on a white horse behind Vespasian and Titus in the Triumph, and having to sit in a litter behind the official chairs of Vespasian and Titus when they appeared in public (*Domitian* 2). When Domitian became emperor in 81, there were suspicions that he had poisoned Titus, or otherwise hastened his death.<sup>98</sup> Suetonius reports that he was always plotting against Titus: “Domitian caused him endless trouble, took part in conspiracies, stirred up disaffection in the armed forces almost openly, and toyed with the notion of escaping from Rome and putting himself as their head” (*Titus* 9).<sup>99</sup> Domitian’s reign (81–96) would be one of Rome’s darker periods, characterised by increasing suspicion, intrigue and murder.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> S. J. Bastomsky, “The Death of the Emperor Titus—A Tentative Suggestion,” *Apeiron* 1 (1967) 22. The Emperor Hadrian believed that Titus had poisoned Vespasian. Jones, *Titus* 114.

<sup>99</sup> Statius alludes to Domitian’s rivalry with Titus. Ahl, “Thebaid” 2821.

<sup>100</sup> Dio had this comments on his character: “Domitian was not only bold and quick to anger, but also treacherous and secretive . . . he would often attack people with the sudden violence of a thunderbolt and again would often injure them as a result of careful deliberation.” Dio, *History* 67.1.1. Eusebius (*E.H.* 3.17) says that

A further worry for Rome may have been Titus' relationship with Queen Berenice, daughter of King Herod Agrippa. Titus had probably become enamoured of her as early as 67, and it was probably widely believed that he hoped to bring her to Rome as his empress; "He nursed a notorious passion for Queen Berenice, to whom he had allegedly promised marriage" (Suetonius, *Titus* 7). She had been known as the "Great Queen" in the East, and shared power with her brother, Agrippa.<sup>101</sup> When she did come to Rome, she acted as if she was already empress, and Titus was forced to send her away, probably in 79—"which was painful for both of them," according to Suetonius (*Titus* 7).<sup>102</sup> After he became emperor later in 79, she quickly returned, but Titus, concerned by then to achieve popularity, would not receive her. For the powerful Roman families in 71, the prospect of a Jewish empress must have been worrying, and given rise to thoughts of alternative action.<sup>103</sup> For the Christians, the prospect of a Jewish empress must have been alarming, especially if Poppea had been influential in Nero's attack on them in 64 (see Page 214).

Theissen has proposed that Mark's story of Herod Antipas and Herodias in 6:17–29 is based on rumours that would have been circulating among the "simple people" of northern Palestine or Syria about the influence and reputation of Herodian women.<sup>104</sup> Although he concedes that the rumours appear in the writings of Josephus, who wrote in Rome, and there is a parallel with the offer by a drunken emperor Gaius (Caligula) to Agrippa of the grant of a request, even

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Domitian was the second emperor to pursue Christians, but the evidence to support that claim is not conclusive. It is there that Eusebius says: "His father had had no mischievous designs against us." That comment, however, is long after the event, and seems to be in comparison with Domitian's behaviour.

<sup>101</sup> She was called "great queen" on inscriptions in Athens. Jones, *Titus* 61. Balsdon (*Romans and Aliens* 12) mentions instances when there was anxiety that a Roman emperor might move the capital to the East, as Antony would have. Suetonius (*Gaius* 49) says that Gaius had intended moving the seat of government to Alexandria. The Roman aristocracy may have feared a replay of the Antony and Cleopatra affair.

<sup>102</sup> Crook comments: "There can be no doubt that Berenice wanted to be queen at Rome"; for the discussion, see Crook, "Titus and Berenice" 168–72, quote on 163. See also Jones, *Titus* 103. Ruth Jordan claims that Berenice came to Rome with Titus in 71, despite Dio placing her arrival after the dedication of the Temple of Peace in 75 (*History*, 66.15.3). Cited in Rogers, "Titus" 92. For Berenice's background, see Grace H. Macurdy, "Julia Berenice," *AJP* 56 (1935) 246–53.

<sup>103</sup> For evidence of the hostility in Rome against Berenice, see Jones, *Titus* 91–92, 103. Barclay (*Jews* 309 n. 66) notes that Berenice had her previous husband circumcised, and suggests that Romans may have worried that Titus would "submit to the Jewish rite."

<sup>104</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 87–96.

“a large kingdom,” at a meal in Rome (*Ant.* 18.289–304), Theissen rejects the possibility that Mark picked up the story there.<sup>105</sup> In Rome, however, Mark’s scene of Herodias and Herod Antipas is likely to have stirred fears of another Herodian woman, Berenice, who had been rumoured to have had an illicit union.<sup>106</sup> As in Mark’s story, she might seduce a “king” to give away half his kingdom, and her influence could result in the deaths of believers. Mark’s use of “king” is striking, as Theissen notes, because Herod was only a tetrarch. *Basileus* is repeatedly stressed in the scene (6:14, 22, 25, 26, 27).<sup>107</sup>

Mark’s story has rightly been taken as a warning to his readers about what will happen to disciples generally, occurring, as it does, immediately after the sending out of the Twelve. But it may also be a specific reference to the risk to the Christians of Rome of the relationship between Berenice and Titus, and his lengthy account (6:17–29) may reflect the sort of anxieties circulating in the city as he wrote, not just among “simple people,” but also among those of the upper class watching the Flavian family closely. It is striking that, in his *Jewish War*, Josephus makes no mention at all of the relationship between Titus and Berenice. Perhaps he had nothing favourable to say.

The above evidence indicates the extensive concerns in Rome about Vespasian and his sons early in the new Flavian reign. It suggests that there was an expectancy around Rome, perhaps especially upon the return of Titus, that the sons would not wait until the “old man” died. Vespasian was 60 years old in 71; Tacitus, who knew him personally, calls him an “old man” at the time of his acclaim as emperor in the East in 69 (*Histories* 2.81), and remarks on it again elsewhere

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<sup>105</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 96) concludes: “But this location of the legend about the baptiser’s death, however well it may fit the traditional placing of Mark’s Gospel in Rome, is improbable.” His basis for this conclusion is the belief that Mark’s material was sourced from stories told by “the simple people of Palestine, but especially among the Jews’ nearest neighbours.” He does not equally consider the possibility that one of Mark’s sources was the gossip of Rome.

<sup>106</sup> Macurdy (“Berenice” 251–53) is of the opinion that rumours of Berenice’s illicit sexual liaison with her brother were just based on prejudice. Josephus (*Ant.* 20.145), perhaps because of his disapproval of her liaison with Titus, was still spreading the rumour in Rome in the nineties, adding that she had left her husband Polemo “due to licentiousness,” without clarifying whether it was hers or his, or its nature (*Ant.* 20.146). Nevertheless, Theissen (*Gospels* 96) comments on Mark’s story: “Dancing Salome fits well with a Berenice who is supposedly living in an incestuous relationship.”

<sup>107</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 93) notes that Mark’s story makes Herodian women appear in a bad light, and that “Herod” is used five times in eight verses, as if to deliberately emphasise the connection.

(*Histories* 4.8; *Dialogue on Oratory* 8). Josephus twice comments that Vespasian had “grown grey” in warfare (*JW* 3.4; 5.123).<sup>108</sup> The ambition of both Titus and Domitian would have been obvious in Rome.

It is striking, then, that Mark depicts two ambitious brothers in his story—James and John, who ask of Jesus an amazing and rather impertinent question: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you” (10:35), and then proceed to request: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (10:37). Irony abounds, given that Jesus has just announced, for the third and final time, that his ‘glory’ will be on a cross. At the crucifixion scene, Mark pointedly links these two ambitious brothers with two criminals, “one on his right and one on his left” (15:27). The scenes turn the reader to the very situation in Roman politics that may threaten them most.

Schmidt has suggested that the two criminals crucified with Jesus have a parallel with those who share power with the triumphator in Roman triumphs, as they would stand either side of him when he was acclaimed. However, he proposes that the motif in Mark is directed against the “self-divinisation efforts” of Gaius and Nero, as he assumes that Mark wrote during the Neronian persecutions.<sup>109</sup> But Mark’s readers would remember the two who shared the emperor’s glory at the recent triumph—his sons Titus and Domitian—as they read of Jesus the king in his triumph of the cross, with the two ‘co-regents’ on the right and the left. The portrayal of the two criminals with the triumphator not only implies the criminal nature of the Roman rulers, but also alludes to the intrigue within the Flavian family. Moreover, the mocking by the criminals of the “king” (15:32) may echo a public perception in Rome of the attitude of Vespasian’s sons toward their father.

Immediately following the extraordinary scene of the brother’s requests, Mark attacks the Roman misuse of power directly—“Jesus called them to himself and said: ‘You know that among the Gentiles those who appear to be their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them’” (10:42). Every term in the sentence

<sup>108</sup> Dio (*History* 66.10.5) reports that there were some “messages he was prevented by old age from reading,” and that he had his sons read some of his communications to the Senate.

<sup>109</sup> Schmidt, “Triumphal Procession” 14–15. The procedure that he refers to applied in the triumphs of Tiberius, Claudius, Vitellius and Vespasian. He mentions Titus and Domitian in the triumph alongside Vespasian, but only to show the normal procedure; he does not consider whether the allusion could apply to them.

is a biting critique of Roman authority. First, Jesus calls them “to himself.” Second, the suggestion is that they only “seem to be rulers” (*hoi dokountes archein*), reminding that God is the only ruler. Third, the two verbs suggest the extreme misuse of power: *katakryrieuousin* (“they lord it over”) and *katexousiazousin* (“they act as tyrants”). Fourth, the term “great ones” (*megaloi*) sounds sarcastic, and it could be that Mark had Vespasian and Titus in mind as he wrote it.

The scene of the two crucified criminals adds irony for the benefit of the powerless Christians who are themselves considered criminals because they carry the name of someone crucified by a Roman prefect. This is epideictic rhetoric at its best: Mark uses irony to lament with his readers that the real criminals are those in power, while the innocent ones—Jesus and the Christians of Rome—are the ones crucified. The Flavian sons should be the ones on the crosses.<sup>110</sup> These allusions would be obvious to a community unjustly dealt with by imperial policy, and who had heard of the rivalry and ambition within the Flavian family.<sup>111</sup> Mark’s two scenes of those on the right and the left may have caused some ironic laughter in the house-churches.

### THE DIVIDED HOUSE

*If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. (3:25)*

Mark seems to have prepared his reader for the scenes of the two brothers and criminals by making an earlier allusion to the unrest within the Flavian family. When Mark’s readers came to 3:24—“if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand”—it is very likely that the recent upheavals of the civil war, fought in their own city, would have come immediately to mind.<sup>112</sup> The first parables of the Gospel appear here (3:23–27); Mark explicitly calls them *parabolai* in 3:23. Typically, they have been related to the world of

<sup>110</sup> This irony would be even greater if both Titus and Domitian had been involved in the investigation or execution of Christians.

<sup>111</sup> Donahue (“Windows and Mirrors” 26) wonders if the Christians of Rome might have heard of the palace rivalry and intrigue through the slaves of the imperial household.

<sup>112</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 241–42) admits that readers would think first of the Roman civil war.



the story and interpreted thus: as a result of the coming of God's kingdom, especially through Jesus' exorcisms, Satan's kingdom is "crumbling" or "breaking up."<sup>113</sup> As parables, they have been viewed as metaphors drawn from common life, as Dodd said.<sup>114</sup> But Mark, the first to use parables, elsewhere employs them to allude to contemporary events: the Parable of the Wicked Tenants is an allusion not just to the situation in the time of Jesus in the story (the rejection of God's son), but also to that in the time of the reader, when the tenants were removed. The Parable of the Sower pointedly directs attention to persecutions and the allures of wealth and Satan in the reader's day (4:15–19).

Earlier, it was proposed that Mark links Satan with Rome in 1:13, and the second mention of Satan occurs here, where there is a juxtaposition of four images: Satan (3:23, 26), a divided kingdom (3:24), a divided house (3:25), and a stronger man who is the only one who can enter the house and plunder the possessions of "the strong man" (3:27). With the threefold mention of Satan—twice in the opening verse—a signal is given to the reader that these verses relate in some way to Rome. The opening two questions confirm this: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (3:23–24). Just as the divided kingdom reminds of the civil war, so does the first question. For Mark, and probably for his readers, Satan and the Roman Empire were inextricably linked, and the two questions together describe very well that time when Rome was very visibly divided—when Roman forces fought for power in the city in December 69. Tacitus (*Histories* 3.72) calls that fighting within the city, "the mad folly of rival emperors." In Mark's view, that battle was one where Satan seemed to be fighting himself, as each claimant to the throne would be prepared to do his bidding.

After v. 24, the reader is ready to interpret the following pronouncements in the context of Roman society and politics; v. 25 turns to the current situation: "And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." Mark's use of "house" in vv. 25, 27 has often been ignored by commentators.<sup>115</sup> But, for Mark's readers, there was a new "house" in Rome—the Flavian house. "House" is a loaded biblical term, widely used of the Davidic dynasty (cf. 2 Sam 7),

<sup>113</sup> Hooker, *Mark* 116. Gundry (*Mark* 181, 183) calls them "figurative sayings," using Bultmann's classification (*Bildwörter*: cf. Dodd, *Parables* 18), and considers them to be allegorical.

<sup>114</sup> Dodd, *Parables* 16.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Anderson, *Mark* 123; Lane, *Mark* 143; Hooker, *Mark* 116.

whose house and kingdom were quickly divided. With the ambition of Titus and Domitian, and the competition and probable enmity between them, this new house in Rome was divided as well.<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, when Jesus further pronounces in v. 26, “If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come,” the reader is well prepared to interpret this allusion. In conjunction with v. 25, it links the divisions in the Flavian house with the security of the Empire.<sup>117</sup>

The stronger man of v. 27 is the one that had been predicted by John the Baptist (1:7)—Jesus will “plunder” (and presumably carry off) the strong man’s possessions (*oikia*). “The Strong Man” is an accurate description of Vespasian, who took power by force, held Rome to ransom by stopping the Egyptian grain supply and, with the help of his son, holds on the reigns of power tightly.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, if “the strong man” was meant to refer to Satan, the reference is odd, as he is not driven out or defeated, as is usual. Rather, Jesus will leave “The Strong Man” in his doomed divided house, and will take away his “possessions.”<sup>119</sup> This seems to be an implied promise, similar to the one in 13:27, that Jesus would vindicate and gather the elect.<sup>120</sup>

Indeed, Mark’s successive allusions to the end of the Empire and to the advent of the Stronger One merely confirm an earlier implied promise: Jesus’ first act after calling disciples was to drive out a demon, who

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<sup>116</sup> Indeed, both Marcus (*Mark* 272) and Gundry (*Mark* 173) have noted that “Beelzebul” (3:22), building on the Hebrew word *zēbūl*, can mean “lord of the house.” If so, this strengthens the link between Satan and the imperial family. Marcus (*Mark* 281) notes that a common interpretation of these parables is that they combine “the image of a king’s rule over his dominion . . . with that of a householder’s rule over his household . . . a natural enough combination in a Hellenistic context, where the two spheres of authority were frequently linked.” He does not, however, link them to the current political situation.

<sup>117</sup> Other possibilities have been raised for his intended referent of “divided house”: the recent infighting in Israel, the house of Israel, and even the divided Roman churches. However, the story hardly speaks of a divided Israel, and “divided kingdom” does not work for the situation in Palestine as there was no monarchy. Moreover, Mark is not treating internal problems of the community at this point in his Gospel, but the relationship of Christians to the society around them, as shall be proposed in Chapter 6. No other explanation fits together as well as the one proposed here, not only for the images employed, but for the coherence of the entire set of parables.

<sup>118</sup> Gundry (*Mark* 174) notes that the word sequence in 3:27 emphasises the strength of the head of the house. “The strong man” appears twice in the verse, each time unnecessarily adding the definite article.

<sup>119</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 131) note that the despoiling of the strong has “a rich resonance in biblical tradition,” citing the Exodus story and Isa 49:24–25; 53:12.

<sup>120</sup> On the promise in 13:27, and on similar promises throughout the Gospel, see Page 240.

called out: “Have you come to destroy us?” (1:24). With the link between Satan and Rome in 1:13, there is already in this verse a promise that Rome would one day be overcome by “Jesus of Nazareth” (1:24).

The parables of 3:23–27 are set at the centre of a rather strident controversy about being able to distinguish good and evil (3:22, 28–30), and provide a contrast between opponents on the ‘outside’ and those on the “inside” who do the will of God (3:21, 31–35). Chapter 6 will confirm the appropriateness of the political allusions in these parables by demonstrating that this section of text explains that Christians are regarded as evil in Roman society because of its alliance with Satan.

These pointers to the volatile political situation should have been obvious to someone living in Rome in 71. In view of Rome’s recent history of intrigue and murder, Vespasian’s fragile situation, and his two ambitious sons of doubtful character, the concern of the Markan community becomes apparent in these verses.

There are a number of indications, therefore, that Mark wrote the Gospel after Titus returned in triumph, and that the atmosphere at that time played its part in forming the Gospel. Indeed, Mark may have drawn from the stories being bandied about Rome by those who had been present during the attack on the Temple, which had recently become a sanctuary for rebels.

### THE BANDITS’ DEN

*Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? (14:48)*

It has often been suggested that Mark’s use of the phrase “den of bandits (*lēstai*)” (11:17), taken from Jer 7:11, was meant to remind the readers of the rebels’ recent occupancy of the Temple. Marcus, for example, considers that Mark wanted to point to the rebels’ conception of messiahship, which had resulted in the exclusion of Gentiles.<sup>121</sup>

In Chapter 3, it was suggested that Mark primarily employed the

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<sup>121</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 34–35) says that this mention of bandits “falls neatly into place” if the Markan community was in the vicinity of the war. Bryan (*Preface* 105) considers that the readers would have been struck by the ironies of the use of “den of bandits” if Mark was written during the Jewish War, but with even more irony if the readers had seen Vespasian’s triumph in Rome.

phrase to bring to the reader's mind Jeremiah's day in the Temple predicting its destruction. However, he could have used other phrases from Jeremiah's speech to remind of that incident, and the fact that he chose "den of bandits" suggests that he also wanted his readers to recall the stories that they had heard after the Triumph of the final days of the rebels in Jerusalem. The image of the Temple being converted into a "hideout" (11:17: *spēlaion*) for bandits is a good way of describing those holed up in the fortress on the Temple Mount awaiting the Roman legions, whether or not Mark intended to imply that they preyed on the people.<sup>122</sup> Certainly, Josephus does so, frequently calling the rebels *lēstai*.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps the term began to be used of them around Rome as soon as Josephus and other Jews began to blame the disaster on the rebels' 'criminal' behaviour.

Mark's focus here is primarily on the Temple authorities in Jesus' time, as he compares them with the 'bandits' in Jeremiah's day. However, he may also have been suggesting that the religious leaders had been just as lawless as the rebels—both had made the Temple unfit for worship. This allusion to the rebels would also bring to mind a vivid picture of the Temple's recent destruction, just as the readers came to the scene of Jesus criticising the cult (11:17), helping them to realise that Jesus' declaration of its end (11:14) had recently been fulfilled. Even the rebels seem to fit into God's plan.

In addition, it has been suggested by Theissen that the use of the terms "rebels" and "insurrection" in the Barabbas scene (15:7) indicates reader knowledge of the Jewish War.<sup>124</sup> He is probably correct. Mark's use of the terms would have served as a powerful reminder, in the middle of the Roman trial scene, that the Roman authorities in the readers' day had not executed all of the prisoners of war brought back to Rome for the triumph, but had instead been executing innocent Christians.

There is a further possible allusion to the Jewish War. Twice, Josephus laments the killing of Roman troops by the rebels on the Sabbath in incidents that ensured the response of the Roman legions—

<sup>122</sup> Josephus (*Ant.* 14.415, 421) uses *spēlaion* for the hideouts of bandits in Galilee. However, in Josephus, *Apion* 1.292; Heb 11:38; Rev 6:15, it is used simply of a place of hiding from pursuers or persecutors. In John 11:38, it is applied to Lazarus' tomb.

<sup>123</sup> Josephus uses the term "bandits" repeatedly to stress that they preyed on the people; see, for example, *JW* 2.254. In *JW* 1.304, 398, he speaks of bandits in caves in Herod's day and of a "nest of robbers" that was destroyed. In *JW* 4.151, he says, "These wretches converted the temple of God into their fortress and refuge." Of course, Josephus may have also drawn his term from Jer 7:11.

<sup>124</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 183.

the murder of Metilius' soldiers (*JW* 2.456), and the slaughter of Cestius' troops outside of Jerusalem, decimating that legion (*JW* 2.517). These incidents were so important for the beginning of the war that it is quite possible that they were well known in Rome. It may not be a coincidence, then, that Jesus asks, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (3:4)? In the story, the Jewish opponents have no answer to a question that would have been an indictment of the actions of the rebels, who had committed those murders just after being so seemingly concerned for the Law that they had halted sacrifices for Gentiles (*JW* 2.409–17). In Mark's story, Jesus' opponents are so concerned about the Law that they oppose the healing of a man on the Sabbath, but then go out and plot to kill Jesus (3:6).

#### THE DEMONIC LEGIONS

*My name is Legion, for we are many.* (5:9)

In the first event in the Gospel to occur in Gentile territory, Jesus frees a man possessed by demons (5:1–20). These "unclean spirits" surprisingly admit that they are called "Legion," after Jesus questions them. Mark uses *eperōtaō*, which can have the connotation of a legal interrogation, as in 14:60, 61; 15:2, 4. Ironically, although members of Mark's community have been interrogated by the Roman authorities and asked if they are 'of Christ,' here Jesus interrogates demons and finds that they are named after Roman forces.

Nevertheless, although it has long been suspected that Mark alludes to the Roman legions in this account, his meaning has been far from clear.<sup>125</sup> It is proposed that Mark subtly continues here the identification of Satan and demonic forces with Roman power that he began in 1:13. Through this story, Jesus is shown to have authority and power over the "Legion," simply commanding the spirits to leave.<sup>126</sup> They flee,

<sup>125</sup> See the discussions in Theissen, *Gospels* 261; Juel, *Master* 69; Myers, *Strong Man* 190.

<sup>126</sup> The demons acclaim Jesus as "son of the Most High God" (5:7)—a title typically applied to Zeus, according to Adela Yarbro Collins, "Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans," *HTR* 43 (2000) 90. A reader in Rome, however, is more likely to have read it as a title of Jupiter, so that the voices coming from the possessed man sound like (unholy) Roman legionaries call-

and inhabit a herd of pigs, which “rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea” (5:13). The sea is mentioned twice, and it is the place of destruction in this Gospel (cf. 4:37; 11:23). The scene reminds of the Exodus event, with the drowning of the legion reminiscent of the drowning of the Pharaoh’s army,<sup>127</sup> affirming that God is somehow behind their rush to the sea. Once again, a king’s forces threatening God’s people—in this case, the emperor’s legions—are shown to be under God’s control, and are destroyed.

The term used for “herd” is *agelē*, which can be used as a collective noun for any group of animals, but which was also applied to a “company” of men acting together; such as a band of boys being trained together.<sup>128</sup> The emphasis in this pericope on things that are not ‘of God’ is strong, with the transferring of “unclean spirits” from an ‘unclean place’ (the graveyard) into unclean animals. These animals are “drowned” (*pnigō*), also translatable as “choked,” and animals choked to death are not ‘clean’ under the purity laws (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; cf. Lev 19:26). The identification of the legion with the unholy is stressed throughout.

However, as often noted, Mark gives the number of pigs as only 2,000 (5:13), whereas the nominal strength of a legion was 5,120.<sup>129</sup> But Mark’s readers would probably know after Titus’ return that one of the legions that assaulted Jerusalem was the Tenth Legion (*Fretensis*), whose emblems included the boar’s head.<sup>130</sup> The legion occupied the Mount of Olives during the siege and, while it was setting up camp, found itself in danger of annihilation because of a sortie by the defenders, since it was separated from the other legions on Mount Scopus. Josephus gives a very lengthy description of this event (*JW* 5.71–97). As the legion was caught unawares, many were killed and the legion was routed (*JW* 5.76–77, 80). He claims that the situation was only saved when Titus intervened—“Caesar personally twice

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ing out their familiar divine acclamation, recognising in Jesus the power of the highest god come to confront them.

<sup>127</sup> Myers, *Strong Man* 190–91.

<sup>128</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), as noted by Myers, *Strong Man* 190–91. It does not seem to be true, however, as Myers claims, that *agelē* is a term that would not be used as a collective noun for pigs; Eudoxus of Rhodes apparently used it in this way in the second century BCE, cited by Aelianus in the second century CE. See BAGD 8.

<sup>129</sup> Freeman, *Romans* 30.

<sup>130</sup> H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions* (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1961 [Orig. 1928]) 262–63; Smallwood, *Jews* 333. See Geva (“Roman Jerusalem” 36) for a depiction of its emblem and archaeological evidence of its camp when it occupied Jerusalem after 70.

rescued the entire legion when in jeopardy" (*JW* 5.97). Whatever the role of Titus, the degree of attention to this incident suggests that the damage inflicted on the Tenth Legion was significant. Perhaps it was known that the Legion was well below its normal strength.<sup>131</sup>

The captives and Titus' party would have spread the news around Rome that *Legio X Fretensis* was now encamped in Jerusalem, continuing the desecration (*JW* 7.17). Moreover, it is possible, perhaps probable, that the members of this legion had sacrificed a pig in the temple court when they made an offering before their standards after taking the Temple (*JW* 6.316). The pig was an animal normally used for purification ceremonies by the Romans, and such an action on the taking of the Jewish Temple would signify the claiming of the sacred site for the Roman gods.<sup>132</sup> As the Jewish aversion to pig's flesh was widely known, the legionaries may have been particularly looking forward to this moment.<sup>133</sup>

Josephus does not say what victim was offered in the sacrifice, although he does not normally do so. And yet, when he began his

<sup>131</sup> In *JW* 7.164, Josephus reports that the Tenth Legion was combined with various other units before the assault on the remaining strongholds.

<sup>132</sup> For an extended discussion of the important place of the pig in Roman sacrifices, especially those to Mars, and of the literature on the relation between pigs, the legion and the Gerasene story, and Exodus parallels, see Watts (*New Exodus* 157–66). Freeman (*Romans* 40) points out that a pig-sheep-bull sacrifice was often used for land purification ceremonies by the Romans. See CIL VI 2107 for an inscription of such a rite. Cited in Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome. Volume 2: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 151. Cato (*Agriculture* 138–41), discussing the importance of following the correct procedures in religious rites, said that a pig must be sacrificed when cutting down a copse of trees, and that this prayer should be: "Whatever god or goddess you are to whom this is sacred, you have the right to the sacrifice of a pig in return for the cutting down of this sacred copse." Cited in Gardner and Wiedermann, *Roman Household* 35. A similar procedure may have been adopted in purifying the Temple Mount before establishing camp nearby. See Tacitus (*Histories* 4.53) for the sacrifice of a pig, sheep and ox to purify the Capitol, with prayers to Jupiter, before restoring his Temple. Moreover, Watts (*New Exodus* 158) says: "No Roman tomb was legally protected without a pig being sacrificed." Thus, with the many Roman deaths on the assault of the Temple, it is also possible that pig sacrifices occurred at their burial nearby. K. M. T. Atkinson, "The Historical Setting of the Habbakuk Commentary," *JSS* 4 (1959) 252–55, has pointed out that the Romans would sacrifice a pig before the standards at the taking of the military oath, shown in coins of the first century BCE.

<sup>133</sup> Schwier (*Tempel* 315) considers it likely that the Romans sacrificed a pig, deliberately violating the Jewish sanctuary. Although Atkinson ("Historical Setting" 254) does not suggest that a pig was offered, he holds that the soldiers intended to display contempt for things held sacred by the Jews. For the animals sacrificed by the legions during their campaigns, see Roy W. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989) 170.

account of the war, his starting point was the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BCE, pointing out that he compelled the Jews to “sacrifice swine upon the altar” (*JW* 1.34; cf. 1 Macc 1:47). It is possible that Josephus, with Jewish readers in mind, began his account with the Antiochus incident in order to allude to the contempt shown towards the Jewish cult by Titus’ troops in 70 CE, thus showing, in a veiled manner, his distaste for his patron’s behaviour. Indeed, the linking of the legion with the pigs (5:12) may have arisen, not so much from knowledge of their boar emblem, as from the reports of the soldiers’ sacrifice in the Temple.<sup>134</sup> It may even have been rumoured that the idea for this religious slight originated with Titus, adding to the reader’s awareness of his impiety as they read 13:14a.

Mark portrays the legion as an unholy, even demonic, company of pigs. Although he shows that Jesus can deal with such ‘demonic’ forces with a simple word, and could expel the legion from the country if he wants to, he allows the legion to remain there, alluding to the fact that the Tenth Legion now remained on the Temple site. However, in Mark’s story, the legion ‘self-destructs’—perhaps a hope of what would happen to it. Some time during 71, the Tenth Legion moved on to attack the fortresses at Machaerus and Masada, both with cliffs abutting the Dead Sea. Machaerus, besieged first, lay on the east of the Jordan valley (as is Mark’s scene), and is described by Josephus as “entrenched on all sides within ravines of a depth baffling to the eye,” with the valley on the west “ending at the Lake Asphaltitis” (*JW* 7.166, 168). In painting the scene of the company of pigs racing headlong over the cliffs into the lake, Mark may have been inspired by news that the legion had embarked on this campaign.<sup>135</sup> Mark’s hope was not fully realised; although Machaerus was taken with many Roman casualties, the Tenth Legion was still in Jerusalem in the third century.<sup>136</sup>

In the absence of further information, all of the allusions in this story may never be able to be identified entirely.<sup>137</sup> However, the

<sup>134</sup> Theissen (*Gospels* 110) cites three other legions (I, II and XX) that had the boar among its symbols.

<sup>135</sup> The attack took some time, as the legion laid siege to it (*JW* 7.190). In *JW* 7.190–209, Josephus gives a lengthy description of the fighting, and of the protracted negotiations before its surrender.

<sup>136</sup> Ben Dov, “Temple” 187.

<sup>137</sup> See also Theissen’s attempts (*Gospels* 110–11) to tie these allusions together, including possible reasons for citing Gerasa; he argues that the story originated in that



number of coincidences between the role of the Tenth Legion and Mark's narrative strongly suggest that he used it, not only as a demonstration of Jesus' power, but also to further strengthen the link in the Gospel between Rome and Satan. In this encounter with Jesus, the forces of Satan—the demons—call themselves “Legion”—the name of the forces of Rome.

Mark also alludes to other events that had recently occurred in Rome, including one that would have been causing quite a dilemma for those already severely taxed Christians.

### A TAXING QUESTION

*Should we pay or not? (12:15)*

The question to Jesus about the legitimacy of paying taxes to Caesar (12:13–17) has always been related to the poll tax thought to be payable under Roman rule in Judea.<sup>138</sup> The exchange has been regarded as a clever defeat by Jesus of a plan by his opponents to entrap him. In the story, the Pharisees and Herodians flatter him by pointing out that he does not “look at the face of men,” that is, have regard to appearances. Jesus catches them out by asking for a Roman coin (a denarius), which they immediately provide, and asks them to look at it.<sup>139</sup> Mark emphasises with two questions (12:16:

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region. Intriguingly, Simon ben Gioras, who came from Gerasa (*JW* 4.503), was the leader of the revolt who was executed in the Forum at the end of the Triumph. It may just be a coincidence that Gerasa also appears in Mark's Gospel, but it does appear as a geographical anomaly, so that Mark may have stretched things, including it as another verbal signal. In his story, the man from Gerasa is not only controlled by a (demonic) legion, but is also living among the tombs. Mark calls the Temple a *spēlaion* (11:17: “den of bandits”), a term that can also mean a tomb (John 11:38).

<sup>138</sup> Commentators generally look upon this incident simply as a controversy that occurred during Jesus' lifetime. Cf. Taylor, *Mark* 478; Gundry, *Mark* 697; Mann, *Mark* 468: “We cannot doubt that this is a genuine incident.” F. F. Bruce, “Render to Caesar,” in Bammel and Moule (eds), *Jesus* 249–63, says that the setting appears to be Judean since it was there “that the tribute question was one of practical moment.” Helmut Merkel, “The Opposition between Jesus and Judaism,” in Bammel and Moule (eds), *Jesus* 142–43, calls it “the discussion of tribute-money (Mark 12:13ff), whose authenticity cannot be doubted,” and points out that even Bultmann agreed on the historicity of this pericope.

<sup>139</sup> J. Duncan Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970) 314, calls his opponents' opening gambit an “oily preamble.” Rabbinical writers show disapproval of gazing at coins; see Gundry, *Mark* 697. But Jesus forces his opponents to look, suggesting to the reader that such an action is harmless.

“Whose head is this, and whose title?”) that a denarius contains both an image of the emperor and an inscription of imperial titles, which might be “High Priest,” or even “Son of God.”<sup>140</sup> Jesus’ reply is compatible with Jewish tradition that only God is truly king and, in view of the recent rebellion, readers may have known that Judas the Galilean had incited rebellion against proposed Roman taxation in Judea in 6 CE because “God alone was their leader and master” (*Ant.* 18.23; cf. *JW* 2.118).<sup>141</sup> Jesus, however, approves the “giving” to Caesar of that which is inscribed with his image, while he reminds of the need to give to God those things that are his. The answer is clever, and leaves the reader to consider what those things are.

The question is why Mark thought that this issue would be of interest to his community in Rome. Certainly, it is a good story that demonstrates Jesus’ astuteness and reaffirms the prime position of God, while teaching the acceptability of paying taxes, and it does, along with the following incidents, depict the opposition to Jesus in the Temple of the various Jewish groups. However, the transition to it is abrupt—Donahue calls the break at 12:12 “a major subdivision”<sup>142</sup>—and it seems rather strange to place such a story in the context of the Temple, as the clear parenetic emphasis is to do with the payment of taxes.<sup>143</sup> By setting this teaching in the Temple immediately after the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Mark has put it

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<sup>140</sup> Commentators have been inclined to cite particular coins of Tiberius as the ‘likely coin Jesus saw,’ but denarii circulating at the time of Jesus could have been from Julius, Augustus or Tiberius, according to Nanci DeBloois, “Coins in the New Testament,” in John F. Hall and John W. Welch (eds), *Masada and the World of the New Testament* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997) 240. During the reign of Tiberius, a typical inscription was “Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus,” and “Pontifex Maximus,” with his mother Livia on the reverse, dressed as *Justitia* or *Pax*. Anne S. Robertson, *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet. Vol 1: Augustus to Nerva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) cxiv, 68. However, there seems to be “little archaeological evidence” that the denarius was circulating in the Syrian region at the time of Jesus, according to K. Bushell; cited in Marcus, “Jewish War” 444 n. 18. Instead, Mark may be mentioning the denarius to force his Roman reader to think of the local coin with which they were familiar. Ironically, by this time, it would have had the new emperor and the *IUDAEA CAPTA* inscription on it.

<sup>141</sup> Josephus reports that Judas the Galilean tried to stir the natives to revolt, saying that they would be cowards if they submitted to Roman taxes and thus, after serving God alone, accepted human masters (*JW* 2.118; cf. 7.253, 255).

<sup>142</sup> John R. Donahue, “A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark,” *JBL* 101 (1982) 570.

<sup>143</sup> Donahue (“Neglected Factor” 580) argues that the three pericopes (12:13–34) address the need to worship the one true God, and affirm his power. This does not explain the apparent shift of focus.

after a long section that focuses on the Temple's demise. Mark places everything very carefully throughout his Gospel, and context and structure are two of the most important rhetorical tools that Mark employs. Most recently, the reader has been led by 12:1–11 to recall the recent destruction of the Temple. This event, it is suggested, remains in Mark's view as he begins the tax controversy.

Paul had raised the issue of taxes in his letter to the Roman Christians, urging them to “pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due,” even, in a happier time, calling the Roman authorities “God’s servants” (Rom 13:6–7). Byrne has suggested that the background to Paul’s counsel was Nero’s decision to curb the rapaciousness of tax collectors in 58. Tacitus reports that there had been “persistent public complaints against the companies farming indirect taxes,” such that “special priority was given to cases against tax collectors” (*Annals* 13.50–51). Byrne argues that “the report shows that, at the likely time of composition of *Romans*, the issue of taxation was ‘in the air,’” and was highly sensitive, so that there may have been a debate within the community whether to pay taxes.<sup>144</sup> Paul’s advice was aimed at keeping the peace and avoiding possible conflict.

Mark may have included the scene of 12:13–17 to answer a similar type of question. Tax was certainly ‘in the air’ in late 71, and a real dilemma had arisen for at least some of the Christians of Rome. Prior to 70, Jews of the Diaspora had paid an annual Temple Tax of two drachmas for the maintenance of the Jerusalem Temple. After its destruction in August 70, Vespasian required Jews to pay the same amount, called “the Jewish Tax,” for the restoration of the Temple of Jupiter in Rome. Dio (*History* 66.7.2) reports: “From that time forth, it was ordered that the Jews who continued to observe their ancestral customs should pay an annual tribute of two denarii to Jupiter Capitolinus.” Neither he nor Josephus (*JW* 7.218) say exactly when this tax was initiated, but as Vespasian had encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple of Jupiter as soon as he reached Rome in October 70, it is likely that he announced the tax a few weeks later when he heard of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple—the timing of the news was perfect for his project.<sup>145</sup> Coins show that he

<sup>144</sup> Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 13. Jeremy Moiser, “Rethinking Romans 12–15,” *NTS* 36 (1990) 577, had earlier proposed that there was “contemplation [of] a gesture of defiance against the state, such as refusing to pay taxes. . . . This is speculative, but it is not implausible.”

<sup>145</sup> This shows that Vespasian was well aware that Jews remitted moneys to Jerusalem annually, and his act perhaps reflects some resentment among Romans.

took the title *Pontifex Maximus* in November 70, a role which involved overseeing the whole Roman religious system.<sup>146</sup> He said that he needed to raise taxes to rebuild after the civil war, claiming “at his accession” that 40 billion sesterces would be needed to restore Rome (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 16).<sup>147</sup> The annual imperial income has been estimated to have been only 4 billion.<sup>148</sup> Coins of the Temple of Jupiter show that it was under construction during 71–74.<sup>149</sup> Smallwood has estimated that diversion of the Jewish Temple tax would have raised 10 to 12 million denarii, and it is clear that the money quickly exceeded the cost of rebuilding and became general revenue.<sup>150</sup> However, in 71, the tax was pointedly designated for the rebuilding of Jupiter’s Temple.

Further, although the Jewish Temple Tax had been an annual payment by every adult male over 20 years of age,<sup>151</sup> Vespasian’s new tax was on *every Jew*, male and female, over the age of three, and included Jewish slaves of Gentiles.<sup>152</sup> This was a heavy and punitive financial burden on the Jews.<sup>153</sup> Emphasising the relationship of this tax to the Jewish defeat, Martial wrote of “burnt Solyma, lately condemned to pay tribute.”<sup>154</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Robertson, *Coins* cvxiii. He has the title on an inscription in 71 (CIL VI 931). See A. B. Bosworth, “Vespasian and the Provinces: Some Problems of the Early 70’s AD,” *Athenaeum* 51 (1973) 65.

<sup>147</sup> Dio (*History* 66.8.3) says that, even on the way back to Rome in 69, Vespasian instituted many new taxes “overlooking no source, however trivial or however reprehensible it might be . . . he adopted this same course later in the rest of the subject territory, in Italy and in Rome itself.” Vespasian appointed key men of the Flavian party to conduct censuses in Africa and Spain for taxation purposes, and imposed new taxes in the Greek East and Egypt. Bosworth, “Vespasian” 77. Suetonius (*Vespasian* 16) also mentions “added new and heavy burdens.”

<sup>148</sup> Griffin, *Nero* 206.

<sup>149</sup> Smallwood, *Jews* 275; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.53; Dio 66.10.2.

<sup>150</sup> Smallwood, *Jews* 374–75.

<sup>151</sup> Schürer, *Jewish People* 2.271.

<sup>152</sup> Women over 61 may have been exempt. Smallwood, *Jews* 372–74. An inscription on the funerary monument of one Titus Flavius Euschemon shows that Vespasian established a special finance department to handle the collection of this tax. Jones and Milns, *Documentary Evidence* 111. The fund administered was called the *Fiscus Judaicus*, but receipts used the term “Jewish Tax.” Great care was taken in collecting and accounting separately for the tax, as evidence from Egypt shows. Smallwood, *Jews* 374–75.

<sup>153</sup> Many of the ostraca found indicate payment of the tax by instalment. Barclay, *Jews* 77.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in Stern, *Authors* 526. A receipt for the tax from 116 CE has *kyrios Trajan*. Deissmann, *Ancient East* 355. Earlier receipts may have had similar titles, a reminder to Jewish taxpayers of the Lord to whom they were being forced to pay tribute. Leonard Victor Rutgers, “Roman Policy Towards the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century,” in Donfried and Richardson (eds),

The tax was payable by those who followed “ancestral customs,” and Suetonius reports that, in the reign of Domitian,

besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging their faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their nationality and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people. (Suetonius, *Domitian* 12)

Suetonius adds his recollection that, when he was a boy, a ninety-year-old man was stripped to see if he was circumcised. Early in the new tax regime, circumcision and a Jewish origin might have been the prime tests, and little attention might have been paid to the current practice of a Jew’s religion in the drive to maximise revenue.<sup>155</sup>

Mark uses the word *kēnsos* for the tax, a most unusual word, but not unknown. Josephus never uses the word, preferring *telos* or *phoros*, as do the other New Testament writers, including Paul in Rom 13:6–7. It implies a tax based on a census, but there is no external evidence for a head-tax being imposed in Judea in the first century CE. Indeed, historians take this Gospel account as their only evidence for such a tax.<sup>156</sup> In any event, Josephus’ report of the Judean census of 6 CE suggests that it was to assess a property tax, not a per capita tax (*Ant.* 18.1–4).<sup>157</sup> Although Mark’s use of the word would remind the reader of a census, it may not be that Judean census.

What *was* on the mind of Mark’s reader was a census that had to be taken in Rome during 71. It would appear that the Jewish

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*First-Century Rome* 98, regards it as a redirection of an existing tax, rather than a punishment. But it was substantially increased, and the timing of the increase after the destruction of both temples does not seem to be a coincidence. Theissen (*Gospels* 263) claims that the tax was meant to ensure that the Jerusalem Temple at Jerusalem was not rebuilt.

<sup>155</sup> There has been extensive discussion on the nature of Domitian’s crackdown on evaders of the Jewish Tax. See L. A. Thompson, “Domitian and the Jewish Tax,” *Historia* 31 (1982) 329–42; Margaret H. Williams, “Domitian, the Jews and the ‘Judaizers’—A Simple Matter of Cupiditas and Maiestas?” *Historia* 39 (1990) 196–211; Martin Goodman, “Nerva, the *Fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity,” *JRS* 79 (1989) 40–44, who argues that Domitian had attacked Jews who had given up their practice of Judaism. Smallwood (*Jews* 376–79) contends that Domitian taxed all who had been circumcised, including proselytes. All theories suggest that there was still some confusion about who was liable for the tax by the time of Domitian’s reign. Dio’s definition—“Jews who continue to observe their ancestral custom” (*History* 66.7.2)—may represent the final rule that was established.

<sup>156</sup> DeBloois, “Coins,” 240–41; Smallwood, *Jews* 153; Schürer, *Jewish People* 1.372.

<sup>157</sup> Derrett (“Law” 329) points out that we do not know whether the census of 6 CE led to a poll-tax. There is only slight evidence of head-taxes in the Empire at all, with the great majority of taxes being on property, crops or trade. Duncan-Jones, *Roman Society* 187–98.

Tax could not be immediately raised, as it was necessary for Vespasian to institute a census of Jews first, and to collect the names of all Jews throughout the Empire on a register. Parts of that register have been found in Egypt and, in those records, the tax for 71/72 was the first collected, but was a double payment, including the tax from 70/71, which presumably could not be collected until the census was finalised.<sup>158</sup> Thus, the first payment of the Jewish Tax was payable in the second half of 71, around the time that Titus returned to Rome, and the time proposed for the writing of this Gospel. Tax was certainly ‘in the air.’

It has been suggested that “the original tax-lists can hardly have been compiled without the cooperation . . . of the leaders of the various Jewish communities,” perhaps from lists of payers of the Temple tax.<sup>159</sup> Jewish Christians meeting together in a house-church may have been passing themselves off as a synagogue that was legally entitled to meet for worship and instruction, arguing that they were followers of the true religion of Israel. After all, a synagogue was just known to the Romans as a “prayer-house” (*proseuchē*), at which Jews met.<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, Christians who had been born Jews, especially those who had recently converted to Christianity, would have had to decide whether to say that they were Jewish and be held liable for the tax. This would have had a serious effect on their families: if they said that they were Jews, they paid a heavy tax on each family member, although they were no longer Jews and had not been paying the Temple Tax. They may also have faced some criticism from Gentile Christians if they now publicly proclaimed that

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<sup>158</sup> For the register, see CPJ No. 421, a schedule of payments from Jews in Arsinoë in the Fayum, Egypt. The earliest tax receipts that Smallwood (*Jews* 372–73) cites are from the end of August 71, but two ostraca show that the payment related to the previous year. She concludes that the delay was due to the need for a census to enable a tax list to be drawn up, and that collections began soon after June 71. She cites an Arsinoë papyrus with the term “Jewish Tax” in the 72/73 year. Schwier (*Tempel* 44) concludes from two finds at Edfu that the tax was enforced after 1 July 71, backdated to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

<sup>159</sup> Thompson, “Jewish Tax” 333, who argues that apostates would not have been on those lists once they ceased synagogue attendance. But there is no evidence that such lists were kept, and synagogue leaders may have just been asked for lists of those born Jews who had attended their synagogue in recent times. The authorities would not want to limit the tax liability to those attending the synagogue at a particular moment, opening the door to evasion. The criteria would be, first of all, whether someone was born a Jew.

<sup>160</sup> Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 132; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.258; Acts 16:13; Juvenal, *Satires* 3.296.

they were still part of the Jewish community. On the other hand, if they said that they were no longer Jews, but Christians, they risked the execution of their whole family. This would have been a serious dilemma for the Jewish Christians in Rome, the first to face the issue of the administration of this new tax.

To add to their quandary, the purpose of the tax was to pay for the rebuilding of the Temple of Jupiter—the very temple that was the destination of the victory procession. An indication of the sensitivity of this matter may be evident in Josephus' failure to mention that the tax was directed to the rebuilding of that temple, perhaps reflecting his own internal conflict, as he, too, would have been liable for the tax.<sup>161</sup> This question is likely to have caused a crisis of conscience for Jewish Christians.

Thus, it was really Mark's readers who were asking, "Should *we* pay or not?"—a question Mark places in the mouth of Jesus' opponents (12:15). Mark gives comfort through Jesus' answer: paying Roman coin to a Roman emperor for his Roman Temple does not conflict with the duty to give to God the "things of God."<sup>162</sup> Jesus' emphatic drawing of attention to the titles of the emperor suggests that false worship is an issue for the reader. But if Jesus does not pay attention to appearances (12:14), and happily looks at the emperor's image and inscription (12:16), his followers should not be concerned about the imperial claims to divinity, or about any other religious implications.<sup>163</sup>

Mark has strategically placed this scene in the Temple, and it would be difficult for a reader not to think of the Jewish Tax, replacing the Temple Tax, now falling due for the first time, especially with the use of the word *kēnsos*. The Jewish Tax was payable in denarii in Rome, and seems to have become known as the two-denarius tax.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Barclay (*Jews* 76 n. 60) notes Josephus' silence in the matter (cf. *JW* 7.218). Josephus does not mention the tax at the end of the triumph or near his description of events at the Temple of Jupiter (*JW* 7.153), but later in a listing of decrees that Vespaian sent to the procurator of Judea (*JW* 7.218). Schwier (*Tempel* 328) considers that Josephus left it deliberately ambiguous, saying only that the tax was for "the Capitol," rather than for "Jupiter Capitolinus" (a term that Josephus does use elsewhere; cf. *JW* 7.153).

<sup>162</sup> Derrett ("Law" 320) notes that Jesus does not cite any Scriptural authority for reaching this conclusion. This is a very tolerant and practical piece of advice from Mark.

<sup>163</sup> Although Vespaian does not seem to have sought any divine title, he did encourage the cult of the emperor in Baetica, Norbinensis and Africa Proconsularis. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (London: Duckworth, 1987) 166.

<sup>164</sup> An ostrakon from the Jewish Quarter of Apollinopolis Magna in Egypt has:

This controversy addresses issues of power. The power of the emperor is implied even in the word “census” and his power to levy taxes on defeated peoples, but the far greater power of God is demonstrated in the following scene (12:18–27). The emperor appears to have power over life and death, but Jesus chastises the Sadducees for not knowing that God has power over death, and enables people to live forever.<sup>165</sup> By juxtaposing the two controversies (12:13–17, 18–27), Mark turns his reader back to what is really important, and he goes on to emphasise in the dialogue with the scribe (12:28–34) that love is what really matters. The tax controversy is also about the duty to give to God: in 12:41–44, in the only other mention of coins in the Gospel, a widow will give two coins to the Jerusalem Temple, reminding the reader that giving to God means being prepared to give one’s life.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, in 8:33, Peter had been rebuked for confusing “the things of God” with “the things of men,” again in relation to willingness to die for the sake of the gospel. In Chapter 12, the two coin scenes frame a section that puts things firmly in perspective for the readers, and that exhorts them, confronted with Roman power, to be prepared to give everything to God.

Ironically, in 12:14, the opponents of Jesus had accused him of not “caring (*melei*) for anyone,” a word that is found in John 10:13, used of the good shepherd caring for his sheep.<sup>167</sup> In the tax controversy, Jesus is shown to care for the very real practical concerns for his followers, establishing the principle that would enable them to resolve their dilemma.<sup>168</sup> Walters has commented that Paul’s advice

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“Herenius, son of Didymus, receipt for the two-denarius tax on the Jews, for the fourth year of our Lord Vespasian Caesar,” that is, 72/73. Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold (eds), *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 289–90. Dio (*History* 66.7.2) calls it “an annual tribute of two denarii.”

<sup>165</sup> Jesus’ pronouncement there that “he is God, not of the dead, but of the living,” and the mention of rising from the dead would provide comfort for the reader. It occurs when a group that denies eternal life comes forward.

<sup>166</sup> The victory inscriptions of Rome (such as IUDEA CAPTA) appeared on coins of all values and metals. The quadrans was one of the coins depicting the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, adding further irony to the episode of the widow, as a quadrans now pointed to the destruction of the very system that was devouring widows (12:40). The extensive propaganda on coins would help the reader to link both episodes to the Temple’s fate, with the double mention of coins in these controversies within the Temple.

<sup>167</sup> For Mark’s use of the sheep image for disciples, see 6:34 and 14:27. The former depicts Jesus as the “good shepherd” feeding his sheep, and the latter shows him protecting his sheep, citing Zech 13:7–8.

<sup>168</sup> Warren Carter, “Paying the Tax to Rome as Subversive Praxis: Matthew



in Rom 13:6–7 was a suggestion to “keep their heads down.”<sup>169</sup> Similarly, Mark’s inclusion of this controversy is a wise pastoral response to an immediate and pressing concern that could be a life or death issue for some of his flock.

#### THE VEIL THAT EVERYONE SAW

*On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens. (Josephus)*

In this chapter, several indications that the Gospel was written in the second half of 71 have been identified. The Triumph of Vespasian and Titus in July/August 71 helped shape the Gospel because of the powerful effect it would have had on its observers, and the questions it raised about the very visible power of Rome, compared with the seeming absence of the power of God. It is striking, too, that the allusions to contemporary events identified in this chapter all point to events that had occurred within a very short time prior to the proposed date of writing, and the great majority of the allusions refer to events that occurred or became known only when Titus returned, while the others relate to events during or after the civil war in 69. There are no allusions to events during Nero’s reign, other than to the persecution of Christians. The number of allusions to events within this narrow timeframe is strong evidence that these were recent memories for Mark and his readers.

There is one other scene in the Gospel that suggests that the community’s questioning was amplified by that day of glory for Rome in the summer of 71. According to Josephus, one of the prizes carried in the great Triumph was the veil of the Jerusalem Temple (*JW* 7.162).<sup>170</sup> The veil was so impressive that Vespasian kept it with the

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17:24–27,” *JNT* 76 (1999) 3–31, argues that Matt 17:24–27 also urges payment of the Jewish Tax. He sees Matthew’s story of the coin in the fish’s mouth as his way of assuring readers that God was still sovereign over this matter, and that “Rome [only] imagines it rules.”

<sup>169</sup> Walters, “Ethnic Issues” 65.

<sup>170</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 479) calls it “sheer speculation” that the veil was in the procession, as Josephus does not actually mention it in *JW* 7.148–51. However, 7.134 seems to do so (“purple hangings . . . embroidered by the arts of the Babylonians”), using language similar to 5.212 (see note 172). In any case, in 7.162, Josephus mentions that Vespasian placed the “purple veils” in the royal palace after the triumph, and it is highly unlikely that Titus would have brought them back

books of the Torah in his palace, rather than with the Temple vessels in the Temple of Peace (*JW* 7.158–162). The fact that Josephus ends his graphic description of the triumphal procession with a comment about the Torah and the veil, shows that the veil had a special significance to him.<sup>171</sup> Josephus had previously described the veil in this way in his recollections of the Temple that he once served as a priest:

Before [the golden doors] hung a veil of equal length, of Babylonian tapestry, with embroidery of blue and fine linen, of scarlet also and purple, wrought with marvellous skill. Nor was this mixture of materials without its mystic meaning: it typified the universe. For the scarlet seemed emblematical of fire, the fine linen of the earth, the blue of the air, and the purple of the sea. . . . On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted. (*JW* 5.212–14)

For Josephus, the loss of the Temple was like a great rupture in the creation that the veil symbolised, and it is likely that Mark also knew that the veil contained this cosmic symbolism.<sup>172</sup> He seems to have known the layout of the Temple and its environs: he knew about the existence of an outer court meant for Gentiles, the shortcuts taken through it, the merchants, including dove-sellers, and money-changers operating there, and public access to a donation box near the Treasury. He also knew there was a place called Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, and the relationship to the city of that hill, and to Bethany and Bethpage. However, not many, if any, of Mark's

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from Jerusalem, and not displayed them in a prominent position in the Triumph along with "those things taken from the Temple" (7.148).

<sup>171</sup> The veil was remembered as an item of special significance in rabbinic Judaism, and was associated both with Titus and the destruction of the Temple in *b. Gittin* 56b: the "wicked Titus" is said to have "blasphemed and insulted Heaven" by taking a harlot and committing a sin on a scroll of the law. "He then took a sword and slashed the curtain. Miraculously, blood spurted out and he thought he had slain himself." He then used the curtain to wrap the vessels that he stole. What follows is the story of how a gnat entered Titus's nostril and lived in his brain, killing him, as punishment for these sins. In both Talmuds, the verdict on Titus is "unanimously negative." Yavetz, "Reflections" 413.

<sup>172</sup> There were two veils, one 82 feet tall, which Josephus describes, and another 30 feet tall, before the inner door, which he does not describe. Philo mentions the outer veil in *Spec. Leg.* 1.231, 274 as the *proteron katapetasma*, whereas Mark simply refers to the *katapetasma*. Reinhard Feldmeier, "Der Gekreuzigte im 'Gnadestuhl': Exegetische Überlegungen zu Mark 15:37–39 und deren Bedeutung für die Vorstellung der göttlichen Gegenwart und Herrschaft," in Marc Philolenko (ed.), *Le Trône de Dieu* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1993) 219, asserts that both veils divided the heavenly and earthly realms, but there is no evidence that the inner veil had the same symbolism that Josephus describes for the outer veil.

readers would have seen the veil in Jerusalem. Yet, at the climax of the crucifixion scene, immediately following the death of Jesus (15:37), and before the centurion makes his exclamation (15:39), Mark mentions the tearing of the veil (15:38). He could have used other, more usual, motifs to relate Jesus' death to the doomed Temple—Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius and Dio all use such signs as doors swinging open, or a heavenly noise (*JW* 6.299–300; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13; Suetonius, *Nero* 46; Dio *History* 63.26.5).<sup>173</sup> Yet, Mark chose the veil, indicating that it was an item of special significance to him and his readers.

Some commentators regard the torn veil to be the inner one because they consider that Mark intended to symbolise the new access to God through Jesus' death.<sup>174</sup> This is most unlikely, as, in Chapter 11, Mark had already declared that the Temple was useless, and that it was no longer to be a place of contact with God. Jesus never shows reverence for the Temple, offers no sacrifice or prayer in it, and proclaims the end of its function.<sup>175</sup>

The veil that was of significance to both Josephus and Mark was the one with the cosmic imagery in front of the golden doors. Josephus did not even bother to describe the smaller veil in front of the Holy of Holies;<sup>176</sup> nor does Mark think it necessary to note which veil he refers to, so that *prima facie* it can be assumed that he intended his readers to think either of the most visible veil for someone looking at the Temple, or one that they had actually seen.<sup>177</sup> Both criteria are met by the splendid veil that Josephus described, which Vespasian had paraded through the streets of Rome.

The viewing of this Triumph must have been a dispiriting experience for the Christians. Josephus describes how the magnificent workmanship of the displays made people feel that they had really been present at those events of the War (*JW* 7.146), suggesting that it evoked memories for him, and their brutal vividness may have

<sup>173</sup> *B. Yoma* 39a has the story that the rabbis taught for forty years before the Temple was destroyed that the doors of the sanctuary would swing open by themselves.

<sup>174</sup> Examples, among many, are Juel, *Mark* 225; Hengel, *Studies* 14, 127 n. 83; Tolbert, *Sowing* 280. Geddert (*Watchwords* 141–43) lists 35 different interpretations of the veil scene.

<sup>175</sup> For the same reasons, it cannot be the unveiling of God's majesty, as Marshall (*Faith* 206–7) claims.

<sup>176</sup> He only says that the inner part of the Temple was screened from the outer part "by a veil" (*JW* 5.219).

<sup>177</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 480) argues that Mark must mean the outer veil as it would be the one that the reader would naturally think of.

been evocative for other watchers. Every item carried in that long procession must have increased the sense of doubt for the watching Christians: the Temple vessels, the Torah and the great veil all emphasised the desecration and destruction of the Temple by the Romans, and the Jewish prisoners brought to mind a defeated Israel. The visible power of the emperor seemed to be stronger than any invisible power of the God of Israel. After all, where had God been during the last seven years of trouble upon trouble?

It was deeply embedded in the psyche of the ancient world that a god protected and preserved his people. For Christians and Jews, however, there was only one, omnipotent, god, who was sovereign over all the nations. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is likely to have raised the same types of issues as had the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BCE by the Babylonians.<sup>178</sup> Barclay notes that

Josephus deeply mourns [the Temple's] loss. He is unable (or unwilling) to hide his emotion on this subject (e.g. *JW* 1.9–12; 6.111). It raised the most fundamental questions about God's providence and his promised commitment to his people and his holy city.<sup>179</sup>

Josephus might have sobbed at the sight of the burning Temple, eliciting the pity of his Roman companions (*JW* 6.111–12), but Mark does not mourn the loss of the Temple. Yet, it would seem that his readers were troubled by theological issues arising from its destruction by the Romans. If they only had to deal with the destruction of Jerusalem, they could have reasoned that it was a punishment for the Jews in rejecting the Messiah, and that it meant an end to the old order. But it was not as simple as that because Christians, too, had suffered horribly, and their persecutors had seemingly won. It would have been natural for them to ask why God had not intervened and saved them from these persecutions. Where was the power of Jesus now? Rome had its saviour in Vespasian, but where was the one proclaimed by Christian missionaries as the true saviour of the world? Had the gods of Rome indeed triumphed over the God of Israel? Josephus says that, on behalf of the Romans, he had taunted the defenders of Jerusalem in this way:

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<sup>178</sup> Israel's questioning can be seen in texts such as Ps 44:23: "Why do you sleep, O Lord?" and Ps 77:9: "Has God forgotten to be merciful?" See also Isa 54:7.

<sup>179</sup> Barclay, *Jews* 352.

For what was there that had escaped the Romans, save maybe some spot useless through heat or cold? Fortune, indeed, had from all quarters passed over to them, and God who went the round of the nations, bringing to each in turn the rod of empire, now rested over Italy. (*JW* 5.366–67)

Mark's Gospel was the first Christian text to be written after this second destruction of the Temple and, just as the first destruction had stirred much literary reflection, his writing was, in part, a response to that event.<sup>180</sup> However, the types of questions he addressed had not just arisen because the Temple was destroyed, as that was only the most recent in a series of traumatic events for his community. Rather, his Gospel reflects the deep religious anxiety of people who had suffered for years. In doubting the power and the presence of God, the Christians in Rome faced the same questions that suffering people everywhere face, a prime reason for the ongoing power of this Gospel.

It would appear, then, that Mark is responding to these doubts when he causes the reader to turn to the veil of the Temple at the moment of Jesus' death (15:38). Visually, the reader is standing at the foot of the cross, but when Jesus dies, the reader finds himself or herself suddenly transported by Mark to the Temple to see the great veil, symbol of the cosmos, torn "from top to bottom." Only God can do that, and suddenly the God who had seemingly been absent for the whole of Jesus' passion and trial shows that he is in charge of events. This tearing begins the process of the destruction of the Temple, but it also signifies God's power over all things, including Rome, who kills God's children.<sup>181</sup> This is the second 'cosmic tearing' in the Gospel, the first being the tearing of the heavens in 1:10,<sup>182</sup> but

<sup>180</sup> Michael E. Stone, "Reactions to Destructions of the Second Temple: Theology, Perception and Conversion," *JStJ* 12 (1982) 197–200, regards theodicy as "the central issue" in Jewish documents that react to the destruction of the Temple, especially in 4 Ezra, where God's justice is questioned in allowing the Romans to destroy the Temple. Surely, the writer asks, the sins of Israel are far less than the sins of other nations. Stone also cites *J. Yoma* 1.1 in the same vein. See also Adela Yarbro Collins, "Apocalyptic Themes in Biblical Literature," *Int* 53 (1999) 122–24, citing 2 Baruch.

<sup>181</sup> Many commentators accept that the tearing of the veil signifies the destruction of the Temple. Schmidt ("Roman Triumphal Procession" 151–52) considers the darkness to be another indication of judgement.

<sup>182</sup> David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio," *JBL* 110 (1991) 123–25 has proposed that the tearing of the veil in 15:38 is an inclusio with the heavens being torn open in 1:10.

this second tearing is a subtle display of power that also reveals God's constant presence. Its subtlety matches the 'hidden' way in which God works in the reader's own situation. In 15:39, Mark turns his reader back to the foot of the cross, where the centurion concludes that this was surely God's Son. It is all about power and presence.

It is unlikely to just be a coincidence that the veil displayed in the Triumph was also mentioned by Mark. Moreover, although Mark's readers could have known of the cosmic symbols on the veil through others who had visited the Temple, it is more likely that they had seen it for themselves, paraded in triumph through Rome. Indeed, Mark, in placing this scene at such a climactic moment, may have caused some further ironic laughter among his readers: the Romans had paraded the veil through the city as a sign of their great victory over Israel; Mark, however, has used it here as a sign of the ultimate victory of God. Written in the weeks after the Triumph, the veil scene would be a powerful and climactic piece of irony, a statement about the far greater power of the invisible and always-present God.

In 13:1, the disciples cry out, "Master, look at the size of these stones! Look at the size of those buildings!" Mark's specific mention of the size of the stones may have been for the benefit of Roman readers who had not seen the Temple, in order to emphasise the scale of the destruction, just as the Roman Triumph had emphasised the extent of the victory for all of Rome. However, Mark does not describe the veil when he mentions its tearing. After all, he was simply reminding his readers of the veil that everyone had seen.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE TRAUMATISED CHRISTIANS

#### THEIR SUFFERING AND FEARS

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE SUFFERING

*You will be hated by everyone  
because of my name. (13:13)*

For the Christians, the return of Titus, with the accompanying, depressing display of Roman power, was the culmination of seven years of afflictions. Apart from the crises and disasters suffered with other Roman residents, they had been subjected to extreme pressures since 64, when Nero decided to use them as scapegoats for the fire. The resultant stresses upon the members of Mark's community will now be considered, especially the trauma they suffered from witnessing the deaths of others and the constant anxiety of living under the threat of arrest and execution. These factors, it is proposed, largely explain the mood of the Gospel and the fashioning of many of its scenes.

Certainly, followers of the new way faced difficulties before Nero. From the beginning of the Christian mission, its message had hardly been received as 'good news' within the Empire. Paul, in his own life story, became a type of the early Christian, harassed by Jews in both Judea and the Diaspora, beaten and imprisoned by Roman authorities, and finally executed by the Romans in the capital. Midway through his missionary career, Paul could reckon these among his experiences:

... imprisonments, with countless floggings, and [I was] often near death. Five times, I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times, I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. I was ... in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city. (2 Cor 11:23b-26)

Luke reports two complaints against Paul and Silas by the owners of the diviner in Philippi: "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews, and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us

as Romans to adopt or observe” (Acts 16:20–21). Both typify the attitudes that Romans had towards Christians. The first was that “they are Jews” and, although Jews had been able to practise their religion undisturbed since Julius Caesar gave them the right of assembly and worship, they were disliked. The disdain for them by the Roman aristocracy is apparent in the writings of the period, and their ‘secret rites’ and exclusive practices made them the object of suspicion and scorn.<sup>1</sup>

The second complaint was that Christians attempted to turn people away from the traditional customs and gods to a “superstition.”<sup>2</sup> The Roman upper classes, in particular, considered that oriental cults polluted Roman life, fearing their inroads into Roman traditions and values.<sup>3</sup> Rome had always been slow to allow foreign cults in the city: the cult of Cybele, the “Great Mother” goddess from Phrygia, was allowed into Rome in 191 BCE, but restrictions on its practice were only removed in the reign of Claudius.<sup>4</sup> Tacitus sums up the attitude of his social class to foreigners and their ways in a speech of Gaius Cassius Longinus, supposedly delivered in 61 CE to the Senate on whether to continue the practice of executing all the slaves of a household when the master had been murdered by one of them: “We have in our households, nations with different customs to our own, with a foreign worship or none at all; it is only by terror you

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Cicero, *For Flaccus* 28, 66–69; Juvenal, *Satires* 3.14, 296; 6.542–48; 14.96–106. Despite his recognised abilities to research historical sources, Tacitus (*Histories* 5.2–8) seems not to have attempted to find out the truth about Jewish beliefs and practices in his lengthy description of their history and cult, which is full of strange malicious rumours and conjectures. He reveals Roman distaste for their exclusivity by his references to the common belief that Jews would not intermarry with Gentiles or eat with them. Mellor (*Tacitus* 7, 23) speaks of Tacitus’ “snobbish contempt for his perceived social inferiors: easterners, freedmen and the Roman masses,” making them unworthy of research. For further evidence of calumnies against Jews, and accusations of human sacrifice, lechery and of carrying diseases, see Feldman and Reinhold, *Jewish Life* 384–92. Epictetus (*Discourses* 2.9.21) depicts Judaism as irrational. Even the admired Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.7.21) speaks of the Jews as “a curse to others.”

<sup>2</sup> The earliest Roman descriptions of Christianity are: “A most mischievous superstition” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44), and “a new and mischievous superstition” (Suetonius, *Nero* 16).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 21; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) 108–14.

<sup>4</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed.: 1993) 264–65; Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 62–63; Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 3.



can hold in such a motley rabble” (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.44). The Senate accepted his argument.

The consequences of involvement in any disapproved foreign cult could be fatal, especially for members of those families entrusted with preserving Roman traditions. In 57, under Nero, Pomponia Graecina “was charged with foreign superstition” (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.32).<sup>5</sup> She was handed over to her husband and kinfolk for ‘trial’ “according to ancient tradition,” but was acquitted—perhaps a face-saving measure for her husband Plautius who had been acclaimed for his victories in Britain. Nevertheless, the incident emphasises the social repercussions of attraction to a disapproved cult.

The Romans, in fact, were very religious, and their devotion to the gods was seen as essential for preserving Rome and its empire. Yet, for the Romans, *pietas* meant much more than following the traditional gods; it also meant following the traditional ways, and their fear of change is reflected in Cicero’s statement:

When piety goes, religion and sanctity go along with it. And when these are gone, there is anarchy and complete confusion in our way of life. Indeed, I do not know whether, if our reverence for the gods were lost, we should not also see the end of good faith, of human brotherhood, and even of justice itself, which is the keystone of all the virtues. (Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* 1.4)<sup>6</sup>

And yet no civil authority during the more than ten years of Paul’s missionary journeys considered him to be a criminal deserving execution under Roman law; as Paul said: “And yet we live on, punished, but not killed” (2 Cor 6:9).<sup>7</sup> Paul’s advocacy of the new religion may have given rise to disturbances worthy of punishment, but membership of the new, apparently Jewish, sect had not been a capital

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<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that she was a Christian. See Smallwood, *Jews* 218 n. 54; Michael Grant, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (London: Penguin, 1996) 299 n. 1. However, there is no supporting evidence.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch described the superstitious person, especially referring to Jews, as having false images of the gods, leading to bizarre behaviour and atheism. William Goodwin (ed.), *Plutarch’s Morals: Vol 1*. (London: Athenaeum, ND) 172, 178.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the issues related to Paul’s trials before provincial authorities and in Rome, see Jeffers, *Greco-Roman* 160–71. He wonders (170) why Paul did not appeal to Rome when he was in the Jerusalem jail. Paul may have been reluctant to do so for fear of the outcome when he confronted the heart of Roman religious tradition. Otherwise, he should have welcomed the opportunity, given his enthusiasm for visiting the Roman church (Rom 1:11, 13, 15).

offence.<sup>8</sup> Only when he was taken to Rome was he martyred, and it is probable that only in Rome could the precedent be established that the practice of Christianity deserved death. As discussed in Chapter 2, by the year 112 it was taken for granted that the mere name ‘Christian’ made a person liable for summary execution.<sup>9</sup>

It is probable that Christianity had found its way to Rome by the early forties,<sup>10</sup> and it is possible that relations between Christians and Jews in Rome were very strained, perhaps understandably, from then right up until the time when Mark wrote. Although Suetonius’ text is full of difficulties, it is widely accepted that his note on the expulsion of Jews from Rome in the late forties refers to Jewish-Christian tensions that had come to the attention of the authorities.<sup>11</sup> This expulsion is mentioned by Suetonius in the context of the prohibition of the adoption of Roman family names by foreigners (considered a capital offence), and the abolition of participation in the

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<sup>8</sup> In Corinth, Gallio dismissed the complaint against Paul, according to Luke, on the ground that it was an internal Jewish religious dispute (Acts 18:14–15).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989) 20, claims that Nero issued an edict against Christians, the only one to be retained as law after his death. However, once the emperor had established the precedent, no enactment would have been necessary; a Christian was a threat to Rome, and a provincial governor could act summarily, as T. D. Barnes, “Legislation against the Christians,” *JRS* 58 (1968) 50, argues. See also Benko, *Pagan Rome* 9.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 99–103. Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians addressed a sizable and well-established community around 57.

<sup>11</sup> Claudius “expelled Jews from Rome because of their constant disturbances instigated by Chrestus” (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25). Benko (*Pagan Rome* 18) argues that “Chrestus” referred to someone local with that common name. H. Dixon Slingerland, *Claudian Policy-making and the Early Imperial Repression of Judaism at Rome* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 179–201, proposes that “Chrestus” was a Jew, perhaps a freedman, who influenced Claudius to expel some Jews as part of an anti-Jewish policy. However, “Chrestus” does not appear among several hundred (second century or later) Jewish funerary inscriptions. Leon, *Jews* 25. Tertullian, *Apol.* 3.5, and Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.7.5, complained that Roman opponents would get Christ’s name wrong; the latter says that they “are accustomed to call him Chrestus.” The debate on the Suetonius text has been extensive; see also Barclay, *Jews* 304–5, and Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 177–81. However, Acts 18:2 seems to independently confirm both the expulsion and the Christian presence, mentioning that Aquila, “a Jew;” and Priscilla left Rome after Claudius expelled Jews, and there is no indication there, or in Rom 16:3, that Paul converted them. Most commentators regard them to already have been Christians. See Brown and Meier, *Antioch and Rome* 100; Barclay, *Jews* 303; Lichtenberger, “Jews” 2163; Walters, “Ethnic Issues” 97 n. 4.

Druidic cult by Romans in Gaul,<sup>12</sup> indicating that the expulsion occurred in a climate of concern over foreign influences corrupting Roman life. Nevertheless, the affair over Chrestus was still seen as internal Jewish strife, and capital punishment was not applied.

This expulsion may have led to internal stresses in the Christian community in later years. It has been proposed that the return of the exiled Jewish Christians in the late fifties led to tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome.<sup>13</sup> Most analysts of Paul's *Letter to the Romans* see him striving to bring unity between the different house-churches, urging the Gentile Christians to accept the value of the Jewish heritage while exhorting Jewish Christians to welcome the new order instituted by Jesus. Yinger has suggested the depth of the acrimony present within the house-churches in his argument that *diōgmos* in Rom 8:35 means, not persecution by outside authorities (for which there is no evidence), but harassment by other Christians, with Paul using traditional Jewish motifs to argue for inner harmony and for not returning harm upon 'enemies' within one's own community.<sup>14</sup> In the late fifties, the Roman Christians seem to have been much more concerned with inner divisions than external pressures, and Paul's only mention of the Roman authorities is when he urges acceptance of authority and payment of taxes (Rom 13:1–7). The sense is that the community need only keep the peace, and the authorities would tolerate them.

Even when Paul was brought to Rome for trial, he was not immediately executed. However, for Roman citizens the trial system was slow, and it could be delayed by appeals.<sup>15</sup> Luke has Paul under

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<sup>12</sup> Claudius had executed an equestrian for wearing a Druidic talisman. Pliny, *Natural History* 29.54.

<sup>13</sup> Marxsen (*Introduction* 95–109) first proposed that the removal of the Jewish Christians resulted in a shift to Gentile-focused practices and theology; see the discussion in Karl Paul Donfried, "A Short Note on Romans 16," in Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 46–49; also F. F. Bruce, "The Romans Debate—Continued," in Donfried (ed.), *Debate* 180. Although the proposal rests on little evidence, a comparison between *Romans* and Mark's Gospel (especially 7:15–23) suggests that differences in practice between Jewish and Gentile Christians lingered for many years. The feeding of Jews and then Gentiles in the long section 6:31–8:21, together with the mention of the "one loaf" (8:14) and Jesus' impassioned lament over the disciples' failure to understand (8:17–21), may be directed at separate Eucharists being held for Jews and Gentiles in different house-churches because of different attitudes to the Jewish law (cf. 7:1–23).

<sup>14</sup> Kent L. Yinger, "Romans 12:14–21 and Non-retaliation in Second Temple Judaism: Addressing Persecution within the Community," *CBQ* 60 (1998) 74–96.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 264.

house arrest for “two entire years” (Acts 28:30), suggesting a very drawn-out affair, perhaps providing many opportunities for Paul to state his case before the Roman authorities. In any event, the charge against Paul is not known, and he may even have been acquitted. Until Nero declared Christians to be criminals deserving death, the Roman authorities may have hesitated to execute a Roman citizen over what appeared to be an intra-Jewish dispute, as Judaism was a licit religion.

Therefore, the events of 64 are likely to have come as quite a shock to the Christians. In the early sixties, there may have been no indication that relationships with the authorities would worsen so badly. But, with the death of Burrus and the retirement of Seneca in 62, both of whom had provided moderating counsel for the young emperor, Nero’s behaviour became increasingly bizarre, alienating the powerful families of Rome, until “he was never free from fear” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.36). Suspicion, political intrigue and murder characterised these years; Dio reports that Seneca advised Nero: “No matter how many you may slay, you cannot kill your successor” (*History* 61.18.3). It was in this atmosphere of suspicion that the new foreign cult of Christians was suddenly targeted.

The Christians were subject to such a severe attack that Tacitus, while convinced that they “deserved extreme and exemplary punishment” and showing his disdain for “things hideous and shameful” coming to Rome from foreign parts, uncharacteristically suggested that they merited pity (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44). This implies that the attack on the Christians was memorable, and that it was still being talked about when Tacitus began his legal career in Rome in the early seventies. Nevertheless, Tacitus’ use of the phrase *odium humani generis* (“hatred of the human race”) indicates the strong feelings against this new Christian group. This hostility is reflected in Mark’s reminder, using similar language, that Christians would be “hated by all” (13:13).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44; *Histories* 5.5) used virtually the same phrase—“hatred of the human race”—in justifying the execution of Christians as he did in speaking disparagingly of the Jews. Josephus (*Apion* 2.148) complains that Apollonius accused Jews of “hatred of the human race.” Keresztes (*Imperial Rome* 69) compares this term with *misanthropia*, which, in Ciceronian terminology, means “something like dereliction of one’s duties towards the community of men, a separation from the rest of society.” Diodorus the Sicilian (Siculus), ca. 60–30 BCE, had already used similar language for the Jews: “The race of Jews, since they alone of all nations avoided

It is likely that many Christians lived in the poorer (and rather unhealthy) Transtiber district that had been settled by the early Jewish community, and which was untouched by the fire.<sup>17</sup> But Nero did not attack the Jewish community that also lived in that district; instead, he assigned the blame to the Christians.<sup>18</sup> It has been suggested that the Jews of Rome influenced Nero through his wife Poppea, thought by some to be a Jewish sympathiser.<sup>19</sup> There is insufficient evidence to support such a theory, but the scenario is not impossible, and Christian–Jew tensions may have been one pressure on Mark’s community.<sup>20</sup>

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dealings with any other people and looked upon all men as their enemies . . . had made their hatred of mankind into a tradition.” Cited in Feldman and Reinhold, *Jewish Life* 384. Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians* (London: SCM Press, 1980) 80, comments: “There is a direct connection between Roman hatred of the Jews and later Christian persecutions.”

<sup>17</sup> Troops camping in the “pestilent” Vatican district contracted a disease in 69. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93. Foreign groups tended to cluster in certain areas: the Egyptians on the Campus Martius, Africans on the slopes of the Caelian Hill, and other foreign groups on the Aventine, with foreigners often working together. The Jews were also in the Campus Martius, the Subura, and near the Porta Capena. Leon, *Jews* 137. Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16,” in Donfried (ed.), *Debate* 216–230, has concluded that the early Christians were of low economic status, and that there were at least eight circles separated socially and geographically. For the early history of Jews in Rome, see Walters, *Ethnic Issues* 28–34.

<sup>18</sup> In the Bacchanalian and Catalinian conspiracies during the Republic, the accused were suspected of seeking to set the city on fire, as were the Jews in Antioch in 70. Benko, *Pagan Rome* 17. This suggests that fear of Christians as conspirators may have played a part in the accusation against them.

<sup>19</sup> Frend, *Martyrdom* 164; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135–425)* (London: The Littman Library, 1996) 117, 120–23. For mentions of Poppea’s aid of Jewish supplicants to Nero, see Josephus, *Life* 13–16; *Ant.* 20.195. Leon (*Jews* 28) regards her as “partial to Judaism,” and possibly a convert; against this view are Smallwood, *Jews* 278 n. 79, 281 n. 84, Lichtenberger, *Jews* 2148, 2172, and Margaret H. Williams, “The Jewish Tendencies of Poppaea Sabina,” *JTS* 39 (1988) 97–11. Barclay (*Jews* 307–8), however, notes that her support illustrates that “the influence of the Jews reached even the imperial court.” Tacitus (*Annals* 13.45) has this to say of her: “Poppea had every asset except goodness.”

<sup>20</sup> Benko (*Pagan Rome* 20) claims that Jewish synagogue leaders shifted the blame to Christians after “official investigations blamed Jewish fanatics for the fire,” but gives no evidence. Smallwood (*Jews* 217), however, doubts whether Jewish hostility was behind Nero’s attack. C. P. Anderson, “The Trial of Jesus as Jewish-Christian Polarisation: Blasphemy and Polemic in Mark’s Gospel,” in P. Richardson and D. Granskou (eds), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. 1. Paul and the Gospels* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986) 123, argues that Mark shaped the trial before Pilate because of trials that his readers were undergoing, blaming the local Jewish community, but he does not suggest Rome.

However, it is possible that the Christians of Rome had come to the attention of the authorities earlier than 64 because of Paul's trial and his long presence in Rome. Paul was never one to remain silent, and it could be that there was a growing awareness of this new sect in the early sixties.<sup>21</sup> It may even have been known that Paul had spoken of 'the work' being "revealed with fire" (1 Cor 3:13–15).<sup>22</sup>

Only Tacitus reports the connection between the fire and the persecution of Christians—Eusebius only reports that Nero killed Paul and Peter and "took up arms against the God of the universe," giving no detail of the persecutions, perhaps because, as he said, "many writers have recorded the facts about [Nero] in minute detail" (*E.H.* 2.25).<sup>23</sup> Tacitus' account is to be preferred, as Suetonius was not born until around 69, and he only briefly mentions that "punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief" (*Nero* 16).<sup>24</sup> Tacitus was likely to have remembered the fire: although he was only around eight years old at the time, many family homes were destroyed, and the destruction was visible for many years afterwards. Both the disaster and the

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<sup>21</sup> Perhaps reflecting this situation, Luke reports hostility by the local Jews towards Paul on his arrival in Rome (Acts 28:17–28). If Luke's picture of Paul's earlier confrontations is anything like correct, Paul may have stirred up both the synagogues of Rome and the Roman authorities.

<sup>22</sup> W. Rordorf, "Die neronische Christenverfolgung im Spiegel der apokryphen Paulusakten," *NTS* 28 (1982) 371, posits that Nero heard of Christian end-time expectancy that Rome would be destroyed by fire.

<sup>23</sup> Keresztes (*Imperial Rome* 72) says that it is unimaginable that Tertullian would omit the connection between the fire and the persecutions, and notes that no Christian apologist mentions this charge against Christians. But if it was commonly believed in the second century that the Christians were innocent, there was no reason for the matter to be raised. The first claim that Nero started the fire is in Pliny, *Natural History* 35.51. Suetonius (*Nero* 38) and Dio (*History* 62.16.1–2; 62.18.3) have no doubt that he did so. Tacitus seems unsure (*Annals* 15.44). Griffin (*Nero* 132, 157) argues that Nero would hardly have committed arson two nights after full moon, at a location near his own palace, which was destroyed. However, Nero did begin to build a new palace on the land in the centre of Rome that had been cleared by the fire, and this may have given rise to the belief that the fire was no accident.

<sup>24</sup> This action is listed among other steps to keep order, such as limitations on the intimidatory actions of charioteers, the expulsion of pantomime actors, and restrictions on the sale of food in taverns. All of these measures relate to the security of the state and public order, as actors were always regarded as likely to cause unrest, according to Robinson, *Ancient Rome* 203–4. Taverns were places at which clubs met, with their discussions often turning political. Stambaugh, *Roman City* 209. Suetonius wrote after Tacitus, and may have seen no reason to re-raise the old controversy about the fire.

events surrounding it would have been widely talked about for a long time. Tacitus is regarded as a reliable historian who used his sources well, and there is no reason to doubt the basic accuracy of his report.<sup>25</sup> His description of the execution of Christians is lengthy, and the degree of emphasis he gives to this disposal of *noxii* suggests that it was noteworthy even in a society that treated offenders brutally. His outline of the origin of the Christian sect indicates, too, that this event constituted the initial and definitive crackdown against these new undesirables, establishing the precedent for the general practice in existence at the time of his writing (ca. 114–20).<sup>26</sup> Tacitus does not refer to the Christians again in his works.

There is no suggestion that Nero's mass executions were unpopular. The people were known to protest vigorously against unjust acts towards the lower class: when the Senate approved the execution of 400 slaves in 61 (see Page 209), riots resulted, and troops had to be used to restrain the crowds and to carry out the order (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.42–45).<sup>27</sup> But Tacitus does not report a protest in 64 when, according to him, a "great multitude" were massacred; if there had been one, Tacitus is likely to have made something of such a demonstration against Nero's brutality. Rather, the people came to enjoy the show.

Nero knew how to please the crowds, and played up to them, often as an actor, poet or singer at the theatre, or as a charioteer at the circus. As this was distasteful for the Roman aristocrats, Nero had begun to hold his shows in a circus that he had built adjacent to his gardens across the Tiber in the Vatican district, and he would invite the public to attend (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.14; Pliny, *Natural History*

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<sup>25</sup> "He is the best literary source for the events of the early principate that we possess." Grant, *Annals* 10. Mark Morford, "Tacitus' Historical Methods in the Neronian Books of the 'Annals,'" *ANRW II*, 33.2 (1990) 1624, also defends the accuracy of Tacitus' reporting of facts, when compared to other sources. Sage (*Tacitus* 1029) speaks of "his immeasurable superiority as an historian." In his recent evaluation, Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999) 93, states: "Tacitus' passionate opinions should not obscure the fact that he is the most accurate of all Roman historians."

<sup>26</sup> Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 31, has proposed that Nero might have executed Christians earlier, but Tacitus' account implies that it was a new development, not the continuation of a previous policy.

<sup>27</sup> This incident shows how word could quickly get around Rome of discussions in the Senate and of events in the criminal justice system, as Nippel (*Public Order* 89) observes.

36.74; 37.19). The people would have remembered that he had allowed them to shelter there from the fires a few months earlier (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.39),<sup>28</sup> and this was now the setting for the punishment of the supposed arsonists.<sup>29</sup> The execution of criminals was always a very public event, often put on as a show in the amphitheatre. Tacitus describes these executions as if it was just another of the emperor's entertainments, with Nero driving around dressed as a charioteer among the burning Christians at night. He is described as "mingling with the crowd," and he is likely to have drawn a substantial and approving audience for his show, as usual.

Tacitus says that they were executed by burning, crucifixion and by exposure to hungry wild dogs. These punishments could not be inflicted on a Roman citizen.<sup>30</sup> As he mentions no other form of execution, Tacitus considered that there were few, if any, citizens among them. This may just reflect his prejudices, of course, unwilling to admit that Roman citizens would be part of such a group, and he may have guessed this in retrospect, as Christianity was a cult introduced by foreigners. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the Christian community was probably not subject to any legal

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<sup>28</sup> Donahue ("Windows and Mirrors" 21–22) has suggested that Nero's persecution might not have occurred until as late as 66–67, as Tacitus describes him first taking steps to get rid of the rumours, and building his Golden House. However, Tacitus tends to group things together for convenience within each year of his annals, rather than to follow strict chronological order, as Judith Ginsburg, *Tradition and Theme in the Annals of Tacitus* (Salem: The Ayer Company, 1984) 98–99, confirms in an analysis of his methods. The persecution of Christians is mentioned in *Annals* 15.44, and the new year (65) begins with the appointment of new consuls in 15.48. Donahue argues that the account of the persecutions was moved, but it is more likely that Nero began work on his house as soon as the rubble was cleared, which would be enough to start the rumours. Most likely, feelings would have been most intense soon after the fire. The Piso conspiracy would have dominated his attention later in 65, and he was away on his "Grand Tour" of Greece from the autumn of 66 until Vindex revolted in March 68 (Dio, *History* 63.8.2–63.26.1). A clue to the timing may be in Tacitus' mention that some Christians were burnt to illuminate Nero's gardens "when daylight failed" (*Annals* 15.44). Perhaps Nero 'the artist' extended his show into the darkness to have the arsonists burnt at night, just as Rome was. This probably means that night fell relatively early, and November–December 64 may be the most likely months.

<sup>29</sup> Burning was a common punishment for arson for slaves and sometimes for free men of low status. Garnsey, *Social Status* 126.

<sup>30</sup> Execution by wild beasts was not a new punishment: Julius Caesar used it in 44 BCE. Dio, *History* 43.23.5. The Androcles story in the reign of Gaius was of a slave sentenced to death by wild animals. Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 107–8.



protection, and was considered to be of little worth in Roman society.<sup>31</sup>

It is likely that arrests occurred over a period. Tacitus describes two stages: first, the arrest of “all who confessed,” probably meaning those known to be Christians, and then “on their information,” a much larger number was convicted. The large-scale seeking out of Christians that occurred in this case was probably an exception in view of the fire, and the normal legal procedure would have been followed subsequently.<sup>32</sup>

There is no reason to believe that, from this moment, Christians were generally free from harassment, as the Roman legal system relied on precedent, and that had now been established.<sup>33</sup> Belonging to this new superstition was a capital offence, and any magistrate would have carried out the punishment as a matter of course.<sup>34</sup> In effect, Christians were considered enemies of the state, as the

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<sup>31</sup> Black (“Roman Gospel” 38) argues that the ‘first-last’ sayings in the Gospel reflect a low social status. It is likely that there were quite a number of slaves within the Christian community. Mark has Jesus call himself a slave in 10:44. Slaves had no rights: they were called “boy,” even by young children, could not legally marry, and any child they had was considered illegitimate and the property of the master. Suicide by slaves was common. On the low status of slaves and on their physical abuse, use for sexual gratification, and degradation, see Bradley, *Slavery* 17–29, 50–52, 112.

<sup>32</sup> However, it was in the emperor’s interests to have ways of detecting possible conspiracies. Dio (*History* 52.37.2) reports a speech supposedly addressed to Julius Caesar. In it, Caesar was advised to have people around “who are to keep their eyes and ears open to anything which affects your imperial position.”

<sup>33</sup> In Roman law, *mos maiorum*, that is, law and principles established from custom, lay alongside laws established by jurists. A. Arthur Schiller, *Roman Law: Mechanisms of Development* (The Hague, Mouton, 1978) 256. Barnes (“Legislation” 50) concludes that the principle of *mos maiorum* was the most important source of Roman law, and provided the basis of action against Christians. Wendy Cotter, “The Collegia in Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200 CE,” in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds), *Voluntary Associations in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1996) 82–83, argues that, as so much of Roman law was based on precedent, Pliny’s simple question to the arrested Christians would have been “quite in order” after Nero. The Roman policy of applying the death penalty to anyone admitting being a Christian was consistently applied; see Hadrian’s letter (Eusebius, *E.H.* 4.8–9; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 68), and the decree by Marcus Aurelius (Eusebius, *E.H.* 5.1.47).

<sup>34</sup> G. E. M. de Ste Croix, “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?” *PP* 26 (November 1963) 8–19, argues that, once Nero had acted, magistrates would have been bound to condemn any Christian as being a member of “an anti-social and potentially criminal conspiracy,” disloyal to the state. Frend (*Martyrdom* 163–68) considers that Christians were treated primarily as conspirators. Nevertheless, there has been much debate over the legal basis of their execution. See also Robinson, *Ancient Rome* 200; Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 256 n. 7, and the references listed there.

essential nature of the charge against them was treason because of their refusal to worship the Roman gods, take part in public ceremonies and honour the emperor.<sup>35</sup>

The Roman legal system had no public prosecutor and, in criminal matters, a citizen laid a charge before a magistrate.<sup>36</sup> Every Christian was at risk that their neighbour or even a family member might delate them to the authorities. The Christians of Rome now had to be very careful indeed.

#### HATED BY ALL

*A class hated for their abominations. (Tacitus)*

The attack by Nero must have had a catastrophic effect on the Roman Christians. There is a strong tradition that both Peter and Paul were executed by Nero, although we do not know whether they were part of the initial group late in 64.<sup>37</sup> The Roman community not only lost these key leaders of the Christian movement, but no doubt other leaders as well. Tacitus says that “a great multitude” was killed.<sup>38</sup> There would have been a severe diminution in the size of this struggling new group.

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<sup>35</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.* 10.1 calls the charges against Christians *sacrilegium* and *maiestas*, and has the crowd say, “You don’t worship the gods, and you don’t offer sacrifice for the emperors.” Cited in Ste Croix, “Christians” 10, 32 n. 34. Although this text is from a later period, the fundamental complaints are those that are found in Luke’s writings and Pliny’s letter. See also *Mart. Pol.* 3 (“Away with the atheists”), and 12, where Polycarp is called “the destroyer of our gods, the one who teaches many not to sacrifice and adore the gods.” Cotter (“Collegia” 83) observes that Trajan’s reply to Pliny requiring Christians to burn incense before images of the gods was essentially “a test sufficient to prove where their loyalty lay.”

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Ancient Rome* 194. See also Pliny’s procedure. Pliny, *Letters* 10.96.

<sup>37</sup> *I Clem.* 5.1–7 is usually taken to mean that Peter and Paul were martyred under Nero. Eusebius (*E.H.* 2.25) cites a letter from Bishop Dionysius of Corinth (ca. 170) saying that Peter and Paul were martyred “at the same time” in Italy. However, in his own descriptions of events, Eusebius suggests that the crucifixion of Peter and the beheading of Paul were two separate incidents, with no indication of simultaneity, and he does not seem to know when Paul was martyred, other than under Nero, seemingly drawing his conclusions from Acts 28 and 2 Timothy 4 (*E.H.* 2.22, 25).

<sup>38</sup> Tacitus also uses *ingens multitudo* in *Annals* 14.8 to describe the crowd of onlookers applauding Agrippina’s survival of the sinking of her boat in Nero’s attempt on her life. His description suggests that he had quite a large crowd in mind. Clement,

Mark refers to betrayal by other family members, and implicitly by others (“brothers”) in the community (13:12). Perhaps they gave names under torture. After all, it was normal for slaves accused of crimes to be tortured. They would even be tortured to obtain information when their master had been accused of a crime.<sup>39</sup> Women were often tortured; for example, Pliny had two women tortured to learn about Christian practices (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96.7).<sup>40</sup>

Clement mentions the many women and men who had suffered in Rome:

To these men who lived such holy lives [Peter and Paul] there was joined a great multitude of the elect who, by reason of rivalry were the victims of many outrages and tortures and who became outstanding examples among us. Because of rivalry women were persecuted in the roles of Danaïds and Dircae. Victims of dreadful and blasphemous outrages, they ran with sureness the course of faith to the finish, and those weak in body won a notable prize. (*1 Clem.* 6.1–2)

Although it is also possible that Clement was referring to the many Christians who had been martyred during the thirty years since Peter and Paul had died, it is more likely that he meant those who were executed at the same time as them. Their suffering as “Danaïds and Dircae” suggests that their deaths were staged as entertainment for the crowds, as victims were commonly forced to play the part of mythological characters; Dirce was dragged to death by a bull, while Danaüs was offered as a prize in a foot race, possibly suggesting that the victims were raped.<sup>41</sup> Clement praises the faithfulness of those who ‘completed the race,’ despite being “weak in body.”

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writing in the nineties, uses the same phrase in referring to the martyrdoms of Christians who died with Peter and Paul (*1 Clem.* 5.1).

<sup>39</sup> On the torture of slaves, see Gardner and Wiedermann, *Roman Household* 21, 23, 159. They suggest that the practice was partly due to fear of slaves, citing Seneca, *Letters* 47.5: “Every slave is an enemy.” Torture was regularly used as part of court proceedings; see Ramsay MacMullen, “Judicial Savagery in the Roman Empire,” *Chiron* 16 (1986) 152–53. Quintilian (*Inst.* 5.4.1–2) lists arguments for and against evidence extracted by torture, as if it was a common practice.

<sup>40</sup> Tigellinus tortured women in an attempt at uncovering a conspiracy at the time of Tiberius. Dio, *History* 62.27.3; Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60; cf. 15.57 for the torture by Nero of a woman during the Piso conspiracy in 65.

<sup>41</sup> K. M. Coleman, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *JRS* 80 (1990) 65–66. He also gives other possibilities: being bound to the horns of bulls, or simply being given jugs of water to depict the endless punishment of the daughters of Danaüs for murdering their bridegrooms.

Mark may offer special tribute to these martyrs through two of his four depictions of faithful women that appear at intervals in his Gospel. Like those mentioned by Clement, these women are not named, but are presented as models of faith. In 14:9, Jesus makes this promise in regard to the woman who anoints him with perfume in anticipation of his burial: "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her," turning an anonymous woman into one known for all time. Remarkably, Mark seems to have taken the command, "Do this in remembrance of me," shown by 1 Cor 11:24 and Luke 22:19 to have been associated with the Eucharistic words in the early Church, and applied them to this unnamed woman, omitting them from the Eucharistic words in 14:22–25. For "remembrance," instead of Paul's *anamnēsin*, Mark uses *mnēmosynon*. The former is simply a reminder, but the latter is used of a monument or gravestone. Although it has been suggested that Mark uses this word as another pointer to Jesus' death, he has it "as a memorial to *her*," not to Jesus. In Mark's view, it is her act of foresight in recognising the need for the cross, and her own generosity in giving, which will be remembered. Those women who died in the persecutions are not remembered because of any gravestone. Rather, it is their generous acceptance of martyrdom, enabling the gospel to spread to others, that is their perpetual monument and, fittingly, their generous act is recalled "wherever the gospel is proclaimed." Mark honours their memory by using the Eucharistic words to liken their giving to that of Jesus who also gave his body.

Another tribute seems to occur with the widow who 'gives her very life' (12:44). Mark, with a tautology that moves to a climax, emphasises the depth of her giving: the NRSV has: "She, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all she had to live on," but the latter clause is better translated more literally as: "she lay down her whole life" (*ebalen holon ton bion autēs*).<sup>42</sup> In fact, although *ballō* can mean a more deliberate action, such as put or place, it normally means a violent action such as throw, so that it can read: "She threw away her whole life." The use of *ballō* suggests that a faith-filled

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<sup>42</sup> Heil (*Model* 254) points out that her giving is of the same depth as that demanded by the *Shema*: "You shall love the Lord your God . . . with your whole strength" (Deut 6:5), and compares her with the good scribe who had just cited it (12:33).

follower of Jesus should be prepared to ‘throw away’ his or her own (physical) life, of little value in comparison with the true life offered by Jesus (cf. 8:35–37; 10:29–30).

Mark stresses Jesus’ praise for this woman in her quiet giving, explicitly using her as a model (12:43: “then he called his disciples and said . . .”).<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Jesus condemns those in power who seek attention (12:38–40), and, although his phrase—“those wanting to be greeted in the marketplace (*agora*)”—refers in the story to the scribes of Jerusalem, it would also remind the Markan readers of the wealthy Romans who, each morning, led a procession of their slaves and clients through the Forum of Rome, displaying their power and importance.<sup>44</sup>

Mark carefully mentions the very small value of the coins that the widow donates (“two *lepta*, equal to one *quadrans*”), emphasising how little her life is valued, just as the lives of those executed were considered of little worth to their compatriots. It would cost a *quadrans* for an afternoon visit to the public baths in Rome, a daily practice for much of the population.<sup>45</sup> The mention, too, of the visible, seemingly respectable people taking the “best seats in the synagogue” (12:39) would remind the Roman reader that seats at the theatre or the circus were allocated strictly according to class and social standing. In contrast to the visible wealthy, the poor widow is alone, and seemingly unnoticed.<sup>46</sup> But Jesus notices.

In both these scenes of generous giving by anonymous women, Mark has chosen language that alludes to martyrdom. Both frame Chapter 13, which immediately precedes the account of Jesus’ martyrdom, and which refers to martyrdoms that had already occurred in Mark’s community (13:11–13). It contains many exhortations to

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<sup>43</sup> Mario DiCicco, “What Can One Give in Exchange for One’s Life?” *CurTM* 25 (1998) 442, observes that it is Jesus, not Mark as narrator, who mentions what she has done, so that it “affects the reader’s response to the widow and elicits genuine admiration for her action.”

<sup>44</sup> Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* 23; MacMullen, *Social Relations* 107; Paoli, *Rome* 11–12, who cites Cicero, Catullus and Juvenal.

<sup>45</sup> Carcopino, *Daily Life* 278, citing Seneca, Martial, Horace, and Juvenal. Robinson (*Ancient Rome* 116) also cites Cicero. These references show that the charge had been constant for a century, and would have provided a long-standing benchmark for the value of the coin for a Roman reader.

<sup>46</sup> Malbon (“Poor Widow” 600) states: “[With the] historical reality of women’s lower status . . . the Markan community women were in a position to bear most poignantly the message that among followers the ‘first will be last and the last first’.” However, the Romans executed men and women without distinction.

be ready. DiCicco has observed that it is only in 12:43 and 14:9 that Jesus praises the deeds of individuals. Further, he notes, both verses have *amēn legō*, and both scenes use the “hook word” of *ptōchos* (“the poor”) in 12:43 and 14:5, 7.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, in the latter scene, the poor become the centre of the dialogue. These two vignettes serve to remind readers of the suffering that had been undergone by the ‘unnoticed’ people.

Although, in the mid-sixties, official pressure was applied to those known to be Christians, the danger subsequently was that information would be laid by a family member who resented their involvement with this foreign cult, by neighbours or by business contacts who learned of their meetings, or even through the betrayal of other Christians who decided to save their own skin and avoid arrest. No systematic persecution was required for Christians to be martyred. During the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61), a woman living in Rome was denounced by her husband because she divorced him after she became a Christian (Justin, *2 Apol.* 2).<sup>48</sup> Similar denunciations are likely to have happened in earlier periods, as delation had long been the principal means of internal security, and informers received financial rewards.<sup>49</sup> Mark’s depiction of Judas’ betrayal matches

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<sup>47</sup> DiCicco, “One’s Life” 448–49. He describes the story of the poor widow as “a literary masterpiece,” and also notes the word link, using *olos*, between her giving “all” (12:44) and Jesus’ response to the scribe to love God “with all your strength” (12:30). Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 417) notes that both women are silent in their giving.

<sup>48</sup> The woman was probably a citizen, as she could delay the case by successfully making a submission to the emperor to arrange her affairs first. Her request, however, shows that she expected to be executed. No such mercy was shown to her teacher, Ptolemaeus, who was lead away to his execution as soon as he admitted that he was a Christian, nor two bystanders who objected and also said, when asked, that they were Christians. Ptolemaeus seems not to have been a citizen, as he was bound (cf. Acts 22:29). Justin, who had been converted by seeing Christian martyrs, was himself martyred as a result of being denounced by an enemy, a Cynic philosopher. Frend, *Martyrdom* 253, 256. Frend (*Early Church* 237), however, speaks of “the general quiet enjoyed by the Church under Antoninus Pius.”

<sup>49</sup> For the history of delation within the Roman legal system, and the rewards for informers of up to one-quarter of the property of the accused, see Dill, *Roman Society* 35–36, 57; Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 97; O. F. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1995) 78, 99–101. Robinson notes that, on treason charges, even slaves were allowed to inform on their masters. Dill suggests that Vatinius (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.34) had become wealthy as an informer. Tacitus mentions Nero’s use of a “professional informer” (*Histories* 2.10), and of false informers (*Annals* 16.8). In the second century, trials of Christians were always initiated through delation, according to Frend, *Martyrdom* 167.

well the situation in Rome: in 14:10–11, Judas goes to the authorities, who promise to give him money.<sup>50</sup> As MacMullen has observed, although Christians were rarely sought out, “there remained the most common and important means of law enforcement, namely, the citizens’ active cooperation . . . a neighbour’s malice or greed was always to be feared.”<sup>51</sup>

Mark’s reader feared martyrdom. A central teaching of the Gospel is the call to follow Jesus by taking up “your” cross (8:34).<sup>52</sup> This does not have any metaphorical meaning. It means being ready to be a martyr, as is evident from the ‘losing of life’ sayings that follow (8:35–37). In those sayings, Mark becomes an accountant: supposed gain turns into loss for those who cling to their physical life, as eternal life has to be worth more than anything. These sayings tend to be spiritualised today because readers are not generally faced with the prospect of martyrdom. The original readers could hardly have read this central call of Jesus to discipleship in any way other than as a call to be ready to die a martyr’s death.

The reality for the reader seems to be that arrest and execution is possible at any moment. From the beginning of the Gospel, Mark warns him or her to be ready at any time. When Jesus calls the first disciples (1:16–20), the scene is brief, and Jesus is just “passing by.” The account is meant to shock the reader—what if the disciples had not been ready to respond? Mark’s beginning stresses the need to be ready, and, for a reader who had already responded to the call of Jesus, that time will be at their arrest when they are really called by Jesus to radically forsake everything. They must be prepared, without hesitation, to forget their family, their worldly careers and

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<sup>50</sup> Mark does not say that Judas went because of the hope of financial reward. He seems to deliberately leave Judas’ motives ambiguous. See Page 340.

<sup>51</sup> MacMullen, *Paganism* 157.

<sup>52</sup> This does not mean that there were no citizens in the community. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (London: SCM Press, 1977) 39, shows that Roman citizens could be crucified, but that it was considered quite extraordinary in this period. For slaves and aliens, however, “the horror was even more real and related to personal existence than it was for members of the upper classes” (61). But MacMullen (“Judicial Savagery” 152) observes that, when Plutarch (*Moralia* 554A) wrote: “Every evildoer goes to his punishment bearing a cross on his back,” he did so as if that was the only form of punishment. In the second century, Artemidorus (*Interpretation of Dreams* 2.53) wrote of a poor man dreaming of being crucified, although not guilty of any crime. Mark builds on this horror of crucifixion in 8:34. It is likely that the majority of his readers were non-citizens for this image to operate effectively at such a critical point in his rhetoric.

ambitions, indeed, their very lives, and to “come after” Jesus the martyr.

In Chapter 13, the reader is urged (almost implored), again and again, to “watch” (13:5, 9, 23, 33). The events depicted in Chapter 13 are either sudden occurrences, or events that readers can neither control nor predict (earthquakes and other natural disasters, wars and rumour of wars, trials, the desecration and destruction of the Temple, stars falling from heaven, summer arriving, the end of time).<sup>53</sup> “Stay awake” are the final words of the speech (13:37; also 13:33, 35).

The following verse (14:1) describes the plot to kill Jesus, a plot absent from the text since 3:6. It is not just a matter of warning others to be ready; everyone must be prepared. In Gethsemane, Jesus repeats “stay awake” three times (14:34, 37, 38), as he prepares for his arrest and trial by the authorities.

This repetitive motif of the need for readiness, combined with the call to carry their cross, and other references to persecution (4:17; 10:30), together with the repeated references to fear (12 times), are persistent indications of the climate behind the Gospel. The verb *paradidōmi* is used 19 times, and in 17 of those usages it means “be arrested” or “be betrayed.” All of this speaks of an expectancy among Mark’s readers that there will be further arrests, and reveals the intensity of their fear.<sup>54</sup>

#### THE NEED FOR SECRECY

*To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables in order that, while seeing, they may see, but not perceive. (4:11–12)*

It is proposed that this climate of fear substantially affected the style of Mark’s Gospel and explains a number of mystifying elements that have led to a wide diversity of opinion among commentators. Tolbert calls the Gospel “opaque and even intractable,” and says that it “was intended to be an esoteric, hidden text.”<sup>55</sup> Many explanations have

<sup>53</sup> Other than simply being ready, the only action urged by Mark in Chapter 13 is to refuse to pay any attention to the false prophets (13:6, 21–22), who were presumably giving them different advice.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 6 for further evidence that the readers’ fears underlie the text.

<sup>55</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing* xi, 88.



been given for this phenomenon,<sup>56</sup> and the use of insider/outsider language, particularly in the section from 3:31–4:34, has generated discussion about the elitist nature of the community.<sup>57</sup> It is sometimes seen to be an indication that the community was like the Qumran group—marginalised, and characterised by a language and symbols meaningful only to insiders.<sup>58</sup>

But, in the climate described above, Mark would have been severely constrained in writing this document, illustrated in his cryptic allusion to Titus' action in the Temple (13:14), understandable only to insiders.<sup>59</sup> The early Flavian years would have been particularly sensitive times. Teaching in Rome at that time, Quintilian had this to say on the value of ambiguity:

Similar if not identical with this figure [a form of irony] is another, which is much in vogue at the present time . . . It is one whereby we excite some suspicion to indicate our meaning is other than our words would seem to imply; but our meaning is not in this case contrary to that which we express as is the case of irony but rather a hidden meaning which is left to the reader to discover . . . This class of figure may be employed under these conditions: first, it is unsafe to speak openly . . . (*Inst.* 9.2.65).

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<sup>56</sup> For example, Geddert (*Watchwords* 180–81) has suggested that Mark used the same method of mystery and parable that Jesus himself used. This does not explain cryptic comments such as the aside in 13:14. James G. Williams, *Gospel against Parable: Mark's Language of Mystery* (Decatur, Ga: Almond Press, 1985) 133, lists five ways in which the motif of secrecy might have operated in the Gospel, but persecution is not one of them.

<sup>57</sup> Francis Watson, "The Social Function of Mark's Secrecy Theme," *JNT* 24 (1985) 49–69, argues that Mark's secrecy theme was designed to strengthen "barriers" between the Christian community and a hostile society. Gundry (*Mark* 6) says that he aimed to separate his 'true family' from outsiders.

<sup>58</sup> Beavis (*Audience* 41) suggests that Mark follows the tendency of Jewish scribes to be interested in esoterica, so that his "veiled meanings" may reflect Mark's Jewish background. Whether that is so or not, Mark's style does entice readers to pay attention to his hints and clues, encouraging deeper reflection. On this, see Geddert, *Watchwords* 129–30.

<sup>59</sup> Best ("Reader" 128) considers 13:14 is worded as it is in case it might "fall into the hands of the Roman police." There were no 'police' as such in this period but, if thought serious enough, a critical document by a foreign group could have led to an investigative action to stamp out a supposed conspiracy. Livy 39.15 shows that informers were paid during the Bacchanalian conspiracy, and those who harboured fugitives were punished. James C. Walters, "Romans, Jews and Christians: The Impact of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome," in Donfried and Richardson (eds), *First-Century Rome* 180 n. 18. An organised 'secret police' seems to have begun with Domitian, directed largely towards the military.

He goes on to say that this style is common in schools in speaking against tyrants: "If the danger can be avoided by any ambiguity of expression, the speaker's cunning will meet with universal approbation" (*Inst.* 9.2.65).

It would have been unwise to circulate a document, even privately, that might further incriminate Christians, one that might appear to be critical of the emperor, of Titus or of Roman society.<sup>60</sup> Such a document would only confirm the Roman suspicion of Christians as anti-social conspirators. Mark would have wanted the Gospel to appear harmless to outside readers, while being socially critical to insiders of this counter-cultural group. Thus, outsiders might "see, but not perceive" (4:12).

The Romans were always suspicious of clubs, which often masqueraded as religious associations, because of their potential political nature. Tacitus' mention of the criminal background of the founder of the Christian sect (*Annals* 15.44) may reflect a concern from the Neronian era of having a band of supporters of this provincial criminal meeting in Rome. In the early second century, Roman authorities would not permit the formation of even small societies, either in Rome or the provinces.<sup>61</sup>

Tolbert suggests that Rome or a similar city "may supply a concrete historical context" to explain why a religious movement that relied so heavily on oral preaching might see the value of a written

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See William G. Sinnigen, "The Roman Secret Service," *CJ* 57 (1961) 65–66, who notes, however, that, even with delation as the main instrument in internal security, the earlier emperors "used efficiently the Praetorian Guard . . . to act as plainclothes men." Tacitus (*Histories* 1.85) mentions soldiers of Vitellius being "dispersed to private houses and living in disguise" to ferret out opponents. He considers that this is the way in which an emperor might act if conspiracy was feared.

<sup>60</sup> Philip J. Cunningham, *Mark: The Good News Preached to the Romans* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995) 15–16, notes that it would have been dangerous to explicitly criticise Titus.

<sup>61</sup> See Trajan's reply to Pliny (*Letters* 10.34), forbidding even a firefighters' association on the grounds that "they quickly turn into a political club." For Trajan, "clubs do more damage than fires." Benko, *Pagan Rome* 26 n. 31. In the second century, Christians were thought of as an illegal religious society. Wilken, *Christians* 31–47. See John S. Kloppenber, "Collegia and *Thiasoi*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership," in Kloppenber and Wilson (eds), *Associations* 16–30, and Cotter, "Collegia" 75, 81, 88 for Roman attitudes to illegal associations, pointing out (88) that "the very real dangers in belonging to an unrecognised society during the imperial period are usually ignored . . . the constant threat of their sudden investigation and dissolution must become incorporated into . . . our exegetical enterprise." The penalty for members of illicit clubs was death, as if there had been a riot.

manuscript that could go from house.<sup>62</sup> In the Gospel, Jesus teaches frequently in houses, often secretly (explicitly in 7:17, 24; 9:28, 33; 10:10; implicitly in 1:29; 2:2; 4:34; 14:3, with those outside plotting to kill him; 14:14).<sup>63</sup>

In view of the deep Roman fear of conspiracies and suspicion of foreign cults, indeed, foreign groups of any kind,<sup>64</sup> Mark also had to be careful about using apocalyptic language that might appear to contain secret political prophecies.<sup>65</sup> Dio reveals the Roman mind:

Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor and punish, not merely for the sake of the gods since, if a man despises these he will not pay honour to any other human being, but because such men, by bringing in new divinities in place of the old, persuade many to adopt practices, from which spring up conspiracies, factions and cabals, which are far from profitable for a monarchy. Do not, therefore, permit anybody to be an atheist. (*History* 52.36.2)

The Gospel text was necessarily esoteric—it was meant to be hidden from outsiders, and only explained to those who entered the inner circle.<sup>66</sup> Mark’s style, however, did not primarily arise from a need to establish group boundaries, but to ensure group survival.

## HIDING THE LIGHT

*It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god. (Pliny, writing to Trajan)*

It must have been enormously difficult for the Roman Christians to find a way to keep their Christian involvement secret in a society that was so open. MacMullen observes: “Whatever one was or did,

<sup>62</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing* 305.

<sup>63</sup> Kee (*Community* 170) points out that the Last Supper scene also has a “clandestine nature,” and gives the impression of a secret society, so that “it is highly likely that Mark is reading the tactics of his own community back into the time of Jesus.”

<sup>64</sup> See Walters, *Ethnic Issues* 9–15, 37–51.

<sup>65</sup> Hengel, *Studies* 28.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson (“Trial” 121) recognises the need for secrecy in Rome, and suggests that some of Jesus injunctions to those healed and delivered might be aimed at the problem of “unstable people” unintentionally betraying the Christian healer.

everyone knew at once.<sup>67</sup> It is not at all clear how they could have safely met at all. It is usually suggested that they met in the homes of the wealthier members of the community,<sup>68</sup> but it would seem that, in Rome, a *domus* was only owned by a person who was an equestrian or a member of the senatorial families.<sup>69</sup> In Rome, it would have been virtually impossible for a member of the few ruling families to be active as a Christian in these early years. They could hardly have kept it secret, or continued in public life, even if the whole family and all their slaves had adopted Christianity.<sup>70</sup> Even in the houses of the wealthy, privacy was almost impossible, with the atrium open to the street all day, and slaves everywhere.<sup>71</sup> No room would hold more than a small group of people: the dining room (the *triclinium*) would hold no more than nine, and other rooms were just as small, so that any larger groups would need to meet in the open-air *peristylum*, which was still readily accessible, and any such activity is likely to have soon become well-known. Visitors would have noticed any absence of the traditional shrines to the guardian spirits—the *penates* (guardian spirits of the hearth), *lares* (guarding the home) and Vesta (guarding the hearth fire). Religious rites took place in every household.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> MacMullen, *Social Relations* 62; see 68–85 on the widespread involvement of the populace in trade and street associations, and their important social function.

<sup>68</sup> Studies of house-churches have focused on Acts and Paul's letters, and so address the situation of Christian communities in the provinces. For example, Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 76; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983) 155–69.

<sup>69</sup> For a senator, the property requirement was one million sesterces; for an equestrian, 400,000 sesterces. One litre of wheat cost 1–2 sesterces. Jones and Sidwell, *Rome* 163.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Mullins, *Called to be Saints* (Dublin: Veritas, 1991) 24; Stambaugh, *Roman City* 164.

<sup>71</sup> However, our knowledge of activities within Roman houses is very poor, and we know little about multiple dwellings. Lisa Nevett, "Perceptions of Domestic Space," in Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (eds), *The Roman Family in Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 281, 296. From her study of artefacts, Penelope Alison, "Artefact Distribution and Spatial Function in Pompeian Houses," in Rawson and Weaver (eds), *Roman Family* 352, concludes that only small rooms at the sides of the main circulation area of a *domus* may have been out of bounds to visitors, and that there were few discrete public or private spaces in Roman houses. Both Michele George, "Repopulating the Roman House," in Rawson and Weaver (eds), *Roman Family* 318, and Stambaugh, *Roman City* 162–65, conclude that privacy was virtually impossible.

<sup>72</sup> The head of the household had a key role in its religious life, and it would

The great majority of the Roman populace lived in multi-level *insulae* (tenements), and many had little more than a bed and a stool in their unheated rooms, doing their cooking in a central smoke-filled room in a building that was always at the risk of fire, if not of falling down.<sup>73</sup> Others lived in *tabernae* on the ground floor with a single room, and perhaps a second room, serving as living area, shop and workshop, open to the street from daybreak.<sup>74</sup> There is little data on the housing situation of members of the middle ‘merchant’ class, who may have resided in the small apartments that faced onto a common courtyard.<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, they may have rented a whole floor of a tenement, with the ground floor the preferred option.<sup>76</sup> This made such apartments close to the street and shops. In almost every case, the close proximity to neighbours or the street, the small size of dwellings, and shared access to the building would have made privacy and secrecy very difficult.

If Roman clubs or societies wanted to meet, they would do so at taverns, share a meal in rooms provided as part of a shrine or temple, or gather at special premises financed by a patron.<sup>77</sup> None of

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have been very difficult for only part of a family to convert. Columella (*On Agriculture* 1.8.20) speaks of the duty to “first pay respects to the household gods” on returning from town. The wife presided over the household *sacra*. Daniel P. Harmon, “The Family Festivals of Rome,” *ANRW* II, 16.2 (1978) 1600; see 1593–95 for a discussion on the household gods.

<sup>73</sup> Juvenal (*Satires* 3.196) wryly commented: “The inmates sleep at ease under the ruin that hangs above their heads.”

<sup>74</sup> James E. Packer, *The Insulae of Imperial Ostia* (Rome: American Academy, 1971) 44–54, especially 53, gives an example of the great variety of ‘irregular’ building types at Pompeii, including a shop with a back room and a two-room mezzanine apartment, and another with two rooms attached to the business, including a large living room. Also in “Housing and Population of Imperial Ostia and Rome,” *JRS* 57 (1967) 79, 82–83, he emphasises the variety in design within the *insulae* at Ostia in the second century, but notes that very few shops had three rooms. We have no information for Rome. He adds (87): “The average Roman domicile must have served only as a place to sleep and store possessions.”

<sup>75</sup> There was “a large body of wealthy wholesale merchants and shipowners, of thrifty imperial freedmen, of rich bankers and retail traders, among whom the foreign element was largely represented.” George La Piana, “Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire,” *HTR* 20 (1927) 197. Perhaps herein lie the supporters of early Christianity in Rome but, if foreign, they were subject to mistrust and legal disadvantages.

<sup>76</sup> Stambaugh (*Roman City* 154, 174–75) estimates that the rental for such an apartment would have been around 125 denarii per annum—far too much for most of the population. F. R. Cowell, *Every Day Life in Ancient Rome* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1961) 21, points out that whole *insulae* could be bought outright.

<sup>77</sup> Stambaugh, *Roman City* 209–211; Dill, *Roman Society* 251–86; MacMullen, *Paganism* 36–37.

these options was open to the Christians, as they were an illegal association. Pliny (*Letters* 10.96) was concerned about their meetings before daybreak, suspecting a conspiracy. He even tortured two female slaves just to find out whether they and their fellow Christians had really stopped meeting “to take food,” as they had claimed, after Trajan’s edict against clubs.<sup>78</sup>

It is possible, then, that 4:21–22 may have been an exhortation to Christian groups meeting in darkness:

Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lamp stand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.

Certainly, the verses point to the hidden Jesus who must come to light, but this can only occur if Christians themselves are in some way visible. Jews were noticed in the city because they lit their Sabbath lamps; Roman writers commented on the practice.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps, despite the risk of arrest, Mark was insisting that they could not remain hidden forever if the gospel was to be preached; everything must “come to light.” These verses immediately follow the promise that the good soil would bear an extraordinary harvest—if fear of persecution were disregarded (4:17, 20).<sup>80</sup>

When Mark describes Jesus going into Gentile territory in 7:24, he says that he went “into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. But he could not escape notice.” This may allude to the need for those spreading the message to be careful, but it is

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<sup>78</sup> Pliny (*Letters* 10.96) also reports that they sang hymns, suggesting that their singing may have attracted attention. For the many other occasions in Roman history when meetings in darkness were linked with conspiracies and secret religious rites, and the deep Roman suspicion of such gatherings, as well as concern about incantations and oaths, see Benko, *Pagan Rome* 11–13.

<sup>79</sup> Seneca, *Letters* 95.47, and Persius (34–62 CE), cited in Stern, *Authors* 433, 436. Also Seneca, *On Superstition*, cited by Barclay, *Jews* 307. If Jewish Christians continued the Sabbath observance, as is possible from 2:27–28, their continued use of Sabbath lamps could have become a problem for them, drawing attention to themselves if they were known not to be attending the synagogue.

<sup>80</sup> William L. Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva,” in Donfried and Richardson (eds), *First-Century Rome* 209, makes the point that the shops and workshops of Christians would have provided “a ready-made audience” because of visiting clients, workers and slaves. This might have made them vulnerable. If this openness was constrained after 64, Mark might be suggesting that the risk of ‘going public’ will have to be taken again in the future. 16:8 also urges the reader to proclaim the good news despite fear.

also a statement that Jesus will become known regardless of the need for secrecy.<sup>81</sup> Jesus seems not to preach in the streets of Tyre or Sidon, and the reader might assume that the word spread further only through the anonymous Syrophoenician woman. That Gentile woman came to Jesus in a house, and received ‘bread’ from him—an allusion to the Eucharists in the house-churches. The reader would note that, like that woman, others in Gentile territories would come quietly to a private house, where ‘bread’ was provided, and there they would experience the healing and saving power of Jesus.

When Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome, he referred to “households,” not houses.<sup>82</sup> There is no indication at all in Rom 16 of the meeting places of the groups, and Paul’s list only points to the leader of a group, or to a single household as a group, and this suggests a different meeting place for each. This may have been forced on the early Roman Christians because it was not possible to meet other than in small places, perhaps relying on the still quite small housing of the merchant class members. Later, once bearing the name of Christian became punishable by death, the risk associated with every meeting must have added significantly to the anxiety of members of Mark’s community. It is very possible, too, that the fragmentation of the Roman Church was maintained longer than it might have been in order to minimise the loss of members should one of the house-churches be discovered, and everyone arrested.

#### THE DAY THE LORD COMES

*And when they lead you away, arresting you, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. (13:11)*

If they were arrested, Christians would have been brought before a single magistrate, but they may have been held temporarily in prison awaiting a hearing.<sup>83</sup> Mark may allude to this situation in 9:41, which

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<sup>81</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 232) point out that Josephus describes the Tyrians as bitter enemies of the Jews (*Apion* 1.70), so that “Jesus enters territory that is not only Gentile but also potentially hostile . . . Mark’s readers may have seen these actions of Jesus as proleptic of their community life.”

<sup>82</sup> Even then, he only uses *kat’ oikon* once (Rom 16:5), and the remainder of the references to groups simply have *tōn* (Rom 16:10, 11). Meeks (*Urban Christians* 75) has pointed out that the more natural expression for “in the house” would be *en oikō*, as in 1 Cor 11:34; 14:35.

<sup>83</sup> Prisons were only for those awaiting trial or execution. Imprisoned Christians

has often been thought to be a stand-alone saying and rather out of place. It is an unusual piece of praise in the midst of criticism of the disciples: “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.” The phrase *en onomati oti Christou este* (literally, “because in name/reputation you are of Christ”) is unusual in this Gospel. It is a phrase that is as close to “Christian” as would be possible in a Gospel story,<sup>84</sup> and points not so much to the designation for a missionary, as is usually claimed,<sup>85</sup> but to anyone who has the reputation of being a Christian. The verse reads as a promise, but it is also high praise of the solace-giver, emphatically (*ou mē*) assuring a reward for such a person. It is comparable to Jesus’ solemn praise of the generous women in 12:43 and 14:9, and it is notable that those are the only other verses where *amēn* is used to praise people.

If those verses both allude to the generous women who remained faithful under torture, Mark may have had a similar type of situation in mind with 9:41—it may refer to taking sustenance to Christians in prison awaiting trial, as prisoners had to be supported by their friends and relatives. It would take a brave person to visit a Christian prisoner, risking exposure to questioning. Ironically, although an informer might have been rewarded with money for putting the Christian in prison, here Jesus promises that the brave Christian friend will receive *God’s* reward (*misthos*: normally wages or payment). In Matt 5:12, the *misthos* will be received in heaven. Unlike previous views that the giver is a stranger who will be rewarded for being kind to a Christian missionary, this explanation has the giver as a Christian who is prepared to risk his or her life to help an imprisoned brother or sister. It ties in with the sort of risks that this Gospel demands of its readers.

This understanding is confirmed by the following verses, a series of severe warnings (9:42–48) about the consequences of causing

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may have found themselves in the Carcer, the main Roman prison which had always been at the foot of the Capitol, below the Temple of Jupiter itself. The Carcer was still in use in the fourth century. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 217–18, 231. By the early second century, however, Juvenal (*Satires* 3.312–14) was lamenting the fact that Rome now needed more than one prison.

<sup>84</sup> As Juel (*Mark* 134) has observed. The term does not appear in any other Gospel. Paul uses the phrase “of Christ” (*Christou*) in 1 Cor 1:12; 3:23; 2 Cor 10:7.

<sup>85</sup> For example, Anderson, *Mark* 237; Hooker (*Mark* 231); Gundry, *Mark* 512. Lane (*Mark* 344) considers that the saying refers to hospitality towards Christians in the “eastern sun.”



“little ones” to “fall away” (*skandalizō*), a word only used by Mark of those who fail under persecution or who reject Jesus in some other way (4:17; 6:3; 14:27, 29). Van Iersel has proposed that 9:42 is a stern warning directed to the Roman judge and torturer who incite Christians to apostatise, and that the sayings in 9:43–48 allude to the torture and death of the Maccabean martyrs.<sup>86</sup> In 2 Macc 7:11, the martyr exclaims, as he holds out his hands to be cut off, “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.” Van Iersel may be right about the allusions in 9:42–48 to torture and loss of body parts, but the problem with his interpretation is that Roman magistrates were hardly likely to be reading this Gospel and, in any event, the warning is extremely veiled, likely to be understood only by insiders. More likely, it refers to people *within* the Christian community who encourage others to deny Christ when faced with torture. If so, it reflects the dilemma of the Christian faced with the choice of either denying that she or he is a Christian, or being subjected to horrific physical torment. It also reflects the predicament of the loved ones of the accused: they would have been tempted to talk him or her into denying everything.

The sayings exhort the reader to think carefully of the value of parts of the body, and are, in a graphic fashion, similar to the warnings of 8:35–37, which compares the preservation of physical life with the loss of eternal life. Mark’s use of the phrase “one of these little ones” fits well here, not as a reflection of a person’s standing within the Christian community, but of their position within Roman society; *mikros* was commonly used of those of low social importance (cf. Acts 8:10; 26:22; Rev 13:16, 19:5, 18; 20:12). It is similar to “the last” mentioned twice in this Gospel (9:35; 10:31).

The warning, then, is directed not against Christian leaders particularly, but against any well-meaning Christian who urges apostasy in the face of torture, perhaps arguing that it is better to live in order to witness another day. But, for Mark, it is only “the one who endures to the end [who] will be saved” (13:13), again probably

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<sup>86</sup> B. M. F. Van Iersel, “Mark 9:43–48 in a Martyrological Perspective,” in A. A. R. Bastiansen, A. Hilhorst, and C. H. Kneepkens (eds), *Fructus Centesimus* (Steenbrugge: Abbatia S. Petri, 1989) 336–41. On the contrary, Helmut Koester, “Mark 9:43–47 and Quintilian 8.3.75,” *HTR* 71 (1978) 151–53, has argued that it refers to the cutting off of members of the church that have become estranged.

alluding to both interrogation and torture.<sup>87</sup> After all, people would hardly listen to someone who professed to believe in Jesus' promise of eternal life but was not prepared to die.

If 9:41 refers to the visiting of Christians in prison awaiting trial, and 9:42–50 follow on to refer to their torture, 9:41–50 should be treated as one unit warning Christians not to try to talk those arrested out of affirming their Christian identity but, instead, to provide comfort as they face their moment of trial.<sup>88</sup> “Everyone will be salted by fire” (9:49) may allude to the use of fire as a method of torture, which was common.<sup>89</sup> The exhortations in 9:50 for the readers to “have salt in yourselves” and to “be at peace with one another” aim to ensure that the witness of the Christian community does not lose its flavour, and that there is no internal dissension over what should be done when a member of the community is arrested. Again, these verses point to the expectation of further arrests, torture and execution.

A Christian brought before a Roman magistrate could not expect a criminal trial as we know it. The hearing consisted only of an interrogation, and the magistrate could be quite arbitrary in applying penalties. For non-citizens, no appeal was possible. Magistrates were not subject to counsel, and applied harsher and more degrading penalties to those of the lower orders.<sup>90</sup> The Urban Prefect supervised

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<sup>87</sup> There, for “end,” Mark uses the word *telos*, also meaning the goal to be achieved.

<sup>88</sup> 9:33–50 tend to be treated as isolated sayings in Bible translations and in commentaries. However, 9:41 merely continues the discussion that arose in 9:33 on the nature of true greatness and on being a servant. The dialogue in 9:38–40 seems to be an interruption, but it is consistent with Mark's motif of the inattentive disciples. They had, for the second time, just ignored Jesus' prediction of his execution, and begun to argue about their own positions on the power scale, announcing that they were exercising their own authority now (9:38). At 9:41, Jesus returns to the issue of who is great, with the second *gar* in two verses, linking it back to 9:37, and to the theme of being a servant. The disciples' focus on power is now seen as a contrast to Jesus' praise for those who are truly great: (a) those who risk their lives to offer solace to prisoners (9:41), and (b) those “little ones” who are prepared to accept martyrdom (9:42–48). “In my name,” and similar phrases, keep ringing through these verses (9:37, 38, 39, 41), linking the dialogue together, and stressing that these verses relate to those known to be “of Christ.”

<sup>89</sup> Methods of torture were diverse. Cyprian (*Letter to Donatus* 10) directs his reader to look at the forum where “close at hand is the spear and the sword, and the executioner also; there is the claw that tears, the rack that stretches, the fire that burns up—more tortures for one poor human body than it has limbs.” Although from a later period, Cyprian's observation reflected long-standing practices. See MacMullen, “Judicial Savagery” 147–52.

<sup>90</sup> Garnsey, *Social Status* 1–6, 103; Sherwin-White, *Roman Society* 3, 23. Ste Croix

all such cases in Rome and probably heard such capital cases himself.<sup>91</sup> It is very unlikely that such a crime would be handled at a higher level; during the Principate, the emperor would not have become involved in criminal cases unless senators were involved.<sup>92</sup>

It would have been risky for the family or friends of the accused Christian to attend the interrogation by the magistrate, although the court often had many spectators.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps to remind of this dilemma, Mark has Peter “at a distance” and standing “down below in the courtyard” as Jesus appears before the Sanhedrin (14:54, 66). To go too close in order to find out the fate of their loved one would have been to risk death; even a slave-girl might recognize such a friend or relative as an associate of the accused, and cry out, “This is one of them!” (14:69), and it would soon be the judge asking the questions.<sup>94</sup> In setting out this scene as he does, Mark may be depicting the dilemma—indeed, even the distress—of his readers when fellow Christians faced trial. Thus, the accused is forced to face the judge alone. There will be no advocate; only the Holy Spirit can help at that moment (13:11).

This may explain why Mark describes Jesus as being almost completely silent at his trials (14:61; 15:5). With the Roman fear of conspiracy, especially among foreign groups, it is likely that the accused Christian was asked for the names of other Christians. The best policy may have been to remain silent, especially given that the outcome of the ‘trial’ was certain. Jesus sets an example for the accused of Rome.

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(“Christians” 11) points out that there were large areas of Roman criminal law that were unsatisfactory compared with property law. Crook (*Law and Life* 67) points out that we are “exceedingly ill-informed” about how the great bulk of ordinary crime by lower class people was dealt with, but that it was probable that “summary punishment” was the normal procedure by a magistrate.

<sup>91</sup> Robinson, *Ancient Rome* 181–90, 200; John A. Crook, *Law and Life in Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967) 68–72. His office was first made permanent by Nero, and was always filled by a senator. On the role of the Urban Prefect, and his subordinate, the Prefect of the Night Watch, and the resources available to them, see Robinson, *Ancient Rome* 175–95; *Criminal Law* 6–17; Nippel, *Public Order* 91–97; Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 99.

<sup>92</sup> Garnsey, *Social Status* 43–44. In 24 CE, Tiberius personally investigated the case of Plautius Silvanus who threw his wife out of the window one day, inspecting the crime scene himself, but Silvanus was a senator. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.22.

<sup>93</sup> See the examples of spectators at Christian trials in Benko, *Pagan Rome* 167–97.

<sup>94</sup> See the case mentioned below (Justin, *2 Apol.* 2), where the bystanders spoke up and were immediately interrogated and executed.

The way in which Mark has constructed the trial scene before Pilate may be a criticism of the treatment of accused Christians in Rome. In particular, there is the strange answer that Mark has Jesus give to Pilate in answer to the quite unexpected question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (15:2).<sup>95</sup> As his only response to Pilate, Jesus says, “*Su legeis*,” which has led to much debate—did he give a non-committal response (“you say so”), or an affirmative answer (“it is as you say”)?<sup>96</sup> A better alternative is that Jesus asks a *question*, “Is it you saying so?”—in other words, “Are you saying this, or is someone else?”<sup>97</sup> After all, there was no reason why Pilate should have asked whether Jesus claimed to be king at that point, unless that charge had been laid against him. This is confirmed by the following verse, which is usually translated: “Then the chief priests accused him of many things” (NRSV). However, Mark uses the imperfect tense, *kategōroun*, which, as an inceptive imperfect, can mean that they began to accuse him, but more normally points to a continuing past action. The word is a legal term that means “to bring charges against,” and the whole episode would make more sense if it is read this way:

Pilate interrogated him: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “Is it you saying this?” The high priests were laying many charges against him. But Pilate again questioned him: “Why don’t you answer? Look, they are accusing you of many things!”

The scene, therefore, has Pilate bring up a charge that had been laid by the Jewish authorities, and Jesus’ reply effectively suggests that the Roman judge does not have a mind of his own, but is just unthinkingly repeating what others had already been saying. This is a Markan criticism of the Roman authorities who had only relied

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<sup>95</sup> Juel (*Messiah* 51) has pointed out that “King of the Jews” is a Roman formulation, and that Mark distinguishes this from Jewish terminology, which would be “King of Israel.”

<sup>96</sup> Commonly, “you say so” is the preferred translation. For example, Anderson, *Mark* 336; Taylor, *Mark* 579; Stock, *Message* 390; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1986) 109. Heil (*Model* 322) has “you say it,” and Adela Yarbro Collins, “From Noble Death to Crucified Messiah,” *NTS* 40 (1994) 493, sees it as “more positive than negative.” Bond (“Pilate” 107) surveys scholarship, and joins with the majority in seeing it as a non-committal statement by Jesus: “The precise meaning . . . is difficult to determine.”

<sup>97</sup> John 18:34 makes this idea explicit, but it is proposed here that it is already present in Mark.

on the views of others, and had not investigated Christian practices and beliefs themselves to see if any crime had been committed.<sup>98</sup> To the crowd's cry of "Crucify him!" Pilate's last words are: "Why? What evil has he done?" (15:14)—a question that the Roman authorities should have been asking when such a baseless charge was raised against followers of Jesus. There is a sense of frustration with Pilate's trial that he did not go far enough in investigating the truth of the situation about Jesus.<sup>99</sup> In the end, mirroring the situation of the Christians of Rome, Jesus is not found guilty of any specific wrongdoing, but is executed anyway.

At the reader's inquisition, she or he would only have been asked a very simple question: "Are you a Christian?" This is the form of question reported in the accounts of the martyrs in later centuries, and it is usually the only question asked. In the case of the woman denounced under Antoninus Pius (see Page 223), Justin reports that, when her teacher was brought before the magistrate, "He was asked only this question—whether he was a Christian." A bystander, who objected that this was the only question asked, was also accused, and his reply was "I am" (Justin Martyr, *2 Apol.* 2). They were both executed immediately. In the reports of the martyrdoms of Justin, Chariton, Charito, Euelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberian, all are asked, "Are you a Christian?" and they all answer, "I am."<sup>100</sup> Although these martyr texts are much later, and idealised, there is no reason to believe that, from the earliest interrogations, the question and response were any different.<sup>101</sup> A member of Mark's community, too, was likely to have been simply asked whether they were a Christian. "I am" is the answer called for by this Gospel.

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<sup>98</sup> The confusion of the witnesses in the trial before the Sanhedrin (14:56) may also be meant to reflect the general lack of knowledge about Jesus. A local allusion may be present here, as Nero had arranged false witnesses against his enemies, according to Tacitus, *Annals* 14.62; 16.8.

<sup>99</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 273) calls the scene with Pilate a "near-recognition scene," but he merely appears to be confused and under pressure.

<sup>100</sup> Kerezstes, *Imperial Rome* 167–69. In *The Passion Story of the Martyrs of Lugdunum* 18, 20, "I am" or "I am a Christian" were the only answers the Christians would give. See also *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 10, *The Acts of Scillitan Martyrs*, and *The Martyrdom of the Holy and Blessed Apostle Apollonius*; these texts are reprinted in Kerezstes, *Imperial Rome* 190–97. See also the martyrs of Lyons in Eusebius, *E.H.* 5.1.10, 20, 21.

<sup>101</sup> T. D. Barnes, "Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*," *JTS* 19 (1968) 528–29, contends that most of the martyr texts are based on eyewitness reports and court records, as does G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

It is striking, then, that in answer to the High Priest's demand that he identify himself, Jesus models the answer for all followers by saying, "I am" (14:62).<sup>102</sup> Mark chooses this response to show how a person faithful to the gospel should respond to *that question* about their identity by the authorities. Jesus does not hesitate, and neither should they.<sup>103</sup> For Mark, *these* are the words that the Holy Spirit will empower the Christian to utter (13:11).

G. W. H. Lampe has shown that the early martyrs were thought to be inspired by the Holy Spirit in answering the question in this way, and that this moment was always seen as an opportunity. The role of the Holy Spirit was to inspire the accused to boldly proclaim Christ.<sup>104</sup> Mark focuses at some length on this key moment before the judge: "When they lead you away, arresting you, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (13:11). Indeed, Mark's entire teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian is about his or her confrontation with the Roman authorities: first, the Spirit is said to force the baptised person to face Satan/Rome (1:12–13), and the only other mention of the Spirit in this Gospel occurs when the Christian, facing the Roman judge, will be empowered to witness. Mark insists that others would

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Press, 1995) 50, who claims that they are based on the records of court stenographers. Daniel Boyarin, "Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism," *J ECS* 6 (1998) 588, argues against their reliability, citing Gary Bisbee. See Kyle (*Spectacles of Death* 255 nn. 2–3) on the lack of records of the deaths of Christian martyrs, complained about by Prudentius in the late Empire, and for references on the debate over the evidential value of martyr texts.

<sup>102</sup> This does not deny that "I am" may also allude to the divine name, as Jesus confesses his identity here. But the Christian also affirms his or her identity by uttering these words. Donahue (*Christ* 222) concludes that the trial before the Jewish authorities in 14:53–62 was meant to portray Jesus standing trial as his later followers had done, and that "its function is to give them the paradigm of the good confession in the face of trial." However, he does not suggest that "I am" was intended as a model.

<sup>103</sup> Juell (*Messiah* 4, 77) describes 14:61–62 as one of the climaxes of the Gospel, noting that only here does Jesus identify himself: Jesus "answers without reserve . . . the question about his identity." In the following scene (14:66–72), Peter fails to identify himself.

<sup>104</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "Martyrdom and Inspiration," in William Horbury and Brian McNeil (eds), *Suffering, Martyrdom and the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 119–27. He considers that this idea originated with Mark 13:9–11. Mark gives an example of Spirit-impelled witnessing through the remainder of Jesus' response to the High Priest in 14:62 ("And you will see the Son of Man . . .").

only be convinced of the gospel if Christians publicly witnessed before the authorities, as Jesus had.<sup>105</sup>

The recurring mentions of, or allusions to, Jesus coming again (8:38; 9:1; 13:35: “the master (*kyrios*) of the house”) most likely refer to this moment of testing. When he came to the Temple, it was condemned for not being ready. Similarly, for the Christian, the coming of the Lord occurs when they have to be ready—at the moment of testing when he or she is standing before the magistrate, and *the* question is asked. It is there that “the master of the house (church?)” will come (13:35).<sup>106</sup> This is suggested by the listing there of the four parts of the night that correspond to Mark’s account of Jesus’ own arrest and trial—evening (arrest), midnight (trial before the Sanhedrin), cockcrow (the failure of Peter), and dawn (trial before Pilate). At Jesus’ arrest, he says that “the hour has come” (14:41). The warning that the Lord will come at “that hour” (13:35) promises, then, that Jesus will be present at their trial, just as it is promised by 13:11 that the Holy Spirit, too, will be present.

Moreover, 8:38 deals with the same moment, when the follower has to choose between physical life and eternal life (cf. 8:34–37). At this *krisis*, the accused is invited by the magistrate to be ashamed of Jesus, for the man he or she worships is known as a criminal executed by a Roman prefect in the provinces.<sup>107</sup> But, by this verse, the believer is promised that Jesus will be present—“when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” The angels have the role in this Gospel of gathering his “chosen” (13:27), so that the verse becomes both a warning of the consequences of being ashamed of Jesus and an implied promise of a gathering to eternal life of

<sup>105</sup> Ignatius of Antioch (Rom. 3.2) would later remind Roman Christians how they “taught others” to really be a Christian, that is, by being martyred: “I shall be a convincing Christian,” he wrote, “only when the world sees me no more.”

<sup>106</sup> The image in 13:34–36 of the servant waiting for the master to come home speaks of the need for constant alertness (v. 36: “for he may find you asleep”). A common motif on Roman vessels was the figure of a slave with a lamp, waiting for the master to arrive. For an example, see Gardner and Wiedermann, *Roman Household* Fig. 4 facing 116. Paoli (*Rome* 37) comments that slaves would accompany their master with a light, and they “squatted for hours on the steps [outside banquets at night] while their masters drank.” Mark may be alluding to this practice, reminding Christian slaves to be alert for their true “master.”

<sup>107</sup> Even as late as the third century, in a list of several horrific things Christians are said to do, Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 9.4) has: “There are also stories about the objects of their veneration . . . a man who was punished with death as a criminal.”

those who are not ashamed, and who are prepared to give up their physical life.<sup>108</sup>

#### EXEMPLARY PUNISHMENT

*Why, what evil has he done? (Mark 15:14)*

In Rome, execution would probably have been carried out quickly unless the condemned person was saved for the games. Prior to Jesus' execution, Mark pointedly mentions the *praetōrion* (15:16) where Jesus is mocked and abused by the "whole cohort," perhaps alluding to the situation in Rome, if prisoners were under the charge of the Praetorian Guard. Later martyr texts report abuse by jailers.<sup>109</sup> Mockery was a typical aspect of the execution of criminals by the Romans (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44: "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths"). In Mark's depiction of Jesus' execution, mockery continues from the moment of condemnation right to the moment of his death (15:17–20, 29–32, 35–36). The public humiliation of the offender was a key aspect of the punishment, as it emphasised their total rejection by society.

Some criminals were executed at noon (lunch hour) at the games.<sup>110</sup> Once, Seneca visited the circus at that hour, and was disgusted at the behaviour of the crowd, but did not question that the victims deserved to die as criminals—they were enemies of society (Seneca, *Letters* 7.3–5).<sup>111</sup> He does not give the nature of their crimes, and

<sup>108</sup> Again, 9:1 may have the same referent. In the story, it may refer to the glory of Jesus shown in both the Transfiguration that immediately follows, and at the cross. But at the reader level, it follows 8:38, promising that the Kingdom of God becomes fully apparent when the follower passes the test at their trial.

<sup>109</sup> Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 249. Justin Martyr (*2 Apol.* 2) mentions that the Christian Ptolemaeus was thrown into prison by a centurion, interrogated and "punished." The centurion then took him before the magistrate, acting as the informant. This is one example of a Christian being sought out by, presumably, an officer of the Praetorian Guard.

<sup>110</sup> Claudius revelled in these executions. Suetonius, *Claudius* 34; Dio, *History* 60.13.4. For further references, see J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London: Bodley Head, 1969) 288, 298–301. Stambaugh (*Roman City* 237) says that the morning had wild beast hunts, and at noon, criminals were executed by a gladiator, a bear or a lion. Coleman ("Fatal Charades" 56) confirms this practice, citing also Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.10.47, who refers to the "lunch-hour spectacle" in a later period.

<sup>111</sup> Coleman ("Fatal Charades" 58) says that the spectators at Roman executions were not just being entertained, but were "endorsing the course of justice," and



probably did not ask. In the same way, onlookers may not have known what was the crime of the Christians.

Seneca's letter also mentions that the crowd did not like the criminals refusing to fight each other for their entertainment. We do not know if Christians were forced to fight each other or gladiators at this time, but the Gospel does not hint of such a method of execution. It has been suggested that the scene before Pilate, where the mob is given a choice between a criminal and Jesus (15:7–15), is a parody of the games where the crowd decides who should live.<sup>112</sup> However, that scene does not appear to be an allusion to the execution of Christians. It seems to be directed at the injustice of Roman judges (see Chapter 4). In any event, Christians are unlikely to have fought in the games.<sup>113</sup>

The Romans had a number of ways of executing criminals, but crucifixion, burning or exposure to wild beasts were the most common for non-citizens.<sup>114</sup> Citizens would be beheaded. It is notable, then, that Mark's Gospel mentions or alludes to all the main forms of capital punishment at various points. John the Baptist is given the 'honour' of being beheaded, while Jesus is crucified. In 1:13, there had been the allusion to the execution by wild beasts. In 9:49, the brief warning, "everyone will be salted by fire," rather than referring to a metaphorical fire of purification, as often claimed,<sup>115</sup> in addition to pointing to torture by fire (see above), is likely to have reminded readers that their trauma had begun with the burning of fellow Christians, and that their community had already been purified by fire.<sup>116</sup> Thus, execution by wild animals, beheading, fire and crucifixion all appear in the Gospel, as well as imprisonment and torture.

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celebrating the ridding of *noxii* from Rome. Israel Drapkin, *Crime and Punishment in the Ancient World* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989) 230, adds that executions were also seen as a sacrifice to the offended gods, as crime was an offence against the divinity, and punishment was a means of expiation. See also Kyle (*Spectacles of Death* 1–5, 43–46, 53) on the acceptance of violence in Roman society at all levels, especially towards outsiders and criminals, seen as "legitimate objects of violence."

<sup>112</sup> Robert L. Merritt, "Jesus Barabbas and the Paschal Pardon," *JBL* 104 (1985) 57–68; Myers, *Strong Man* 381.

<sup>113</sup> For the history of the Roman custom of forcing criminals to fight one another and beasts, see Michael Grant, *Gladiators* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995 [Orig. 1967]) 10, 16, 123. At an early stage, the Romans may have discovered that Christians would refuse to fight each other.

<sup>114</sup> Drapkin (*Crime* 231) lists a number of unusual punishments.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Hooker, *Mark* 233; Lane, *Mark* 349.

<sup>116</sup> Lane (*Mark* 349) makes this observation. Kyle (*Spectacles of Death* 170) adds that

Nevertheless, crucifixion was common, if not usual, as the condemned person remained on public display for days on a busy thoroughfare as a warning to others.<sup>117</sup> Pseudo-Quintilian reveals the Roman policy:

Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect. (*Decl.* 274)<sup>118</sup>

In Mark's Gospel, the crucifixion of Jesus is portrayed just as it would have occurred for a criminal, or a Christian, in Rome, and it has to be considered possible that Mark has based his whole crucifixion narrative, not on an earlier account that he had received of Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem, but on what he knew of the procedure in Rome. Jesus' final prediction of his fate—"they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him" (10:34)—is the typical sequence that could be expected by the condemned person.<sup>119</sup> In Rome, crucifixion was normally carried out on the Campus Esquilinus outside the east gate of the city on the Via Tiburtina (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.32; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25). Mark says that Jesus was crucified in the morning (the third hour). The hour for the crucifixion of criminals in Rome is not known, if indeed there was a fixed hour at all, but an early hour would mean the longest exposure to the sun.

Moreover, if Jesus' triumphal procession to the Place of the Skull was meant to mirror the Flavian Triumph, Mark may have specifically mentioned the third hour as the time of Jesus' crucifixion to remind readers of the part of the day in which the Triumph was held. Josephus (*JW* 7.124) reports that the ceremony began "at the break of day" with speeches and prayers, and the procession began soon

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fire was a means of execution as well as torture of slaves, and was later used to torture and kill Christians.

<sup>117</sup> An inscription from Pompeii (CIL IV 9983a) has a line advertising that criminals would be crucified in the amphitheatre as part of a show. Cited in Coleman, "Fatal Charades" 56, who points out that crucifixion might even be combined with burning, or with attacks by animals, with the criminal as bait.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in Hengel, *Crucifixion* 50. MacMullen, "Judicial Savagery" 151 n. 12, dates Pseudo-Quintilian's *Declamation* in the second century.

<sup>119</sup> See Kyle (*Spectacles of Death* 53) for flogging and stripping as a normal procedure before crucifixion. Hengel (*Crucifixion* 26–28) says that crucifixion was normally preceded by various kinds of torture.

afterwards. Jesus' trial before Pilate began early in the morning (15:1).

The nature of the punishment was often designed to mock the crime, often setting up a dramatic role-play for the execution, frequently with mythical elements. Coleman calls it a "fatal charade."<sup>120</sup> Mark presents the death of Jesus as such a 'fatal charade': he is mockingly crowned by the soldiers, dressed in purple, and acclaimed as "King of the Jews" (15:18) in line with the accusation against him. The "charge" (*aitas*) that was attached to his cross, "King of the Jews" (15:26), ironically states Jesus' true identity—his kingship over his crucifiers. We do not know what charge, if any, was attached to the crosses of members of the Roman church; it may just have said "Christian," thought to be a crime by the Romans, but, again ironically, it was a title of which they could be proud.

Mark's brief scene of the centurion who makes the dramatic exclamation upon Jesus' death (15:39) has been much discussed, particularly the reason for his response, why a centurion was chosen, and how Mark's enigmatic *hijos theou* should be translated—"the Son of God," "God's Son," or "a son of God." But the centurion does not function as either a model Gentile, or as a model Roman representative, as often proposed, for the text gives no signal of either role.<sup>121</sup> Rather, he functions simply as the one in charge of the executing party (cf. 15:44; in 15:45, he confirms Jesus' death), and so his appearance on the stage at this climactic moment evokes for the reader the execution scenes with which they are familiar. In the story, rather than venerating the image of the emperor on the standard of the legion, this centurion acclaims another son of god raised on a pole. There would be considerable irony here if Mark's read-

<sup>120</sup> Coleman, "Fatal Charades" 46–47. In 1 Cor 4:9, Paul uses a figure that reflects the public nature of Roman executions: "I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world."

<sup>121</sup> For recent discussion on the ambiguity of the centurion's acclamation and the way a reader would perceive it in relation to its use for the emperor, see Collins, "Greeks and Romans" 94–100; Johnson "Confession" 408–413; Whitney T. Shiner, "The Ambiguous Pronouncement of the Centurion and the Shrouding of Meaning in Mark," *JST* 78 (2000) 3–22. There may also be a sense of his bravery here, as a centurion would be taking a risk in acclaiming a criminal with a term often applied to the emperor. For one thing, a centurion was reliant on the emperor's approval for promotion. G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) 86–87. He would also be entitled to a substantial grant on completion of service. Webster, *Amy* 118.

ers were aware of the veneration by the Roman soldiers of their standards in the Temple a few months earlier. But for the Christians who had witnessed their colleagues on the crosses outside Rome, Mark provides a scene where the head of the executing party looks up at the crucified person and says, “Without a doubt, this person was a child of God!”<sup>122</sup>

After the crucifixion, Mark has two scenes: the first (15:40–41) has women looking on from a distance—perhaps a familiar and poignant scene for readers whose relatives and friends had been crucified, and who had not dared go closer lest they identify themselves. In Mark’s story, the women do not go and claim the body. But in the second scene (15:43–45), Joseph of Arimathea goes to the Roman prefect to ask for it. Mark says that he “got up the courage” (*tolmēsas*) to go, using a word that denotes daring. Paul used it in Rom 5:7 of someone who might be courageous enough to lay down his or her life for another. It is a fitting word, as only a very brave person would have gone to the authorities in Rome to ask for the body of their Christian relative or friend. Joseph is said to be alone in committing his act of bravery. The bodies of the crucified were normally left to rot on the cross and to be devoured by birds and dogs to add to the horror for passers-by. Horace calls the vulture “the Esquiline bird,” and Juvenal says that “the vulture hurries from dead cattle to dogs and crosses” and so disposes of corpses, even in Rome.<sup>123</sup>

Unusually, but not impossibly, Jesus is buried. There was a cemetery on the Esquiline, near the place of crucifixion, as Mark implies of Jesus’ place of burial (15:46). Excavations have uncovered both human and animal bones there in pits, mixed with assorted rubbish,<sup>124</sup> and the remains of Christians may be among them, as many would not have received a proper burial or cremation. Indeed, there may be an allusion to a common method of disposing of the bodies

<sup>122</sup> The Greek is quite emphatic: *Alēthōs, houtos ho anthrōpos*. . . .

<sup>123</sup> Cited in Hengel, *Crucifixion* 54; he adds (87): “It was a stereotyped picture that the crucified victim served as food for wild beasts and birds of prey. In this way, his humiliation was complete.” See also the example he gives (43 n. 9) from Pliny, *Natural History* 36.107. Artemidorus wrote of the crucified: “His substance is sufficient to keep many birds . . . the crucified are stripped naked and lose their flesh” (*Interpretation of Dreams* 2.53; see also 4.49). Malalas (*Chron.* 257) claims that Nero ordered the bodies of Peter and Paul to be left unburied.

<sup>124</sup> For the use of the Esquiline for executions and burials, see Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 164–69.

of the unwanted in Rome in the warning in 9:42 that it would be better to be thrown into the sea than for someone to lead astray a disciple: often, bodies would simply be thrown into the Tiber, thus expunging the criminal from the city.<sup>125</sup> In fact, less than two years earlier, the body of the emperor Vitellius had been thrown into that river after his murder (Suetonius, *Vitellius* 17).

Of Jesus' execution, it has been said that Mark reports the event with "the detachment of a military report,"<sup>126</sup> and even that "Jesus' death focuses very little on Jesus' physical suffering."<sup>127</sup> He certainly does not describe the crucifixion of Jesus; he simply has: "And they crucified him" (15:24). But Mark did not need to describe the process, as every one of his readers knew exactly what it was like, designed as it was to maximise humiliation and pain over a prolonged period. His scene of Jesus' crucifixion would cause his readers to vividly recall their own familiar experiences—the victim carrying his cross through Rome and out the gate, the mocking of the passers-by, and the fearful Christian friends and family looking on, trying not to appear to be associated with the one crucified lest they be challenged and asked, "Are you a Christian?"<sup>128</sup>

The speed of the text is reduced markedly from the opening chapters, until time seems to stand still at 15:34.<sup>129</sup> The physical suffering is not the focus. All that happens while Jesus is hanging on the cross (15:25–36) is that people keep mocking him—people passing by, the authorities, even others being crucified—a picture of the scene on the Via Tiburtina. Some of the mockers seem to have come just to watch, and to have some fun with him (15:35–36). They scornfully

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<sup>125</sup> The body of the emperor Elagabalus was thrown into the Tiber, attached to a weight (222 CE). For extensive evidence of this method of disposing of bodies, see Kyle, *Spectacles of Death* 213–24; also 251–53 on the later execution of Christians by drowning, including some with millstones tied around their neck. Drapkin (*Crime* 231) mentions a condemned person thrown into the sea in a sack. Of course, in the story, the disciples could hardly have been warned about being thrown into the river, and Mark has used instead the stereotyped idea of destruction in the sea (cf. 11:23).

<sup>126</sup> Bryan, *Preface* 133. Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 467) describes it as "written concisely and matter-of-factly. It is as if the narrator is reluctant to describe the scene at length."

<sup>127</sup> Juell, *Mark* 217.

<sup>128</sup> Drapkin (*Crime* 277) notes that the death penalty in the late Republic could be applied to the whole family of the offender, and it is possible that whole Christian families were executed.

<sup>129</sup> Smith (*Lion* 41) notes the slowing down of the narrative.

suggest that he save himself (15:30, 31, 32). But the one who tries to save his or her life will lose it (8:35), and God must be trusted to save. And yet the agony continues. The issue, however, is not the pain, but that God does not seem to be there to save you when you need him, and the wait seems endless.

### MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

*Don't you care that we are being destroyed? (4:38)*

Members of Mark's community would have been suffering from an accumulation of stress after years of witnessing the horrific deaths of family members, friends and leaders, and from the daily fear of arrest and execution, from internal tensions caused by betrayal and apostasy, perhaps from acrimony and differences in views between the different house-churches, from the hostility of non-Christian family members, from the strain of living apart from a hostile Roman society, and from the political uncertainty. Many of the readers of the Gospel are likely to have been traumatised, similar to the effect on those suffering prolonged exposure to the risk of death and to seeing others die daily in a war or in a concentration camp.<sup>130</sup> They are likely to have been dispirited and even depressed, facing, in addition to the physical threat, a spiritual and theological crisis because of the apparent absence and powerlessness of God, or even any sign of his desire to put an end to their suffering.

If the setting proposed is correct, Mark's Gospel was produced in an intensely emotional atmosphere. Deep personal traumas leave marks on texts produced by those affected, and the mood in the Markan community has accordingly left a pronounced imprint on this Gospel. Soon after Mark wrote, Quintilian was teaching Roman students: "The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others, is in my opinion, first to feel those emotions oneself" (*Inst.* 6.2.25). But Mark would not have had difficulty in empathising with his readers'

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<sup>130</sup> This is not the recently identified "posttraumatic stress disorder," which becomes evident some time after the trauma, as Mark's readers were still in the middle of the stressful situation. Although some could have been suffering particularly from the horror of Nero's mass murder, for all of them, their trauma was ongoing. Trauma is defined as "an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects." *Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary 2001*.

emotional reaction to their situation, as he was sharing their experiences. Thus, both his own emotions and those of other members of his community can be found in this text.

It should be no surprise, then, that the protagonist in this narrative is very emotional.<sup>131</sup> The emotions of Jesus are brought into play as early as 1:41; Mark tends to use words that describe deep emotion, and here he uses a word that suggests a deep, gut feeling: *splagchnizomai* (*splagchnon* = bowels). It is also used in 6:34 and 8:2 of Jesus' compassion for the crowds that need feeding (the sheep without a shepherd), and by the father of the epileptic boy in 9:22 who delivers a plaintive cry for help. Again, Jesus is emotional when his opponents will not help the man with the withered hand in 3:5, becoming angry and "deeply grieved" at their "hardness of heart." In Gethsemane, Jesus is "deeply grieved" (14:33: *perilypos*) after his disciples were just "grieved" (14:19: *lypeō*). Indeed, he is grieved "to death" (14:34), and literally collapses (*piptō*) on the ground (14:35). Milder emotional expressions occur elsewhere: he "sighs deeply" (*anastenazō*) at the incomprehension of his opponents (8:12), and twice he appears to be deeply frustrated (8:17–21; 9:19).

Moreover, emotional scenes occur regularly in the Gospel. In fact, the whole Gospel can be read as a series of highly charged encounters. There is no long teaching discourse in this Gospel to interrupt this style, nor long collections of parables or sayings. Even Chapters 4 and 13 contain strong emotional reminders of persecutions and suffering. In opening his narrative, Mark seems to have begun by deliberately stirring the emotions of his reader, constructing the baptism scene to remind of the reader's own baptism.<sup>132</sup> There, Jesus is portrayed as coming up out of the water and the Spirit coming upon him, followed by an inner voice that affirms the baptisand as "my Beloved child, in whom I delight" (1:10–11). Baptism would have been a special moment for those early Christians, baptised as adults, and Mark repeats variations on the word "baptism" six times in six

<sup>131</sup> Commentators have noted the frequency of the mentions of Jesus' emotions in Mark's Gospel compared with the other Gospels. See, for example, Beavis, *Audience* 177. Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 433) finds only five examples; Dowd (*Prayer* 153) says that "reports of Jesus' emotions are rare in the Markan narrative," but then cites nine instances.

<sup>132</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 69) say that this scene would have "resonances with the experiences of Mark's first readers—they received the 'spirit of adoption' that Paul described, but it had not spared them trials."

verses leading up to this scene (1:4–9) to help trigger this memory. Jesus' baptism is immediately followed by trials with wild beasts (1:12–13), a stark and emotional reminder of the deaths of others who had been baptised.

The emotions of the community are also found in Mark's depiction of the disciples, who are afraid many times, and whose fear increases as the cross draws nearer. Throughout, the disciples are unwilling to even face the possibility of martyrdom to the extent that, every time Jesus predicts his suffering and death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33), the disciples are either horrified at the thought and propose an alternative, or change the subject completely. We have the odd situation where their leader tells them that he is soon going to be murdered, and the disciples completely ignore him, discussing instead their own ambitions. This is more than normal fear—they are in complete denial, continually refusing to face the possibility of the cross. As the consequences of following Jesus become clearer, they become panic-stricken (10:28, 32), and their last action in the Gospel is a hasty flight from the cross (14:50–52), leaving us with an enduring image of their backs. The image of the fleeing naked youth might have evoked a familiar saying in Rome: Cicero, in a speech against Clodius (now lost), colourfully described another headlong flight: "He fled from the court like a man escaping naked from a fire."<sup>133</sup> The Gospel ends with another panicky flight of disciples (16:8). Peter, who so often seems to speak for all disciples, is last seen sobbing in the darkness. The depiction of the disciples provides some sense of the pervasive panic and fear in the readers behind the Gospel.

Characters in the story also play the part of the reader, uttering the cries, prayers and questions of the Christians of Rome. One of the most dramatic pleas occurs in 4:38: "Teacher, don't you care that we are being destroyed?" This expresses the feeling of the reader who, for seven years, has been faced with an apparently asleep Jesus (4:38). The absence of Jesus and God is a recurring motif. Mark arranges Chapter 6 so that, when the disciples are sent out on mission for the first time (6:7–30), Jesus is uncharacteristically absent from the story. During Jesus' absence from the text, Mark inserts the gruesome story of the martyrdom of John, not only foreshadowing the martyrdom that Christian witnesses would suffer while on

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<sup>133</sup> Cited in Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.81.



their mission, but also showing that Jesus would not seem to be present when that occurred. In this Gospel, there are no angels ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane (cf. Luke 22:43), and Abba says nothing when his son cries out. Again, when Jesus undergoes his trials and execution, God seems to be totally absent. Even at the final scene, Jesus is absent, and the disciples are told: “He is not here” (16:6). There is only the promise that “you will see him” in Galilee, the place of mission and ministry in the Gospel.

Distressed characters in the story maintain the emotional mood: the outcast in 1:40–45 (“if you want to, you can cleanse me”), the demonised man who appears to be a beast (5:1–8), the incurable woman in 5:26 (“she had spent all she had . . . and she was getting worse”). There is one father’s emotional appeal for his epileptic son (9:22: “If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us”), and another father’s emotional appeal for his dying daughter in 5:22–23 (“He fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come . . .’”). In the latter case, Jesus says to those who are weeping and wailing, “Why make such a commotion and weep? The little girl is not dead but sleeping” (5:39). There are a number of emotional touches in this scene: the weeping of the mourners, the presence of both the father and the mother at the bedside of the dead girl (5:40), the scorn of the onlookers at the idea that she might live again, the mention that the child was approaching marriageable age. Moreover, Mark has ordered Chapter 5 so that, when the girl dies, Jesus is absent. This scene, in which Jesus commands the girl to “Rise!” (5:41), is constructed as a message of comfort and hope in the midst of mourning, and perhaps especially addresses those parents of children who had died during those difficult years.<sup>134</sup>

The depth of doubt in the readers is further expressed in the prayers of the characters, which simultaneously become model prayers for the readers: “I believe: help my unbelief!” (9:24), “The spirit is certainly willing, but the flesh is weak!” (14:38), and “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not

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<sup>134</sup> Mark insists on the importance of children in the community in 9:36–37 and 10:13–16, and children are mentioned on several other occasions: 7:26, 30; 9:17–27; 10:29–30; 12:19–22; 13:12. Children in the community may have died during the food shortage and plague that went through Rome in the late sixties. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.13.

what I want, but what you want" (14:36). On two occasions, Jesus had taught that "all things are possible" for those who believe (9:23; 10:27), but in his moment of testing, he, like the reader, must believe it himself. His prayer (14:36) expresses their hope ("remove this cup from me"), while providing the ideal response ("not what I want, but what you want.").

Jesus also asks some challenging questions that, at the same time, recognise the fear and uncertainty of the reader. In 10:38, he asks, "Are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink, or the baptism with which I shall be baptised?" In 8:29, he looks straight out of the text at the reader and asks, "But *you*, who do *you* say I am?"

At times, the cries of the characters simply reflect the reader's desperation: "Have pity on us and help us!" (9:22), "Look, we have abandoned everything and followed you!" (10:28), and "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (twice: 10:47, 48). But the most telling indicator of the minds of the readers occurs at the dramatic climax of the story. Jesus' cry on the cross is certainly intended to point the reader to Ps 22, a psalm that moves from seeming despair to trust in God and belief that, through God's intervention and vindication (Ps 22:24), "all the families of nations" will bow down before Yahweh, and will "tell of his saving justice to a people yet unborn" (Ps 22:27–31).<sup>135</sup> However, at the story level, these are the final words of Jesus.<sup>136</sup> He has followed his own teaching that the way by which one gains eternal life is to give up everything for the sake of the gospel (8:34). He has progressively given up his home, family, career, reputation, body and blood (Eucharist), will, freedom, companions, clothes, dignity, and his life. Now, Jesus reveals that he has also given up that most precious thing—his felt experience of the presence of God in his life.

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<sup>135</sup> Robbins (*Texture* 50) has argued that Mark reverses Ps 22 in his sequence of allusions to it, so that it ends in despair. It is very doubtful that these allusions would be read this way. Rather the earlier allusions prepare the reader to consider the whole meaning of the psalm when they come to the direct quotation of its opening line. Schmidt ("Cry of Dereliction" 149) points out that "Jews sometimes cited an opening line to represent an entire psalm," and sees it as a cry of hope, as the closing words of the psalm proclaim. See Watts (*New Exodus* 135) for rabbinical examples of this technique. Mark's scriptural allusions often suggest that the reader should read beyond the referenced verse (for example, 1:10 points to Isa 64:1–12).

<sup>136</sup> Best (*Temptation* lxiii) calls this cry "the moment of supreme dramatic tension in the Gospel," but reads this scene from the viewpoint of an atoning death (lxxiv), as is common; as a further example, see Collins, "Noble Death" 481–502.

But this cry is not really the cry of Jesus. It is the cry, and accusation, of the Roman reader who, like all people suffering in darkness, exclaim, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned *me*?”

Yet, this is not Jesus’ last act; he goes one step further. He responds like the reader of this Gospel who, out of their trauma and fear, has gone beyond all rational thought, and for whom words can no longer adequately express the apparent meaninglessness of their suffering. Finally (15:37), Jesus just screams.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PREPARING THE WAY THE SHAPE OF MARK'S RHETORIC

#### PART I: THE WAY OF THE READER

*I am sending my messenger in front of you (Mark 1:2)*

To this point, the concern has been to identify the historical situation of, and pressures upon, the Markan community. In doing so, Mark's responses to a number of specific issues have already been examined. The focus now shifts more fully to the way in which he addressed his readers' doubts, fears and dilemmas. The aim is to sufficiently show that the major features of the Gospel match the setting already proposed. Consequently, there will be a change in approach: a narrative-rhetorical analytical method will be adopted in the final chapters, as the literary awareness inherent in such a procedure best reveals what Mark hoped to achieve by constructing his narrative as he did.

Clearly, the whole text cannot be analysed here. Instead, in this chapter, three major aspects will be treated. Each will primarily deal with a large block of text, but will refer to other parts of the Gospel to fully reveal Mark's rhetorical thrust. This part structural, part thematic presentation will confirm the crisis faced by the Roman Christians, and will bring to light other aspects of their situation. The three parts of this chapter are:

- I. A demonstration of the way in which Mark causes his readers to continually relate the story of Jesus to their own experiences, showing how the opening verses establish this pattern, especially by appealing to their memories and emotions and by presenting Jesus as the one who shows the way.
- II. A study that shows 3:20–6:44 to be a highly structured response to the emotional condition of the reader, and that brings to light Mark's attempt to allay their fears, provide answers, give comfort, and show how they could obtain the strength they needed to face their crisis.

III. A reading of Chapter 13 as a Roman Christian might have done in late 71, showing that it is a carefully constructed and coherent speech that addresses their situation well.

When someone is suffering, persuasion must go far deeper than intellectual conviction, and so, in a deeply emotional time, Mark crafted this rhetorical text, not only to empathise with his suffering, anxious reader, but also to deliberately stir up his or her emotions. By doing so, he forced his reader to face their fears and doubts, hoping to lead him or her, both emotionally and intellectually, to a new perspective. He provided the material to build courage and hope, and his story was designed to inspire a deep conviction, not only that the good news was good enough to die for, but also that the alternative was very unattractive. He aimed to convince his reader that God was in control of the situation, that he cared deeply about their plight, and that he would provide the strength needed to overcome the fear.

Donahue has pointed out that Virgil's *Aeneid* and Livy's *Histories* not only told the origin of the Roman people but, by telling a story, helped the reader "to come to terms with the world in which he lives."<sup>1</sup> So, too, in the form of a story of Jesus' life, this Gospel helped the reader to come to terms with their own lives. It showed them 'the way' through their crisis, a way modelled by Jesus and a way to eternal life. Mark has presented the life of Jesus in such a way that it evoked both their past experiences and their current situation, and his Gospel continually appeals to the reader directly and personally. He begins to do this with his opening sentence, and the verses that immediately follow appear to have been designed to empathise with his reader's situation by stirring their memories and emotions, by engendering hope and instilling a new resolve. He does this by reminding them of God's track record.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "One function of narrative is to create an ordered world." Donahue, *Christ* 227, 229.

<sup>2</sup> Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.1.51) taught that most of the appeals to the emotions should be reserved for the opening and the close. Moreover, Cicero (*On Invention* 1.20–26) had said that the opening of the rhetoric prepares the audience to receive what follows by making them attentive and receptive, and well disposed to the speaker. See Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 92–93. If Mark was aware of the rhetorical practices of his day, he could be expected not only to move his reader's emotions with his opening verses, but also to establish his authority to speak. He did this by citing the familiar Scriptures, by demonstrating knowledge of God's perspective, and by empathising with his reader's fears and doubts.

To show that this is so, the opening words must be examined closely, as there has been extensive discussion about their translation and meaning. Verses 1–4 are normally rendered as two sentences, as in the NRSV:

(1) The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

(2) As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; (3) the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’” (4) John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness . . .”

However, many variations have been proposed; Boring lists eleven ways in which full stops can be placed.<sup>3</sup> There are other complications: although Isaiah is explicitly mentioned, v. 2 is thought to be a conflation of Mal 3:1 and Exod 23:20, and only v. 3 is Isaian, an adaptation of Isa 40:3. Verse 2 is singular (following Exod 23:20 LXX), but v. 3 is plural (following Isa 40:3 LXX). Although vv. 2–3 do not identify the messenger, they are both generally understood to refer to John the Baptist.

However, there are severe difficulties with such a reading. First, there is doubt that Mark drew on Mal 3:1 at all,<sup>4</sup> as v. 2 stands quite close to Exod 23:20 by itself. In any event, Mal 3:1b LXX is not very similar at all, the only connection being that the messenger will “look upon (*epiblepō*) a way before my face,” that is, there is a sense of preparing the way.<sup>5</sup> But Mark may well have used only Exod 23:20, changing “guard you on your way,” to “prepare your way,” as the idea of protection does not fit his Gospel, and the mention of preparation leads into the Isaian verse that follows. As Mal 3:1 seems to refer to Elijah as the eschatological prophet (cf. Mal 4:5 MT), commentators may have had a tendency to see it as a source behind 1:2 because Mark *later* identifies John with Elijah (cf. 1:6; 9:12–13). But if the John-Elijah link is disregarded in the reading of v. 2, Exod 23:20 becomes a most satisfactory precedent.

The *angelos* of v. 2 refers in Exod 23:20 to the angel that went before the people of Israel in the wilderness and, although it has to

<sup>3</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “Mark 1:1–15 and the Beginning of the Gospel,” *Semeia* 52 (1990) 48–50.

<sup>4</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 240) says that Mal 3:1 as a source is “rather uncertain,” without giving reasons.

<sup>5</sup> For a table of the relevant texts, see Marcus, *Mark* 144.

be taken as “messenger” here,<sup>6</sup> it is usually seen to refer to John, because he prophesies in vv. 7–8 of the Stronger One to come. But *Jesus* is the messenger of God in this Gospel, beginning at 1:14–15. Jesus even suggests that he is a prophet (6:4) and, like other prophets, he teaches the “way” to follow.

Tolbert has argued that, from a narrative point of view, v. 2 can only refer to Jesus, as John is not introduced until v. 4.<sup>7</sup> Her objections to the usual reading have not been dealt with by those who disagree with her view.<sup>8</sup> As she points out, v. 2 would be very strange if the “you” was Jesus, as it then has to be read as God speaking to Jesus about John, and yet neither character has been introduced into the narrative at this point.<sup>9</sup> Further, v. 1 is addressed to the reader, and it would read more naturally if the “you” of v. 2 was still the reader.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, the reader is left wondering who the addressee is.

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 7:24 for an example of *angelos* as a “messenger”; there, it refers to messengers of John.

<sup>7</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing* 239–48.

<sup>8</sup> See P. J. Sankey, “Promise and Fulfilment: Reader-Response to Mark 1:1–15,” *JSNT* 58 (1995) 9, who claims that John’s appearance in v. 4 “echoes the preceding citations so closely as to demand to be read as its primary fulfilment,” but he does not address Tolbert’s objections to that traditional reading at all. Also Marcus, *Mark* 142, who argues against her on the basis that the words “who will prepare your way” in 1:2 are from Mal 3:1, and refer to Elijah. But his table (144) shows significant differences in wording, and he ignores the fact that Mal 3:1 refers to “a way before me,” not “a way before you” which is far closer to Exod 23:20. Tolbert (*Sowing* 240) argues, correctly, that it is “Jesus, not John, [who] is the one sent by God to show everyone the way.” Marcus (*Mark* 142) otherwise only argues that “the messenger of 1:2–3 proclaims a message in the wilderness” like John, so that “there are too many links” to 1:4–8. But v. 2 does not refer to the wilderness, and the separation of vv. 2 and 3 proposed here resolves this difficulty. However, Tolbert keeps those verses together, and concludes that they both relate to Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that Jesus has been introduced in v. 1, but he is not yet a character. Marcus (*Mark* 141) omits the phrase “Son of God,” as being more likely a scribal addition, being absent from Sinaiticus and other manuscripts. Inclusion of the phrase, as is generally accepted, would mean that God is also mentioned in v. 1, and perhaps the existence of this phrase has resulted in a reading of v. 2 that has God speaking to Jesus as his son, similar to v. 11. For example, Marcus (*Mark* 147) claims that v. 2 is another scene of “extraordinary intimacy” between the Father and the Son, but it is a very strange way of portraying it, naming neither party.

<sup>10</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 241) remarks: “This switching of narratees (from the reader to Jesus, a character) almost in mid-breath is strained and confusing, to say the least,” and it is unusual in prophetic writing. It would require a prophet (“Isaiah”) speaking for God to God’s son. She also points out that it is normal for *kathōs* to point backward, not forward, so that it does not begin a second sentence; Marcus (*Mark* 142) agrees. If this is the case, v. 2 means that Jesus, identified as the Messiah in

A better reading, it is suggested, is this:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, [the Son of God,] as written in Isaiah the prophet: “Look, I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way.”

A voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance . . .

Verses 2 and 3 are separated to emphasise that this reading avoids the usual clumsy interconnection between the two. A further major difference is that vv. 3 and 4 are linked as one sentence.<sup>11</sup> It could be objected that this divides the reference to Isaiah, but Mark alludes to Isaiah throughout his opening verses, particularly to Isa 64:1 in v. 10.<sup>12</sup> Claiming Isaiah as the prophetic authority in v. 2 can be seen to relate in a loose way to the whole of the opening scenes, not just vv. 2–3. In any event, the phrase “prepare the way” is an Isaian phrase (Isa 40:3; 57:14; 62:10).

The result of this translation is that v. 2 becomes a proclamation *to the reader*, not to Jesus, as is usually argued.<sup>13</sup> It fits the normal pattern for prophetic texts: God, through the prophet, speaks to “you” (singular), the reader.<sup>14</sup> John is introduced in v. 3, not v. 4, and is just “a voice” (no article), like the prophets before him. This Gospel opens, then, by announcing the good news about Jesus, who has been sent by God to go before the reader, just as Yahweh went before Israel, as Isaiah had proclaimed.<sup>15</sup> Verse 2 is like 16:7, where

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v. 1, is further identified as the messenger of God. Tolbert considers (244) that our reading of vv. 2–3 has been influenced by the versions in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

<sup>11</sup> The Jerusalem Bible took this approach. Marcus (*Mark* 141) puts vv. 2–3 in parentheses. This is complex and reads poorly, and it is questionable that this would be the reader’s first choice.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 147) argues that “his prologue is full of allusions to Deutero-Isaiah,” and it is likely that Mark is “deliberately setting his story in an Isaian context.”

<sup>13</sup> Even in the usual translation, a reader may take v. 2 personally.

<sup>14</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 242) sees a difficulty in the singular “you,” which would normally address Israel in prophetic texts (such as Exod 23:20), and she concludes that Mark is addressing the “authorial audience . . . as a corporate personality.” There is some value in this idea. As argued in Chapter 2, the scene in 1:12–13 seems to address the suffering of the community, while addressing the pain of, and providing comfort to, the individual reader. Here, too, the “you” may have both corporate and individual senses.

<sup>15</sup> These observations overcome the difficulties with vv. 1–3 that have led J. K.



Jesus again goes before the disciples. This idea frames the Gospel.

Therefore, the opening sentence is a personal assurance to the reader. God has sent his son, the Messiah, to go first on the way. Adding to this image of Jesus following the human journey, his humanity is quickly emphasised.<sup>16</sup> Like any other person, he is baptised, comes up out of the water, experiences the Spirit, becomes aware of his identity as beloved child of the Father, is subjected to testing at the hands of Rome (Satan), but comes through, and powerfully proclaims the good news.<sup>17</sup> The reader is led to identify with Jesus, as this is already his or her own story. As pointed out in Chapter 5, vv. 10–11 have been shaped to remind the reader of their own baptism. Marcus considers, not only that this scene would evoke such a memory, but also that vv. 14–15 may have been drawn from a baptismal ceremony.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, the exhortation, “repent, and believe the gospel” (v. 15), points to a Christian’s initiation.

Indeed, unless Mark intended to evoke the reader’s own baptism, it is difficult to see why the baptismal scene appears at all. Jesus’ baptism by John seems to counter Mark’s claim that Jesus is the greater one, and Jesus seems to join others in repenting of sins. The later evangelists all remove these problems in various ways (Matt 3:14–15; Luke 3:20–21; John 1:30–34). Mark was hardly compelled to include this scene: if he could leave out Jesus’ birth, family and background, he could have left out his baptism. The Fourth Evangelist had no difficulty with drastically revising the whole scene, and omitting Jesus’ baptism. Mark seems to have been prepared to put up with the inconsistencies and theological difficulties he creates in order

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Elliott, “Mark 1.1–3—A Later Addition to the Gospel?” *NTS* 46 (2000) 584–88, to claim that they were added by a later writer.

<sup>16</sup> Boring (“Beginning” 64–65) has pointed out that Jesus is depicted in the opening verses as both a person of power and a person of weakness. Jesus’ weakness here helps the reader to identify with him.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus (*Way* 50; *Mark* 165) proposes that “coming up out of the water” points to Isa 63:11 (“Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit?”), adding another Exodus allusion. However, the parallel is weak, especially as 1:10 is in the active tense, and has “water” rather than “sea.” Acts 8:39 has the eunuch “come up out of the water” after his baptism.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 166, 170, 174, 176. He points to other New Testament passages similar to 1:15 that are regarded as baptismal formulae, and argues that they would have heard the proclamation of the dominion of God and a call to repent in a similar formula on the day that they became disciples of Jesus.

to include a scene that enables the reader to recall their own baptism and to identify with Jesus. The words that the baptised hears are taken from Isa 42:1: "Here is my servant . . . my chosen, in whom my soul delights," but Mark has altered them to the first person: "You are my child . . . in you I am delighted" (1:11).<sup>19</sup> This opening text is very personal.<sup>20</sup>

The Gospel opens with a fanfare, and its music inspires hope.<sup>21</sup> The strength of this motif is an indication that this is what Mark's readers needed to hear most. Vespasian might have provided hope and salvation for Rome but, in a very few verses, Mark evokes memories of the far greater saving power of the God of Israel who, at times of crisis, had rescued the afflicted from the kings of the earth. In a tone that is both consoling and triumphant, he draws significantly from motifs in Deutero-Isaiah's prophecies, insisting that God has intervened in human affairs—the heavens have been torn open, and God has sent his son (1:2, 11; cf. 12:6: "He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them"). Even the first word of the Gospel, "beginning," evokes Gen 1:1 and the creative power of God in the midst of darkness and chaos. It is a beginning of the "good news"—a joyful announcement that surpasses that of the emperor.<sup>22</sup> The first spoken word is "comes,"<sup>23</sup> and the first spoken phrase—"someone stronger is coming" (v. 7)—is a powerful statement that Rome/Satan are subject to the sovereign God, and will be dealt with. It is a proclamation of a New Triumph that colours the whole of the Gospel, to be remembered until its last verses.

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<sup>19</sup> Ps 2:7 ("You are my son; today I have begotten you") may have been his inspiration for this change. Gen 22:2, 16 may have provided the very personal "my beloved son." For the discussion, see Juel, *Master* 37; Bryan, *Preface* 140; Marcus, *Way* 51–52; Matera, "Prologue" 305.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler (*Reader* 20) cites Walter Bundy in 1942, and Morton Enslin in 1947, who had observed that the baptism scene is directed towards the reader.

<sup>21</sup> Wegener (*Cruciformed* 99) considers that the opening verses provide the tone for the whole narrative by setting up a "sacred, severe and even foreboding atmosphere." This misses the dominating message of hope and the reminders of God's providential care.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 146) points out that *euangelion* and its cognates are frequently linked in both Deutero-Isaiah and elsewhere with royalty. Porter ("Literary Approaches" 122) is of the opinion that the juxtaposition of 'gospel' and 'son of God' provides "secondary evidence for the Roman origins of the Gospel," or at least, that Mark "consciously crafts his Gospel in terms of religious and political terminology of the day, replacing Caesar with the genuine Son of God."

<sup>23</sup> Pointed out by Diana Culbertson, *The Poetics of Revelation: Recognition and the Narrative Tradition* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1989) 142.

The reader is quickly reminded of God's saving power in the key events in Israel's history: the wilderness is repeatedly mentioned, alluding to God's Exodus rescue, and, in v. 3, the rescue from the Babylonian exile is evoked through a direct and explicit quotation from Isa 40:3, a text written after the previous destruction of the Temple: "Console my people, console them' . . . Here is Lord Yahweh coming with power . . . He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms" (Isa 40:1–11).<sup>24</sup> Isaiah goes on to speak of the greatness of God, who "reduces princes to nothing, the rulers of this world to mere emptiness" (Isa 40:23). All of this is evoked by Mark in choosing that well-known Isaian text.

Moreover, in his multiple mentions of the wilderness, Mark reminds of God's providence during Israel's time of testing.<sup>25</sup> In a supposed wilderness, John the Baptist is provided with plenty of food and water, supplied without human intervention, reminding of God's providence in supplying Israel with manna, quails and water, and teaching his people to trust in him to provide, day by day.<sup>26</sup>

The image of the torn heavens (v. 10) points the reader to Isa 64:1:

Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down . . . to make your name known to your foes . . . you have hidden your face from us . . . Jerusalem has become a wasteland. Our holy and glorious Temple . . . has been burnt to the ground . . . Yahweh, can you restrain yourself at all this? Will you stay silent? (Isa 64:1–12)

Mark has chosen his allusions well.

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<sup>24</sup> "There is a consistent tendency of Jewish interpreters to view Isa 40:1–5 as a divine promise of eschatological comfort." Marcus, *Way* 21. It is in Isa 40:3 that *euangelizo* ("good news") appears twice, as in Isa 52:7. It has been suggested that Mark's use of *euangelion* is a "deliberate recall of Paul." E. A. Russell, "The Gospel of Mark: A Pastoral Response to a Life or Death Situation? Some Reflections," *IBS* 7 (1985) 219. Although this may well be true of Mark's later use of the "gospel" as what must be preached (1:14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9), in 1:2, 'gospel' is Isaian, a promise of God's rescue of the oppressed.

<sup>25</sup> Marcus (*Way* 18–26) argues that Mark primarily points to Isa 40 rather than to the Exodus. However, Isaiah was already building on the far more foundational Exodus experience, and the wilderness is remembered as *the* time of Israel's formation. Exod 16 depicts a time of learning to trust in God's providence daily. To point only to the secondary Isaian imagery omits these elements. Building on the Exodus tradition, Hosea prophesied that Yahweh would lead Israel back into that wilderness in order to re-form her (Hos 2:14–17). Here, John begins the process by leading "all of Judea" out into the wilderness for repentance (1:5), and Jesus shows that the new wilderness lies in the testing by Rome/Satan—that is where the reader has already been formed and made ready to spread the gospel.

<sup>26</sup> The motif of providence is often missed in discussions of the opening. For example, Gibson, "Wilderness Temptation" 14–16.

The symbolic meaning of the dove descending on Jesus (1:10) has been much discussed.<sup>27</sup> However, as the observation of the movement of birds was central to Roman augury, and a key indicator of divine approval or disapproval, Mark may have used a Roman motif rather than a Jewish one.<sup>28</sup> The Roman eagle may have rested on Vespasian and Titus, who promised peace and a new beginning for Rome, but Mark has the bird that proclaimed the end of an earlier calamity and the beginning of a new era for the whole world (cf. Gen 8:8–12) come down upon Jesus.<sup>29</sup> However, this scene does not just provide divine legitimation for Jesus,<sup>30</sup> but also for the reader, who remembers, too, that he or she is a child of the Father and recipient of the Spirit (1:8, 11; cf. Rom 8:15).<sup>31</sup>

These opening verses are not like Greco-Roman prologues.<sup>32</sup> Mark was not doing what a writer of fiction needs to do in the opening to introduce invented characters, to re-shape mythical ones, or to

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<sup>27</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 159) cites Allison and Davies, who list sixteen different explanations for the dove. David B. Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," *BBR* 9 (1999) 49, comments that "the dove continues to evade interpreters." However, he notes that "the story of Noah's ark became inextricably linked with Christian baptism" (cf. 1 Pet 3:20–21).

<sup>28</sup> In Roman society, watching the flights of birds (auspices) was considered to be a prime means of discerning the will of the gods, especially of Jupiter. See the nine examples listed by Valerius Maximus (1.4), reprinted in D. Wardle, *Valerius Maximus: Memorable Deeds and Sayings. Book 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 44–49. See also Robert Hodgson, "Valerius Maximus and the Social World of the New Testament," *CBQ* 51 (1989) 683–93, for the possible use of Greco-Roman prodigies in Jewish apocalypticism. Even the unusual appearance of a bird was seen as a sign; see Tacitus, *Histories* 2.50, for the bird that appeared and disappeared at the suicide of Otho.

<sup>29</sup> The dove was used as a symbol of peace in early Christian funerary inscriptions. Graydon F. Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," in Donfried and Richardson (eds), *First-Century Rome* 82–83.

<sup>30</sup> Aune (*Literary Environment* 48) says that it provides divine legitimation similar to the ancestry, birth and education stories of Greco-Roman biographies.

<sup>31</sup> It has been suggested that the promise of baptism in the Spirit in v. 8, an event that does not occur in the narrative, is an allusion to Pentecost. Best, "Mark's Readers" 847; Marshall, *Faith* 28. However, as Mark uses what appears to be a standard formula, "baptised in the Spirit," this text is more likely to remind a reader of his or her own baptism in the Spirit, which occurred at the same time as baptism with water (Acts 19:5–6).

<sup>32</sup> See the discussion of different types of prologues in Greco-Roman writings by Dennis E. Smith, "Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory," *Semeia* 52 (1990) 1–9. There he cites (3–4) Aristotle: the prologue is "a paving [of] the way for what follows," apprising the audience of information unknown to characters in the play.

provide his readers with information.<sup>33</sup> Rather, he was reminding them, not only of the way God has worked in history, but also of their own experiences—including their own courage in becoming a Christian. Instead of opening with the story of Jesus' birth or early life, Mark begins in the middle of the reader's own situation—the baptised person who is driven by the Spirit to face trials and beasts. The reader's present suffering quickly comes into view. From the beginning, Mark trains his reader to think of both the story world and their own world. The Gospel is the life of Jesus, but it is also the life of the reader.

By v. 12, Mark is confronting the doubts, fears and disappointments of a reader whose new life in the Spirit had not matched their expectations. Instead of receiving hoped-for blessings from God, they had been subject to the most severe suffering. Mark shows that this is only to be expected, putting forward Jesus as the model *par excellence* of the Spirit-filled life where, in this strange Kingdom of God, the Spirit forces the child of God to face Satan/Rome and its wild beasts. Chapter 13 will remind the reader just how strange that Kingdom has been lately.

Accordingly, after having faced Satan and the beasts, and directly following the ominous words, “after John had been arrested” (1:14), the reader is urged: “Change your perception!” (*metanoete*).<sup>34</sup> It is the rule of the unseen God that is “near” (1:15), in contrast to that of the very visible emperor. God is shown to be involved, but working in a hidden way.<sup>35</sup> The reader is exhorted to “believe” (*pistete*) in *this* “good news.” In Mark's view, his readers must move to a different perception: they must be utterly convinced that the good news of Jesus Christ is far superior to anything that Rome can proclaim, if they are to witness fearlessly to the gospel.

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<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Robert C. Tannehill, “Beginning to Study ‘How the Gospels Begin’,” *Semeia* 52 (1990) 187, has criticised the tendency to see the narrative beginning as “a cryptic summary of it.”

<sup>34</sup> Both 1:2 and the portrayal of John as Elijah remind of a persistent Yahweh sending prophets through the ages despite their ill treatment (cf. 9:12–13; 12:4–5). Mark mentions the persecuted Elijah nine times.

<sup>35</sup> The crowd sees nothing at Jesus' baptism. God is well hidden throughout the story, only intervening occasionally (9:7; 15:38), and each time only the reader recognises his voice or notices his action.

## JESUS, MARTYR

*So that I may proclaim the message . . .  
for that is what I came out to do (1:38)*

Throughout the remainder of the story, the reader is further led to identify with Jesus; even the title that Jesus gives himself—"Son of Man"—is another way of saying human being (93 times in Ezek), and Mark calls people "sons of men" (3:28). The basic story in this Gospel is of a man facing the same experiences as the reader—he is baptised, is empowered by the Spirit, and proclaims the gospel, but quickly faces rejection and opposition by society and demonic forces, and is arrested on unjust charges, dying as a martyr, only to be vindicated by God and raised to eternal life. Jesus is depicted as the first martyr for the gospel, and a model for all.<sup>36</sup> The protagonist is, on the one hand, the historical miracle-working and teaching Son of God; but at the same time, he acts out the life of the reader, who is called to spread the gospel at the risk of his or her life. Like the reader, there is no dramatic rescue of Jesus from his enemies, and he, too, cannot feel God's presence in the midst of his suffering.

Mark's depiction of Jesus is of a person *driven* to proclaim the gospel. Impelled by the Spirit, his zeal to spread the gospel is outstanding. There is an urgency and fearlessness about his mission: "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out to do" (1:38). His determination continues to the very end, and the sheer energy of his mission tells the reader that his "gospel" must be very, very important.<sup>37</sup>

It is not surprising that Jesus finally has to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem. In 10:32, we have the epitome of the determined Jesus, striding towards the capital, patiently explaining "on the way" that

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<sup>36</sup> Juell (*Master* 141) claims that "martyrdom is not a pervasive theme in Mark." Apart from the multiple allusions to the fate of future disciples, the whole story is about the martyrdom of Jesus.

<sup>37</sup> In the first verse of his letter to the Romans, Paul had written of "the gospel" (Rom 1:1), and there are four more uses of the word in the next fifteen verses, including mention of his "eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Rom 1:15). Perhaps Mark's knowledge of the eagerness and energy of Paul is mirrored in the way he depicts the ministry of the historical Jesus. For Mark, as with Paul, it is a gospel about the Son, it is about the power of God, and it is salvation for all (Rom 1:16).

he expects to be killed, and so should his followers (10:30–34). But he never wavers.

For Mark, a faithful disciple is one who, like Jesus, pours out their blood “for many,” because it will be through their witness that many will believe in the gospel.<sup>38</sup> There is no sense in this Gospel that Jesus died to atone for the sins of humanity.<sup>39</sup> Too much has been made of the brief mention that Jesus came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). This only says that giving one’s life is the price that has to be paid in serving others by spreading the gospel.<sup>40</sup> Love costs, and this is essentially the message of 10:45, where Mark uses an image of freedom that would be highly emotive for many of the readers, as slaves and freedmen made up a high percentage of the population of Rome.<sup>41</sup> Although manumission of slaves was common, this image of the purchase of freedom would have been highly effective as a way of exhorting the readers to be prepared to give themselves completely for others.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The Roman martyr may also have been giving her or his life “for many” in another sense. The follower who admitted to being a Christian would be dying ‘for,’ that is, instead of, other Christians, as the alternative may be to inform on others, out of fear.

<sup>39</sup> There have been many who have concluded that Mark has an atoning soteriology. Examples are Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Significance of the Cross within Mark’s Story,” *Int* 47 (1993) 378–79; Best, *Temptation* xlvii–lvii; Koester, *Christian Gospels* 282; Collins, “Noble Death” 493, 497. However, David Rhoads, “Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death,” *Int* 47 (1993) 366, points out: “Jesus does not die so that sins might be forgiven (Jesus offers forgiveness apart from his death).”

<sup>40</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Signification of Mark 10:45 among Gentile Christians,” *HTR* 90 (1997) 382, argues that the use of “ransom” (*lytron*) in Greco-Roman cultic and magical situations means that Mark in 10:45 interprets “the death of Jesus in a metaphorical way as a ritual expiation of the offences of many.” However, the inscriptions and literary references that Collins cites show a wide meaning.

<sup>41</sup> La Piana, “Foreign Groups” 191; MacMullen, *Social Relations* 103, who considered that perhaps one-half of the population of Rome were slaves, ex-slaves or of slave origin. Freed slaves were still second-class citizens, but epitaphs show that they had pride in their status, and could rise to powerful positions. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* 92–93; MacMullen, *Social Relations* 105. Deissmann (*Ancient East* 320–21) noted that someone hearing the word *lytron* would think immediately of manumission, and that numerous documents of manumission contain the words *ep’ eleutheriai* (“for freedom”).

<sup>42</sup> Many of the Jews brought to Rome by Pompey were set free through purchase by fellow Jews. Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 155–58. *1 Clement* 55.2 and other later Roman documents indicate the practice of Christians ransoming other Christians by purchase of the *lytron* and even by self-substitution, and *lytron* had connotations of both spiritual and physical freedom. Carolyn Osiek, “The Ransom of Captives: Evolution of a Tradition,” *HTR* 74 (1981) 367, 369.

“Glory” (*doxa*) is only used three times in this Gospel. Twice, it refers to the ‘coming of the Son of Man’ (8:38; 13:26). The other occurrence is when James and John ironically ask to “sit, one on your right and one on your left in your glory” (10:37). When the reader later discovers Jesus dying between two criminals on his right and left (15:27), he or she realises that Jesus’ moment of glory is his moment of martyrdom, and that this, somehow, is the true exercise of God-like power. That this is the moment of glory is emphasised by Jesus being given the title of king in the preceding verse (15:26).

For Mark, it is not true that glory will follow suffering. His Gospel announces to the reader that their moment of suffering *is* their moment of glory, as it was with Jesus. For this reason, it is suggested, Mark introduces the link between “cup” and “baptism” into Jesus’ rather convoluted response to James and John (10:38–39). Both words have a double meaning, and can mean either suffering or a blessing (for cup, see 14:23; for baptism, see 1:8). In these two words, suffering and glory are cleverly mixed together and become one. True glory is being like God who, in his eagerness, even foolhardiness, to proclaim the way to life, sent his own son to be killed. The reader’s moment of glory will be when they follow the way of Jesus, and give everything for the sake of many.

## PART II: A PAINFUL CHOICE

*Who are my mother and my brothers? (3:33)*

For many Romans, becoming a Christian would have meant their rejection, not just by Roman society, but also by their own families. Believing that they were doing the will of God, they found themselves considered criminals and persecuted, even by close members of their families. Even if their immediate family became Christians with them, their extended family may have reacted to the news badly. In Rome, a Christian’s family would witness their daughter or son probably give up their careers and livelihood, and risk their lives, in order to embrace a foreign superstition, abandoning the religion of their forebears, and rejecting Roman culture. Many, if not most, of Mark’s community would have faced the choice between becoming a Christian, and retaining their relationships with their family and friends.



Mark introduces a motif of the family early in the Gospel. The first scene after Jesus announces the Kingdom of God (1:14–15) is one in which two pairs of brothers face the choice of following Jesus, or remaining with their family and livelihood. The image of the sons leaving a stunned Zebedee, as well as the family business (1:20), would have reminded the reader of the painful choice that they once had to make. It is significant that the extended family is mentioned on the other side of the synagogue scene, in an intercalation that is not usually recognised.<sup>43</sup> Common to 1:16–20, 29–31 is the mention of the families and extended families of the first four disciples called. In one case, a father is left behind; in the other, an in-law is healed and serves them. Soon, the first disciples are told that they must leave their hometown in order to follow Jesus (1:38).

From 2:6, Jesus begins to experience opposition from his own people, who plot to kill him as early as 3:6, and it is clear that neither the religious nor the political leaders will welcome the news of the kingdom (3:6, 22). The early placement of this confrontation with the establishment underlines for the reader how normal it is for such a reaction to occur against the gospel. Jesus upsets the politico-religious status quo by welcoming and including those considered ‘sinners’ by society (2:5, 15–16),<sup>44</sup> and the subsequent unexpected banding together of the Pharisees and the previously unmentioned Herodians in the plot to kill Jesus (3:6) shows that Mark had in mind that it was the entire politico-religious system that was disturbed by his behaviour.<sup>45</sup> As if to deal with the leadership that opposes God, Jesus gives authority over demons to his followers (3:14–19).

It is significant that this initial section dealing with leaving family and clashing with those in power is immediately followed by scenes that give a negative image of both the natural family and the authorities (who come from the capital). In 3:21, Jesus’ own family hears

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<sup>43</sup> In the centre of this intercalation, the confrontation with the demon suggests for the first time that Jesus would deal with Satan/Rome.

<sup>44</sup> Christians in Rome were “sinners” as far as the Romans were concerned because of their failure to show piety towards the Roman gods. The word *amartōlos* (2:15) is used in inscriptions (with *theois* or *theōn*) for someone thought of as being a “sinner against the gods.” BAGD 44.

<sup>45</sup> Religious authority was inseparable from political authority in both Jerusalem and Rome. The Emperor, as Pontifex Maximus, headed a large religious establishment intent on preserving the Roman religious tradition, assuring the continuation of the Empire and the *Pax Romana*.

about what is going on, saying, “He has gone out of his mind,”<sup>46</sup> a phrase that the reader might have heard often from their own family. Jesus’ family tries to “take custody of” him; Mark uses *krateō*, a word that frequently refers to physical restraint and legal arrest (6:17; 12:12; 14:1, 44, 46, 49, 51). He thus juxtaposes the opposition of the family with the appointment of those “to be sent out to proclaim the message” (3:14), and he describes the family’s response in terms of a physical seizure or arrest.

In Rome, some family members had, in fact, arranged for their Christian members to be arrested, thus allying themselves with the persecuting authorities. Mark later makes this memory more explicit for the reader—“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (13:12). There is a strong appeal to the emotions here—*epanastṛēsontai tekna epi goneis kai thanatōsousin* can be more bluntly translated: “Children will turn against their parents and have them killed.” Yet, the emotional reminder of the Christians’ conflict with their own families begins at 3:21, and the ‘sandwich’ of 3:20–35 strongly puts the choice before the reader: on the one hand is your natural family, and on the other, the new family. Readers are told that even Jesus had problems with his natural family, at least at some stage of his life.

At the centre of the intercalation are the authorities (the Jerusalem scribes) who seem to be unable to distinguish between good and evil (3:22; cf. 3:4). Families who oppose their Christian members cannot distinguish between good and evil either. The accusation in 3:21 (he is out of his mind) is effectively the same as that of Jesus’ opponents in 3:22 (he is under the control of Satan), as mental illnesses were equated with demonic possession. Mark thereby alludes to the alliance between the reader’s alienated family members and the Roman authorities, both of whom, in their own way, oppose the spread of the gospel. Satan figures strongly in the centre of the intercalation.

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<sup>46</sup> Unreasonably, the NRSV has “for people were saying,” whereas the Greek simply has *elegon* (“they were saying”). The natural contextual reading would be to relate this verb to the preceding “his own family” or “his own people” (*hoi par autou*). See also Marcus (*Mark* 270) for further arguments. The claim by John Painter, “When is a House not a Home? Disciples and Family in Mark 3:13–35,” *NTS* 45 (1999) 498–513, that it refers to Jesus’ disciples, strains the reading, and has insufficient regard to both the immediate and wider contexts.

Earlier, these verses have been shown to allude to the imperial family, and to firmly connect Satan with Rome. Not only is Jesus shown to be diametrically opposed to, and stronger than, these evil forces (3:23–27), but the corollary is also implied: Satan is against Jesus and is somehow behind the imperial forces arraigned against the reader.<sup>47</sup> By surrounding this conflict with Satan with the negative portrayal of Jesus' family, Mark goes further, joining family opposition and the oppression of the authorities with Satan, all working in an unholy alliance against the will of God.

The reader is therefore confronted with a painful memory of rejection and opposition by a family that had not only thought that they were mad to become a Christian, but also that what they were doing was evil. This failure to recognise what is good is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and such a person “can never have forgiveness” (3:29). The degree of emotion behind this issue of opposition, rejection and even betrayal by family members can be seen in the intensity of this strong condemnation.

Mark deliberately stirs emotions here, as he begins a section extending as far as 6:6 that answers the deeply-felt question of his readers: “Why are we being persecuted?” The fact that their own families seem to be part of the forces allied against them make this a powerful scene, and a turning point in the text for the reader, who is led to reaffirm his or her commitment to be an “insider” at the cost of their family and society.<sup>48</sup>

‘Inside’ is a scene of the house-church—disciples “around” Jesus (mentioned twice), presumably listening to him, and doing the will of God, apparently just by being there. The alternative to being inside is not good. Mark paints the picture using black and white only: Jesus' natural family is said to be “*standing* outside” (3:31) while those inside are comfortably “*sitting* around him” (twice: vv. 32, 34; cf. 4:10). To choose to be ‘outside’ is to be allied with Satan and

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<sup>47</sup> According to Marcus (*Mystery* 62, 64), the Parable of the Sower also shows Satan to be “a major actor,” and the Gospel portrays a battle against Satan. Russell (“Pastoral Response” 220), too, observes the link between the portrayal of Satan and the “demonic forces at work destroying their community” in Rome.

<sup>48</sup> In 10:28, the alarmed Peter will remind Jesus that the disciples have “left everything,” and a patient Jesus will complete the teaching on the new family: the rewards to be obtained both “in this age” and “in the age to come” are far greater. They include being part of a new family, access to many houses, and new close relationships, but persecutions are said to be an integral aspect of the new scheme of things (10:30).

those who oppose the Holy Spirit (3:29).<sup>49</sup> Those outside reject the eternal life offered by God. “Outside” certainly sounds the wrong place to be.

Painfully for the readers, Mark depicts Jesus’ mother and brothers in a way that must have been highly evocative of their situation: “Standing outside, they sent a message to him, calling him” (3:31).<sup>50</sup> They do not go inside; they only send in a messenger to urge the one doing the will of God to come outside.<sup>51</sup> The pressure of the reader’s natural family for the Christian member to come back to the family fold is tangible. It is a poignant scene, accented both by Jesus’ refusal to respond to his own family and the emphatic *idou* that indicates the shock of the crowd at his behaviour (v. 32).

Another emotional family decision facing the members of Mark’s community may lie behind Mark’s teaching on divorce (10:1–12). Given the paucity of ethical instruction in this Gospel, his lengthy attention to this matter stands out. Moreover, it is difficult, on first examination, to see why Mark placed it where he has—in the midst of a long section focusing on the risk and high cost of being a disciple, and the rewards for doing so. That section gives repeated warnings that discipleship is a life or death issue (8:31, 34, 35, 36, 37; 9:12–13, 31, 43, 45, 47; 10:30, 33–34, 38–40, 45).<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the divorce issue is also a life or death issue. If a married person became a Christian, but her or his spouse did not, serious

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<sup>49</sup> Sometimes, only the family are thought to be those ‘outside’ in this scene, because of 3:31. For example, Tolbert, *Sowing* 160. But, as Mark purposely equates the natural family with the authorities (the scribes), they, too, are ‘outside.’

<sup>50</sup> The contrast between their natural family and their church community is assisted by the repeated use of “mother” and “brothers” (vv. 31, 32, 33, 34, 35), as well as “sisters” (vv. 32, 35). “Brothers and sisters” became a term for a Christian very early (1 Thess 1:4). Bryan (*Preface* 94) has pointed out that the use of the words “my mother and my brothers and sisters” in 3:35 operate naturally to include the audience as well as the characters in this narrative. “Mother” may be used here solely for emotional impact.

<sup>51</sup> Mark uses *zēteō*, suggesting that they call him for the wrong reasons. On its use elsewhere, see Chapter 7, n. 59. Russell (“Pastoral Response” 221) believes that the Gospel reflects the defection of Christians from the community in Rome, partly from family pressures, partly from pressure by the authorities.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 96, says that it is “widely agreed that 10:1–31 is a pre-Markan collection of didactic material on issues of a broadly household related nature.” However, it is unlikely that Mark just threw this in at such a key point in the text, given his authorial skills evident throughout. It is even difficult to tie the three pericopes into a heading of ‘household material.’

marital tensions are likely to have resulted.<sup>53</sup> It is significant that the subject matter is the initiation of divorce by one partner (10:2, 9, 11, 12), not the situation of consensual divorce. The problem may have been the temptation by members of Mark's community to divorce their non-Christian spouses, perhaps believing that it would minimise the risk of exposure of themselves and their fellow Christians to the authorities. There may also have been the belief that marriage to a non-Christian was not binding, as seemed to have been the case in Corinth. In 1 Cor 7:10–16, Paul had found it necessary to counsel Christians not to divorce their unbelieving spouse. His advice to the Corinthians had been mild: "He should not divorce her . . . she should not divorce him." He distinguished Christian marriages from marriages to non-believers: in the first case (1 Cor 7:10), he claimed the authority of Jesus ("not I but the Lord"), but in the second (1 Cor 7:12), he gave his personal opinion ("I and not the Lord") that the Christian should not divorce the unbeliever. He did not cite any tradition that divorce contravenes the divine plan for humanity, nor give a blanket injunction. Rather, he seems to have regarded the continued marriage as an opportunity for the Christian to convert the unbeliever (1 Cor 7:14, 16). However, the continued union was subject to the unbeliever agreeing to live with the Christian spouse (1 Cor 7:12, 13); if there was conflict, Paul would apparently agree to divorce.

Paul did not seem to be concerned about any wider-reaching social consequences. Divorce was common, and could be freely obtained by either partner in Roman law.<sup>54</sup> Before Nero made being a Christian a capital offence, there was little risk that an embittered spouse might have brought about harm to the community. However, by Mark's time, to divorce an unbelieving partner might have resulted in the

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<sup>53</sup> James S. Jeffers, "Jewish and Christian Families in First-Century Rome," in Donfried and Richardson (eds), *First-Century Rome* 137–43, gives evidence for the expectancy in Roman society that a wife would adopt her husband's gods, concluding that conversion to Christianity "could lead to serious conflict within the family." He points out that 1 Peter devotes much of its household code to this issue. See also James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 11. Barton (*Family Ties* 1–11) gives evidence for the distaste of Roman society towards conversions to Judaism, partly due to the perceived adverse effects on families.

<sup>54</sup> By imperial times, there was an "epidemic of divorces." Carcopino, *Daily Life* 110–11.

aggrieved spouse informing on the Christian.<sup>55</sup> It is significant, then, that Jesus speaks strongly on this question in Mark's Gospel: anyone who divorces goes against God, and against the very design of his creation. Mark's teaching is absolute: the Christian must remain married. Like Paul, Mark may have seen a continuing marriage as an opportunity to evangelise (cf. 1 Pet 3:1–2 on the hope that a wife would “win over” her husband), but his greater concern may have been delation. Furthermore, the warning is not just against divorcing a spouse, but against divorcing and then marrying another. It may have been that some hoped to marry a Christian spouse, and move into a safer situation. This warning puts paid to any such thoughts—marrying again would only add to the likelihood of the hostility of the former spouse, and might only increase the risk to them and their community.<sup>56</sup>

Although family conflict is raised at several points in the Gospel, the emotions of the readers are pointedly stirred up in the scenes in 3:20–35. Mark does so there because the reader, having identified with Jesus' story, is likely to have also recalled, in reading of Jesus' clashes with the authorities in 2:1–3:6, the pain and stress of their own rejection by society. Mark helps them to deal with their suffering and loss in those scenes. In Chapter 4, he moves on to respond to the perplexity and frustration that they are likely to have also been experiencing, wondering: ‘Why is it that my family and society cannot recognise the goodness of the “good news of Jesus Christ”? Why can't they see as I see?’

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<sup>55</sup> See the example of the denunciation of a wife in Justin, *2 Apol.* 2, described on Page 223. Frend (*Martyrdom* 12, 27 n. 99) also cites Tertullian, *ad Uxorem* 2.4.5, on a dispute between a husband and wife, and asks: “Could a pagan husband trust his Christian wife who participated in the Eucharist?”

<sup>56</sup> The idea that Mark is attempting to encourage family unity is strengthened by the immediately following pericope (10:13–16), where Jesus welcomes children in a way that looks liturgical, as he “laid his hands on them, and blessed them” (10:16). The phrase *mē kōlyete* in 10:14 is a technical term used in Acts 8:36; 10:47 in relation to baptism, and Kee (*Community* 92) has suggested that this scene argues for the baptism of children. See also Paul's link between divorce and children in 1 Cor 7:14.

## SEEING, BUT NOT SEEING

*To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God (4:11)*

Accordingly, Mark moves to a language of mystery and metaphor in Chapter 4, in a long parabolic discourse. His use of figures forces the reader to consider the mystery of their situation, and to reinterpret it. For the entire discourse (4:1–34), there are parables about seeds, some plants growing and some not, and plants growing mysteriously and surprisingly. There is also an equally mysterious saying about a lamp that cannot be hidden, but must come to light (4:21–22).<sup>57</sup>

Certainly “hidden” would be a meaningful word for the readers. Jesus was unknown to the very great majority of the residents of Rome. A few would know of his reputation as an executed provincial who, it was said, claimed to be a king. He would not even have seemed to be a religious figure. Surrounding Mark’s cryptic allusion to the hidden light are repeated references to seeds that die in order to give rise to new life and to bountiful harvests—not just allusions to Jesus, but to his followers who die in order that the gospel may be spread. Again and again, there are predictions that the kingdom would grow regardless. Columella (3.3.4) could hardly recall the time when land in Italy yielded fourfold, and it was usually threefold. One hundredfold (4:20) would have been a miraculous return, suggesting that those who resist pressure from Satan, attractions to wealth, and persecution (4:15–19), would result in many coming to faith.

The discourse is a reflection on the mystery of the will of God and the will of human beings, and disciples who do not understand seem to be an integral aspect of this mystery (4:13, 26–27, 33). The enigmatic and much-discussed vv. 11–12 are the first words of private instruction by Jesus to the disciples in the Gospel, and they demand that the readers engage the real nature of that kingdom that was rather cryptically proclaimed in 1:15 (it is “near”). Jesus

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<sup>57</sup> These lamp and measure sayings are usually seen to be the centre of the discourse. John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 30–32; Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 177–78. Bryan (*Preface* 93) is not convinced, nor is Greg Fay, “Introduction to Incomprehension: The Literary Structure of Mark 4:1–34,” *CBQ* 51 (1989) 66–67. They are, however, the only non-seed figures.

announces to the ‘insiders’ that there is a “mystery” (*mysterion*) and, what is more, they have apparently already been “given” it. But it can hardly be the disciples in the story that Jesus is addressing here, as there has been no such teaching earlier in the narrative.<sup>58</sup> Rather, the primary addressees of 4:11 are the readers. This is not so much a Markan aside to the reader, as a dramatic movement in which Jesus turns from the story world and speaks to the watching reader directly (“To *you* has been given the secret . . .”).<sup>59</sup>

A reader is shocked by vv. 11–12. Jesus apparently says that he speaks in riddles *so that* people will not understand. This alarming introduction to Jesus’ first discourse is a reworded quotation from Isa 6:9–10, which forms part of the call of the prophet: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here I am; send me!’” (Isa 6:8). The explanation of this secret thus opens by referring to the proclamation of God’s word by his messengers.

In Isaiah, Yahweh’s response to the enthusiastic prophet is to inform him that people will not listen to him (Isa 6:9–10), in what is a rather sarcastic word from God: “Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’” No matter what Isaiah will say, Israel will keep on *not* listening.<sup>60</sup> The reader is led to reflect how Rome is not listening either.

But the Isaian text makes another prediction—there will be a remnant: “The holy seed is its stump” (Isa 6:13).<sup>61</sup> Some will respond and, from them, a new Israel will grow. And so, in another turn to

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<sup>58</sup> Räisänen (*Secret* 17) is perplexed by this, and suggests that Jesus revealed the secret to the disciples when he called them. “But then Mark’s presentation can hardly be called skilful.” This demonstrates the unexpectedness of 4:11, forcing the reader to think of alternatives. Fowler (“Rhetoric 125–33) considers that this is an example of Mark’s “opacity,” where he leaves the reader out of the picture.

<sup>59</sup> The verse begins with “to you” (*humin*) for emphasis. Other examples of this technique of turning to the reader are found in 8:29 (“But who do *you* say that I am?”), and 8:34 (“If anyone wants to follow after me . . .”), where the crowd suddenly appears in the narrative, although it had previously seemed that only the disciples were present with Jesus in 8:27–33.

<sup>60</sup> Bryan (*Preface* 131) notes that Isa 6 speaks of the pathos of God sending prophets who are repeatedly ignored. 12:1–11 reflects exactly the same pathos, and is the only other parable in the Gospel outside of 3:23–4:34. The “Son of God” in Mark is the son of the compassionate Father and Owner of the Vineyard.

<sup>61</sup> For discussion on the meaning and background of this phrase, see Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 182.



the reader, the promise of an extraordinary harvest concludes Mark's explanation of the Parable of the Sower. Marcus puts it well: "Mark turns to his own congregation in 4:20 . . . [perhaps expecting] the [lector] will indicate his audience with a gesture: 'But *these* are those sown on good soil . . .'"<sup>62</sup>

Mark's choice of the Isaian riddle in 4:11–12 directly addresses the readers' question: Why doesn't everyone hear and see? After all, in Exod 4:11, Yahweh says, "Who makes [mortals] mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?" Mark's choice of quotation suggests that this is just the way things are, and it is no wonder that commentators have said that Mark believed in predestination.<sup>63</sup> Mark does not go that far; indeed, he insists that Jesus goes to a lot of trouble to convince people of the gospel, and that would be pointless if everything was predetermined. Mark does not suggest that people are bound by Fate or by God's capriciousness, but is amazed that people should so harden their hearts against him.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, in his story, he shows that Jesus keeps speaking out, and so should disciples, even when rejection appears to be certain (13:11).

"The Parable of the Sower" is aptly named in some ways; not so, in others—it is not Mark's title. It does speak of the determination of the Sower (God), in spite of the obstinacy of humanity.<sup>65</sup> The

<sup>62</sup> Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 64.

<sup>63</sup> Watson ("Secrecy Theme" 55) asserts that Mark's secrecy motif is due to his belief in predestination, as "saving knowledge is granted to the chosen few, but withheld from the rest." Tolbert (*Sowing* 161) concludes: "For the Gospel of Mark, it is simply the hard and painful truth that some people are in essence good and others are not." This leaves little movement for free will, or conversion. For further discussion, see Juell, *Master* 51–56; Marcus, *Mystery* 59, 119–121; "Mark 4:10–12 and Marcan Epistemology," *JBL* 103 (1984) 566–73. However, Beavis (*Audience* 150–51) argues: "There is no clear implication that God is ultimately responsible for [the Pharisees'] blinding." She rightly points out that repentance is possible, and discusses the distinction in ancient Christian and Greco-Roman literature between divine control over human affairs, and human beings' ability and responsibility to choose.

<sup>64</sup> Paul also quoted Isa 6:10 in his letter to the Roman community (Rom 11:7–8) to explain why the majority of the people of Israel did not accept Jesus and were now 'outside,' as pointed out by Adela Yarbro Collins, "Mysteries in the Gospel of Mark," in David Hellholm, Halvor Moxnes and Turid Karlsen Seim (eds), *Mighty Minorities? Minorities in Early Christianity—Positions and Strategies* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 13.

<sup>65</sup> God is often depicted as a very determined farmer or gardener, as in 12:1–11 (cf. Isa 5:1–7; Jer 12:10; Matt 20:1–16; Luke 13:6–9; John 15:1–2; 4 Ezra 8:41),

initiative is with God and, as always, he seems to be prepared to waste his word on ground that is most unlikely to yield a harvest. However, the Parable of the Sower is equally the Parable of the Soils. Some soils receive the word and yield a harvest, and others do not. Bryan suggests that every reader is being asked, “Are you good soil?”<sup>66</sup> But the reader, who could hardly answer the question with complete confidence, as Bryan admits, instead asks: “Why isn’t everybody good soil?”<sup>67</sup>

It is inevitable, therefore, that people will oppose those who preach the gospel. Suffering becomes necessary in such a climate. Suffering people blame God, but Mark absolves him by showing that he, too, in his Son, is subject to exactly the same irrational hatred as all others who would proclaim the good news. Jesus is the first seed to die.

Thus, within the narrative, the “mystery of the Kingdom of God” had already been given *to the reader*, not to the disciples, before 4:11. They had already encountered this mystery in their conflict with society and family, and Mark had brought it to their consciousness immediately prior to the Parable of the Sower, when he compared the hostility ‘outside’ with faithfulness ‘inside’ (3:20–35).

In both the opening and the close of Jesus’ explanations of the parables (4:13, 33), there are the first explicit mentions that the disciples do not understand, reflecting the lack of understanding of this mystery in Mark’s community. The disciples begin to act like outsiders in this scene. The reader, too, acts like an outsider if he or she does not accept the fact that those who preach the kingdom will face opposition and persecution, and that God’s Kingdom will only grow if followers resist society pressures.

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possibly drawn from “the garden of God” in Gen 2:8; 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; 31:8, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Bryan, *Preface* 93.

<sup>67</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 149–50, 158) sees the Parable of the Sower as a plot synopsis with the three groups of failures pointing to three groups who fail to receive the word (the Jewish authorities, the disciples, the rich man), claiming that this synopsis is near the beginning of the Gospel (it commences at the 109th verse). She identifies Peter with the “rocky ground,” but the reader knows that Peter did indeed bear a harvest. Further, it is difficult to see how the Jewish authorities fit the soil on the path, as they never receive the word in the first place. She is correct, however, in pointing out the emphasis on failure for most of the parable, and therefore that “what interests Mark and Mark’s authorial audience is why the word does not bear fruit.” Marcus (*Mystery* 65–69) also compares the soils with these groups.

Mark will return to the rejection by family and society in the account of Jesus' return to his hometown (6:1–6).<sup>68</sup> But, having now spoken of opposition, persecution and dying, he turns next to the biggest problem of all—his reader's fear.

#### WHAT WILL IT BE: FEAR OR TRUST?

*Why are you being cowardly?  
Don't you trust yet? (4:42)*

As soon as it becomes clear that there will be hostile forces aligned against them, and persecution is mentioned (4:17), the disciples become afraid for the first time, and they do so in a scene that seems to be a battle with hostile elemental spirits. The placement of the storm scene (4:35–41) dramatically demonstrates the depth of the readers' doubts and fears in the face of such hostile forces.<sup>69</sup>

As the storm rages around the disciples and Jesus sleeps in the stern when he should be steering, the disciples cry out, "Teacher, don't you care that we are being destroyed?" (4:38).<sup>70</sup> This is really the cry of Mark's traumatised readers, unable to comprehend why God/Jesus had not rescued them. They might justifiably have been questioning this 'Kingdom of God' that the preachers had kept mentioning, wondering whether Jesus, the Son of God, had any power at all, or whether he was impotent in the face of Roman might and

<sup>68</sup> The scenes in 3:20–21, 30–35 are not meant as a "foreshadowing" of Jesus' rejection in his hometown, as Donahue ("Windows and Mirrors" 14) proposes, but are emotional *reminders* of very real events in the lives of the readers. The memory of their own personal situation operates much more powerfully than any textual look-ahead to 6:1–6.

<sup>69</sup> Virgil's *Aeneid* has numerous storms at sea, one caused by Juno. This motif was re-used by the Flavian poets, Valerius Flaccus, Statius and Silius. In Silius (*Punica* 17.236–90), Neptune causes a storm, and each hero cries out against his fate. See Gossage, "Flavian Epic" 83. For at least some of Mark's readers, these familiar Roman stories may have further served to identify opposition to the spread of the gospel with hostile spiritual forces associated with Rome. See similar observations in Rick Strelan, "A Greater Than Caesar: Storm Stories in Lucan and Mark," *ZNW* 91 (2000) 166–79, who also notes that the story emphasises that Jesus is more powerful than the Roman gods and Roman rulers.

<sup>70</sup> "We are perishing" is too weak here (NRSV). The disciples do not just believe that they are about to die, but that the elements are destroying them. Mark uses *apollumi* for the destruction of a number of things and people—the demon (1:24), the wineskins (2:22), Jesus (3:6; 11:18), life (8:35), the boy (9:22), and the tenants (12:9). It frequently refers to killing someone, or putting them to death. BAGD 95.

the evil spiritual forces.<sup>71</sup> Although Christian preachers might have appealed for trust, in the darkness of those days, God seemed to have been conspicuously absent. They accuse God, and Mark answers on his behalf. In formulating Jesus' response to the disciples, Mark goes to the heart of their problem, tying trust and fear together: "And he said to them, 'Why are you being cowardly? Do you not trust yet?'" (4:40).<sup>72</sup>

Lincoln has pointed out that there is a consistent contrast between fear and trust throughout the Gospel, culminating in the very last verse, and that this combination reflects the situation in the reading community.<sup>73</sup> Mark mentions fear twelve times, and trust fifteen times, which suggests that the prospect of people becoming 'rocky ground' is his dominant concern. Only once does he address 'thorny ground' attitudes (the rich man of 10:17–23), but fear versus trust dominates the Gospel, and the fear is not the fear of a loss of wealth or security, which is not mentioned at all.<sup>74</sup> Again and again, fear is related directly to the possibility of loss of life, and the motif of fear appears for the first time at 4:40, when the disciples are faced with death. They seem to have had no fear in leaving their family and home in order to follow Jesus, and they have not been concerned about the initial opposition, but fear and lack of trust in God become issues as soon as their lives are threatened. It is the only time that the disciples accuse Jesus.

From this moment, their fear keeps increasing, and they will even become frightened of Jesus, displaying a growing lack of trust (9:32). As they head towards Jerusalem with the growing understanding that they face life-threatening opposition, they are said to be "shocked" and "afraid" (10:32). This immediately follows their hearing that their 'rewards' will include "persecution" (10:30). It is striking that Mark has placed his polemic against the Roman "tyrants" (10:42) just after

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<sup>71</sup> Paul had called Jesus, "Son of God," in opening his letter to the Roman community (Rom 1:3–4).

<sup>72</sup> The NRSV has: "Have you still no faith?" However, "trust" will generally be used to translate *pistis* in this study, rather than "faith," as it better signifies the personal confidence in God urged by this Gospel.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8," *JBL* 108 (1989) 286–98. However, he considers that 16:7–8 resolves this fear through an expectancy of an imminent Parousia. It will be shown that there is no such expectancy in this Gospel.

<sup>74</sup> In Chapter 7, Peter's exclamation in 10:28 will be seen to be for reasons other than fear.

this point, and just before Jesus faces the Jewish authorities. Mark, in an allusion that would not have been missed by a reader, reminds of the Roman abuse of power. In the story, Jesus might be determinedly striding towards the capital, but lying behind the story scenes of frightened disciples is the sense of frightened followers not so determinedly facing the rulers who “lord it over them” (10:42). The teaching that follows, on Jesus giving his life for many (10:44–45), urges readers to face this fear.

The disciples’ fear reaches a climax with their headlong flight (14:50). However, fear continues to be evident in Peter’s distancing himself from Jesus’ trial and denying knowledge of him, and is implied in the absence of the Twelve from his crucifixion, as well as in the women watching from a distance. Fear in the community was apparently such a problem that Mark returned to it in his final verse, even after the ‘good news’ is announced. In 16:7–8, trust and fear are laid side by side, demanding that the reader choose between the two. He effectively asks them: ‘Are you, too, going to run away out of fear? Or are you prepared to trust and tell people the good news, regardless of the risk?’<sup>75</sup>

### DOES JESUS CARE?

*(The title of a New Orleans Funeral Hymn)*

Mark addresses not just the reader’s fear, however, but also their doubts. The cry—“Teacher, don’t you care?”—rings through the following scenes, revealing the depth of their misgivings about the trustworthiness of Jesus, who had not seemed to care at all about them during the events of the last few years. Especially for those Christians who had, not so long ago, respected the gods of Rome, the demoralising effect of the propaganda proclaiming a victory of those gods is likely to have exacerbated their insecurities. In an environment of suffering, doubts flourish.

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<sup>75</sup> Of course, Mark’s readers knew that the news of Jesus’ resurrection had got out. Rather, his ending is much more a ‘what if’ scenario—what if the only witnesses at the tomb, and the only witnesses to the Easter good news, had allowed fear to overcome them, and had not told anyone? Where would we be then? It evokes a determined response in the reader, moving him or her to action and courage.

Beginning with 4:35, Mark has constructed his text to show, not only that Jesus does care about their plight, but that he does have the power to save. Of course, in a broader sense, Mark has been demonstrating that Jesus is powerful from the moment of the baptism scene when the voice from heaven told the reader that he has great strength (1:7), is God's beloved son (1:11), and has God's authority to dispense the Holy Spirit (1:8). Jesus' early healings and exorcisms proved that his power came from God. However, Jesus had been killed by the Romans, and had apparently been inactive since—serious hindrances to belief in his ongoing saving power. Mark responds to this in a section of text (4:35–6:6) that has not been seen as a structural unit by commentators, and he does so while still operating within his overarching motif of 3:20–6:6, the explanation for their rejection and persecution by Roman society.

Jesus answers the disciples' cry with his first strong response towards them: "Why are you being cowardly? Don't you trust yet?" (4:40). *Deilos*, normally translated "afraid," is only used here, and normally describes a coward.<sup>76</sup> The strength of Jesus' reaction emphasises this important moment.

Here, the disciples act out the false attitudes that the readers had, or, at least, that Mark perceived them to have. The disciples are suddenly confronted with someone who can control the wind and waves, and who, in contrast to the cordial relations so far in their venture, calls them cowards. Instead of trusting, they respond with even greater fear (4:41). This is not fear of death, as the danger has been averted, nor awe of the divine,<sup>77</sup> as they have obviously not worked out who Jesus is, but it is alarm that Jesus should suddenly turn on them. Previously they had recognised that he had some special powers, and would have liked to control him (1:36–37); now, for the first time, they realise that they will not control him. So, too, those readers who would have liked Jesus/God to act according to their own wishes are shown that he cannot be controlled.

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<sup>76</sup> In Rev 21:8, it is the first in a list of those whose place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. Josephus (*JW* 3.365) uses the word in this way: "It is equally cowardly not to wish to die when one ought to do so, and to wish to die when one ought not."

<sup>77</sup> Both the NRSV and NJB translate *phobon megan* as "great awe," as if the disciples are impressed, but the most natural translation is "great fear" or "very much afraid" (as the NAB has it). It becomes more apparent as the story progresses that the disciples are constantly afraid.

This storm scene seems to have been drawn from the Jonah story (Jon 1:4–16),<sup>78</sup> but there are very significant differences. In the case of Jonah, while the prophet is sleeping in the hold, the boat's crew calls on their own gods, and awakes Jonah to also call on his god (Jon 1:14). Here, the disciples do not call on God (strangely), but on Jesus. In the same way, Jesus does not call on God, but acts in his own right. It is here that Jesus and God are equated most clearly, and the rhetorical question of 4:41 ("who is this . . .?") emphasises this identification. Nor do the disciples throw the prophet overboard to satisfy God's anger, as Jonah's crew did (Jon 1:15), because here the storm is not caused by God, but is rebuked by Jesus as evil and told to be silent (4:39), just as he had rebuked the demon and told it to be silent (1:25: both use *epitimaō*, and *phimoō*). The scene implies that the readers' troubles with Roman society have a demonic origin, not a divine one.<sup>79</sup> It also shows Jesus' divine power to calm the storm, instilling trust in him. Calm (v. 39: "Be quiet! Be still!") is placed in the midst of "storm" (v. 37) and "fear" (vv. 40, 41), emphasised by the repeated use of "great"—"great storm (*megalē*) . . . great calm (*megalē*) . . . great fear (*megan*)."<sup>80</sup>

In a surprising twist compared with the Jonah story, Jesus travels to Gentile territory after the boat scene, but is rejected, continuing that underlying motif. In 4:35–41, God has been shown not to be one who inflicts storms (cf. 1 Kings 19:11: "but Yahweh was not in the storm") and, in 5:17–19, he is also shown not to force himself on people. However, the final scene of the Gerasene story has one man who becomes a follower of Jesus, preaching throughout the Decapolis "how much Jesus has done" (5:20).<sup>81</sup> The word has been

<sup>78</sup> For the importance placed upon Jonah as a type of Christ in early Christianity, see Matt 12:39–41; 16:4; Luke 11:29–32. Jonah commonly appeared on catacomb art. Michael Gough, *The Origins of Christian Art* (New York: Praeger, 1973) 38–41.

<sup>79</sup> Malbon ("Criticism" 39) argues that this scene echoes Ps 107:23–32 but, there, God causes the storm. The use of *epitimaō* hints that demonic forces are trying to thwart this first journey into Gentile territory.

<sup>80</sup> This scene also begins a play on the Old Testament idea of the sleeping God; see 1 Kings 18:27; Ps 44:23. Jesus shows himself to be in control, even when he appears to be asleep. Mark returns to this in Gethsemane, where Jesus comically reminds Peter (and the reader) of this boat scene when there was a lack of trust in the face of death. Instead of praying, the disciples sleep, and it is Jesus' turn to enquire, "Simon, are *you* asleep?" (14:37). Peter *is* asleep, and powerless, unlike God. With this seemingly incidental question, the reader is reminded at the Gethsemane crisis that God is always alert and ready to act.

<sup>81</sup> Although Jesus tells him to "go home to your friends and tell them how much

spread, despite the rejection of Jesus by the great majority—a reflection of the Roman situation. The kingdom grows mysteriously from a small seed.

It has often been noticed that the three stories that follow the storm scene have a different character than other healing stories, exorcisms or miracles in the Gospel.<sup>82</sup> The text seems to slow down here, and we find Mark giving a level of detail not found elsewhere.<sup>83</sup> He paints a pathetic picture of the situation of the demoniac (5:2–5):

A man [came] out of the tombs, with an unclean spirit . . . he lived among the tombs; no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains . . . no one was strong enough to tame him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

Indeed, he dwells on the circumstances of all three characters in this chapter who need his help, and each story is filled with pathos. The second story has a father who “begged him repeatedly” to save (*sōzō*) the life of his “little daughter” who is “at the extreme” (5:23; *eschatō*). The third story is of a woman who had suffered bleeding for twelve years.<sup>84</sup> She is described as having suffered “much under many physicians; she had exhausted her resources, and “was no better, but rather grew worse” (5:26).<sup>85</sup> The descriptions of the daughter and

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the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you,” the man proclaims, not just to his friends, but throughout the Decapolis “how much Jesus had done for him” (vv. 19–20)—again equating Jesus and God, and showing Jesus to be the dispenser of God’s mercy.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Tolbert (*Sowing* 165) says that they have “entertainment value,” and their features “draw the audience’s attention to these stories individually in a way not evident before.”

<sup>83</sup> “The slower the delivery, the greater its emotional power.” Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.3.111.

<sup>84</sup> “Twelve” appears twice in these stories: first, of the period of the woman’s suffering (5:25), and then of the age of the girl (5:42). The first occurs in the opening words, and the second in the last words, so that they frame the stories. One wonders, especially with the emphasis on the length of suffering in 5:25–26, if Mark is not alluding to the length of time that his community has suffered. If he wrote in 71, the beginning of their troubles would have occurred in 59, not 64. It was in 59 that Nero plotted the murder of his mother and wife and began his downward spiral (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.58–14.1, 12–13), and perhaps unknown pressure began to be applied to Christians even then, with the onset of suspicions at the political level.

<sup>85</sup> The term “physician” (*iātros*) can also be used of the gods, including Aesculapius, the god of healing. BAGD 369. A parallel with this scene occurs in P. Oxy. 1381,



the woman could both be applied to the long-suffering readers. In both stories, fear and trust are specifically put side by side (5:33–34, 36). The woman summons up enough trust to overcome her fear because of her desperate situation, although she would prefer not to exhibit that trust publicly. Jesus first encourages her to ‘go public’ by calling on her to overcome her fear, and then he conspicuously praises her trust—it has not only “saved” her, but allows her to “go in peace” (5:34).

Each of the three stories begins with a person in a desperate situation, and each is “saved.” *Sōzō* occurs three times (5:23, 28, 34) and, although not used of the demoniac, each story is a story of salvation.<sup>86</sup> People or demons beg favours of Jesus five times in 14 verses (vv. 10, 12, 17, 18, 23), and Jesus is shown to be very amenable to it, even granting the demons’ requests to remain in the country and to enter the swine, as well as the Gerasenes’ request to leave their district. He only denies the request of the exorcised man to follow him, telling him to go and witness. Jesus might be amenable to requests, but the mission is paramount. So, too, for the sake of the gospel, Jesus will not save the Christian from physical death, but will save by gathering him or her to an eternal reward.

All three stories have a supplicant at Jesus’ feet (vv. 6, 22, 33). Although prostration was common before rulers in the East, Gaius, and later Nero, appeared to have insisted on it, introducing the practice to Rome,<sup>87</sup> so that this motif may again be intended to compare Jesus with the (uncaring) emperors of Rome. Another aspect of these stories would have been familiar to a Roman reader: funerals were very noisy affairs in Rome, and weeping and wailing mourners (mentioned twice in 5:38, 39) were a common sight, with mourners often being hired for the occasion.<sup>88</sup>

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from Memphis, Egypt, in the second century CE: “For the god is always ready to help . . . he often saves people after all medical efforts have failed to [liberate them] from the diseases binding them, if only they turn to him in worship, however briefly.” Quoted in Cartledge and Dungan, *Documents* 122. In both cases, the divine physician is sought after medical help has failed. The woman, too, only touches Jesus briefly, and is saved (5:34: *sōzō*). In demonstrating the caring power of Jesus, Mark may have deliberately used a motif from popular piety towards Aesculapius. This is the only occasion when power is said to flow out of Jesus.

<sup>86</sup> Bryan (*Preface* 93) also observes that the four scenes in 4:35–5:43 have a universal dimension: those ‘saved’ are male Jews, a male Gentile, a Jewish woman and a Jewish child.

<sup>87</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 208–16.

<sup>88</sup> Paoli, *Rome* 130. This is the sort of scene that has been said to be typical of

Touch is emphasised: “Come and lay your hands on her that she might be saved” (v. 23). The word “touch” occurs in vv. 28, 30, 31,<sup>89</sup> and Jesus takes the little girl by the hand in v. 41 and tells her to “rise!” Although a large crowd presses in on Jesus (v. 24), only the woman who reaches out to touch him is saved.<sup>90</sup>

Mark has demonstrated well that Jesus *does* care.<sup>91</sup> Jesus’ final words, to the grieving parents, are Mark’s appeal to his distraught reader—“Do not fear; just trust” (v. 36).

### JESUS IS AMAZED

*He could do no act of power there (6:5)*

In the four scenes (4:35–5:43), Mark demonstrates that Jesus has power over the elements, demons, sickness and death.<sup>92</sup> It is a convincing demonstration of power, which begins with control over non-living elements, and moves to life itself.<sup>93</sup> When Jesus comes to his hometown, Mark reminds the reader that the power of Jesus has been in focus since the disciples queried it in 4:38; there, the

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the Palestinian background of such stories, but noisy funerals were also a feature of city life in Rome.

<sup>89</sup> But Jesus does not touch each person, as Tolbert (*Sowing* 134) claims. That would be too mechanical for Mark, who may have been conscious of potential, if not actual, accusations that Jesus was a magician.

<sup>90</sup> The phrase “knowing in her body” (5:29) also adds to the emphasis on the physical.

<sup>91</sup> Elsewhere, too, Jesus is shown to care. An observant Jesus praises a poor widow who is unnoticed by the society leaders (12:38–44), a healing Jesus helps all who come to him (1:33–34; 6:56; 7:31–37; 8:22–26; 10:46–52), a merciful Jesus freely forgives a man without even being asked (2:5), and a concerned Jesus protects a woman from criticism (14:6). However, the motif is strongly concentrated in 4:35–6:6.

<sup>92</sup> Some have seen this, such as Frank Matera, “He Saved Others; He Cannot Save Himself,” *Int* 47 (1993) 16, and Bryan, *Preface* 49, but they do not connect these stories with 6:1–6. Bryan regards them as a collection of existing miracle stories, a long-held view of scholarship that has obscured the relationship to 6:1–6, where no miracle occurs. For discussion of that view, see Achtemeier, *Omne Verbum* *Sonat* 60–62.

<sup>93</sup> Mark stresses Jesus’ power by calling his miracles *dynamis* (“acts of power”) for the first time (6:2, 5, 14), having initially used *dynamis* to refer to the power going out of him (5:30). It is also used of Jesus in 9:1 and 13:26, where it is promised that he would come again in power to bring about the ultimate rescue of the one who endures. *Dynamis* is also used of God in 12:24 and 14:62, both of which are connected with the power of the risen Jesus. In 9:39, Jesus speaks approvingly of followers performing such acts of power.

townspeople exclaim with astonishment: “What acts of power he has been working with his hands!” (6:2).<sup>94</sup> In 6:16, Herod will ironically suggest that such power can only be available to someone who has risen from the dead.

Indeed, a reader might ask, after controlling nature, demons, sickness and death, is there anything over which Jesus does not have power? Yes, says Mark: Jesus does not have power over human beings. In doing so, he returns to the issue raised by 3:20–4:34—the mystery of the rejection of Jesus, and of those who proclaim him. In his hometown, Jesus is rejected because they think that they know who he is, and so do not believe. Mark shows him to be powerless unless people allow him to exercise his power. The reader, rejected by his or her own family and society, is told that Jesus was treated in exactly the same way that they are—his compatriots paid no attention to the facts, but they reach a conclusion about him simply on the basis of parentage and status.<sup>95</sup> The Christian is condemned just because of ‘the name’ (cf. 9:41; 13:6). It is striking that Mark does not mention the name of Nazareth here, but uses the more emotive term, “hometown” (6:1).

Mark’s contrast between the natural family and the new family is complete, as is his explanation for their persecutions: it is just a fact of life that some people will reject both God’s word (4:14–19) and God’s actions (6:2–5). God did not cause their recent stormy period—Satan lies behind their persecution. God does care, but he has always respected human freedom, sending prophet after prophet (cf. 6:4) and finally his own son (1:2, 11; cf. 12:1–8). And yet, God’s healing will be experienced by some (6:5).

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<sup>94</sup> Strong irony is at work in this scene: Jesus is said to have worked powerfully “with his hands” (6:2), but is dismissed simply as “someone who is skilled with his hands” (6:3: a *tektōn*). He then lays “his hands” on a few, and heals them (6:5). In 5:23, the synagogue leader had begged Jesus to lay his hands on his daughter. The ‘hands of Yāhweh’ created the heavens and the earth (Exod 15:17; Ps 8:6; 28:5; 92:4; 95:5; 102:25; 111:7; 143:5; Isa 5:12; 45:12), and created human beings and Israel (Job 10:8, 34:19; Ps 119:73; 138:8; Isa 19:25; 29:23; 45:11; 60:21), so that there is an interplay here between “hands” and God’s great acts of power. According to Job 5:18, the hands of Yāhweh also heal.

<sup>95</sup> Rather than alluding to the virgin birth or to the death of Joseph, as has often been claimed, Mark may have only mentioned Jesus’ mother when citing his parental status (6:3) because, in Roman law, children of non-citizens took their legal status from their mother. For the legal position, see P. R. C. Weaver, “The Status of Children in Mixed Marriages,” in Beryl Rawson (ed.), *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1986) 147; Jeffers, “Families” 134, 146.

Jesus' final remarks are: "A prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household" (6:4). Matthew and Luke considered this saying too harsh, and removed the mention of the family (Matt 13:57; Luke 4:24). But as it is, mention of the three opposing groups—hometown, extended family and immediate family—reflects the Roman social situation well. Jesus' followers will be treated in the same way as he was by those who *will* not listen (cf. 9:12–13).

The issue of family has framed the whole section 3:20–6:6, which could be entitled: "*Why is this happening to us?*" Within it, the reader is led to acceptance of the hostility directed at them, and to confront his or her fear of death and doubts about Jesus' desire and power to save. In the concluding verse (6:6), it is Jesus' turn to be amazed—the only time in the Gospel—and he is astounded at the hard-heartedness of those who will not receive God's messenger. The reader is amazed with him, and perhaps saddened.

Nevertheless, Jesus' immediate response is to send out messengers regardless (6:7), warning them that they would not be welcomed by all (6:11). The Twelve were appointed in 3:14–19, but are not sent out until Jesus has shown that he has power and cares about all people, Jew and Gentile, and has taught about the mystery of the human response. It is in this context that Mark graphically warns of the likely consequences of being sent on this mission, and then consoles the reader, having regard to all of the emotions stirred up since the first mention of the family in 3:21.

#### EVERY TEAR WILL BE WIPED AWAY

*You prepare a table before me in the  
presence of my enemies (Ps 23:5)*

Surprisingly, the love of God is never mentioned explicitly in this Gospel. One would think that the seemingly abandoned Christians would have needed to be reassured about that love.<sup>96</sup> For Mark, however, love can only be demonstrated, not just spoken about. Those who had betrayed their fellow Christians had shown a lack

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<sup>96</sup> For the beleaguered Johannine Christians, God's love is mentioned repeatedly. For example, John 3:16; 14:21, 23; 15:10; 17:26.

of love, but probably would have talked about love a lot. Mark insists that real love is only proven by actions.

This may be why we have the kiss of Judas in the betrayal scene (14:44–45)—an unnecessary action, as there was no need to identify the well-known Jesus with a kiss. If there was any doubt, Judas could have just pointed him out. This scene appears odd to us today. But in the early Christian communities, the “holy kiss” seemed to have been a powerful sign of love (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14: “a kiss of love”).<sup>97</sup> In Mark’s narrative, betrayal occurs with an intimate act by one of his intimates, and his inclusion and double mention of the kiss (14:44, 45) show that betrayal struck at the heart of the community.<sup>98</sup> After all, some who had shared the holy kiss with them had handed over their friends and family to the authorities.

Mark’s core teaching on discipleship (8:31–10:45) is framed by the essential elements of the way of Jesus—being ready to give up everything (8:31–37), and being ready to be a servant of others, to the point of giving your life (10:44–45). Giving up everything for the sake of others is a definition of self-sacrificial love. The Gospel does not speak about God’s love, but demonstrates it, telling the story of God sending his son to reveal the way of love, knowing that he would be killed for his trouble (10:45; 12:1–8).

Of course, the Gospel is perfumed with displays of God’s love in many ways: Jesus heals all who come to him, has a particular care for outcasts and sinners, and is *ultra*-patient with his followers. However, there is one particular scene that would especially speak to the heart of the reader, and instinctively reassure them of God’s caring love.

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<sup>97</sup> On the kiss within the early Christian communities, see Benko, *Pagan Rome* 81–82. Fowler (*Reader* 159) regards the kiss as irony, but makes no connection to its use in the early Christian communities. The kiss as a greeting was a common practice in Roman society, but it is often reported in situations of treachery and mistrust. Suetonius reports that Galba welcomed Otho one morning “as usual with a kiss” (*Otho* 6)—Otho would soon revolt; Vitellius used to kiss the common soldiers that he met (*Vitellius* 7)—the soldiers would soon turn against him. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.29) mentions that the tense negotiations between Corbula and Tiridates to settle the Parthian threat ended with a kiss. In *Annals* 13.18, Tacitus reports that Nero would leave his mother “with a hurried kiss,” while surrounded by guards in a very strained situation, not long before he murdered her.

<sup>98</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 415) point out that the first mention of the kiss in 14:44 has *phileō*, while the actual kiss in 14:45 has *katephileō*, which “seems to heighten the intensity.” They translate it in 14:45 as “he kissed him warmly.”

It occurs just after the long section on their rejection by society (3:20–6:6).

Immediately after the commissioning of the Twelve (6:7–11), the risk for God’s witnesses is graphically illustrated by the chilling and gruesome story of John the Baptist’s execution. Mark places this story here, expressly out of chronological sequence (cf. 6:16–17), for maximum impact. He tells how John had been killed by a fearful and amoral ruler because of pressure from others (6:14–29), a familiar story for the reader. In story time, the Twelve are out on their mission while John’s execution is narrated, and for the first and only time during his ministry, Jesus is absent from the text for a substantial period (16 verses). Despite his absence, the disciples are surprisingly successful.<sup>99</sup>

With the image of John’s head on the platter, Mark stirs the fear of his readers, particularly the few Roman citizens among them who risked execution by beheading. The horror of this scene prepares for the relief of the following scene, which provides deep consolation.

The feeding scene by the lake (6:31–44) is explicitly marked by compassion, first for “the sent ones” (6:30–31: *apostoloi* is only used here), then for the crowd (6:34). It evokes many comforting images through Old Testament allusions, all of which would be familiar to readers with a minimal knowledge of the Scriptures. First, the scene is set in “a wilderness place” (three times: vv. 31, 32, 35).<sup>100</sup> This again directs the reader’s attention to God’s daily providence in the wilderness, and to Ps 78:20, 24, where the manna is called “bread from heaven” (cf. Exod 16:4). God’s response in the psalm is to “open the doors of heaven” (Ps 78:23; Jesus looks to heaven in 6:41) and “he sent them food in abundance . . . they ate and were well filled” (Ps 78:25, 29; cf. Mark 6:42: “and all ate and were filled”).<sup>101</sup> God is again providing in an impossible situation.

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<sup>99</sup> The execution of John the Baptist immediately follows the report of the success that the Twelve have in casting out demons and healing (6:13), and it begins: “when Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known . . .” (6:14). The ruler hears only when disciples begin to go public themselves, acting in Jesus’ name. Mark’s juxtaposition of this mention of Jesus’ name becoming known with this only sending out of the Twelve shows the risk that readers would take, as they would inevitably come to the attention of the Roman authorities.

<sup>100</sup> Rather than “wilderness,” which would be wrong for a Galilean setting, Mark alludes to it by using the phrase “a deserted place” (*erēmos topos*).

<sup>101</sup> Donahue and Harrington (*Mark* 207) note that the type of baskets (*kophinoi*)

The scene also reminds them of the appointment of leaders in the wilderness—“sheep without a shepherd” (6:34) is from Num 27:17, and the establishment of groups of fifties and hundreds in Israel (6:39–40) is found in Exod 18:21, 25; Deut 1:15. Jesus becomes the new shepherd who is compassionate towards the flock (alluding to Ezek 34, which condemns leaders who do not care), and who is training disciples to feed them (6:41).<sup>102</sup>

Another important biblical motif would spring to mind: the banquet of God for the oppressed and suffering person, when Yahweh “will swallow up death forever . . . [and] will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isa 25:8).<sup>103</sup> Moreover, this scene of the meal in the wilderness does not just allude to Ps 23; it virtually acts it out:

Yahweh is my shepherd; I lack nothing.  
 He lets me lie down in green pastures;  
 He leads me beside tranquil waters to restore my spirit . . .  
 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
 For you are with me . . .  
 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
 . . . My cup overflows.  
 Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
 And I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh my whole life long.

Mark cleverly triggers the connection by the reference to “green grass” (6:39). For a reader familiar with the psalm, the allusion reminds of God’s providence, compassion and generosity. It exudes peace and, in contrast to the prior scene of John’s death, reassures them, surrounded, as they are, by enemies.

Moreover, Mark alludes to the sacred meal in their house-church, and a reader could not read the scene without feeling at home, as the words of 6:41 are those of the Eucharist (“taking the loaves . . .

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used for the leftovers in 6:43 were said by Juvenal (*Satires* 3.14; 6.542) to be “especially characteristic of the poorer classes of Jews in Rome.”

<sup>102</sup> Snyder (“Interaction” 84–85) observes that the shepherd symbol appears “early and often in early Christian art” based on Ps 23, was second only to the cross, and was prior to it. Further, he notes, fish were a symbol of life in another realm, and were “the primary symbol for the Eucharist.”

<sup>103</sup> This motif of God’s banquet appears in many New Testament places, showing its prevalence in the thought of the early Christian communities (Matt 8:11; Luke 14:15–24; Rev 3:20; 19:9). For a discussion on the background of the Messianic banquet motif in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought, including the expected presence of the Messiah at the communal meals at Qumran, see J. Priest, “A Note on the Messianic Banquet,” in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 222–38.

blessed . . . broke . . . gave"; cf. 14:22; 1 Cor 11:24).<sup>104</sup> The scene evokes their own house gatherings where they listen to the teaching of Jesus (6:34), and break bread together (6:41).<sup>105</sup>

This pattern of conflict and threat interspersed with moments of comfort and blessing, will be evident again when Jesus is inside with disciples at the beginning of the Passion Narrative while the plot is hatched outside in the darkness (14:1–11), and at the final meal itself (14:17–31).<sup>106</sup> This juxtaposition of danger and consolation reflects the experience of the readers, surrounded as they are by danger outside, but by beauty, truth and saving grace inside. The feeding scene is evocative of their haven in the midst of their enemies. There, they experience God's love and reaffirm their commitment. And there, they become aware of their source of strength, as Jesus feeds them with bread from heaven.

#### STRENGTH FOR WEAK FLESH

*Your disciples were not strong enough (9:18)*

That bread is, however, only one of the sources of strength for the members of Mark's community, who needed more than mere encouragement if they were to face possible martyrdom because they continued to attend the house-church gatherings. They needed real power. "Strength" is a recurring motif in the Gospel (1:7; 2:17; 3:27; 5:4; 9:18; 14:37). In 2:17, "the strong" (*ischyontes*: that is, the healthy) have no need of the physician. Of course, the reader knows that the scribes are some of those who need the good doctor, just as the sinners do. However, it involves a double irony on a second reading,

<sup>104</sup> 14:22 uses exactly the same verbs. Smith (*Lion* 229) criticises Fowler for saying that the feedings could not be read in terms of the Last Supper later in the narrative, "as if Mark's audience heard the narrative in a complete vacuum." Rather, the story is "a type for the Eucharist."

<sup>105</sup> Jesus' looking up to heaven (6:41) may reflect the practice at the Eucharistic ritual.

<sup>106</sup> Kee (*Community* 110) points out that "at crucial points in the Gospel" (6:34; 14:27) Mark points to the new family as the 'flock of God' in the only two references to sheep and shepherd. He considers that the allusion to Zech 13:7–8 in 14:27 is "far more than a vivid metaphor for a leaderless people; it depicts the eschatological community enduring persecution and suffering in expectation of God's vindication." Both of these pastoral images occur at Eucharistic scenes.



as the reader will discover through the Gospel that it is indeed true—the one who is “strong” has all the resources needed.

The strength of Jesus is specifically mentioned in 1:7; 3:27 and 5:4, but, in 9:18, the disciples are said not to be “strong enough” (*ouk ischusan*). Jesus’ response is the harshest in the Gospel: “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?” (9:19).<sup>107</sup> The scene reminds of Moses’ return from the mountain to a “stiff-necked people,” and the long discussion with Yahweh about whether he would disown his people or continue to go ahead of them (Exod 32:1–34:11). The obstinacy of the people (*sklērotrachōlos*: Exod 34:9 LXX; cf. Exod 32:9 MT) has been altered by Mark to “faithless generation,” as obstinacy is not the issue in this matter, but lack of trust is.

An emotional scene follows, with a father pleading with Jesus for his son, and querying Jesus’ power: “If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us” (9:22).<sup>108</sup> Jesus is indignant at the suggestion: “If you are able!” (9:23). After he drives out the demon, the chastened disciples ask, “Why could we not cast it out?” (9:28), and he informs them, “This kind can only come out through prayer” (9:29). There is an implied expectancy that they should have known this, that strength comes from prior preparation through prayer, as they had twice seen Jesus prepare before new stages of his mission (1:35–39; 6:46).<sup>109</sup>

The final reference to strength occurs in Gethsemane, where Jesus calls on “Abba, father” for it (14:36).<sup>110</sup> Although they had been

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<sup>107</sup> The passion in Jesus’ outburst in 9:19 suggests that it would make sense to give up on these disciples and get some others. One wonders whether this and other notes of frustration in Jesus’ responses to his disciples (cf. 4:40; 8:17–21) reflect Mark’s own frustration with others in his community.

<sup>108</sup> The repeated use of “us” (*hēmīn . . . hēmas*) leads the reader to relate this plea to their own situation.

<sup>109</sup> These nights alone in prayer occur before Jesus moves on to other Jewish districts (1:38–39), and before embarking on the Gentile mission, which effectively begins with 7:1, after the aborted trip across the lake. On 1:35, Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 140–41) proposes that Jesus withdraws because he was having difficulty coping with the crowd, and the disciples “persuade him to take courage and resume his activities.” This is the exact opposite of the characterisations of both Jesus and the disciples in the Gospel, and has no textual support at all. Rather, this scene where the disciples “hunt him down” (1:36) and seem interested in controlling his ministry is, significantly, their first failures—to appreciate the need for prayer, and the need to spread the gospel.

<sup>110</sup> Romans used the term “father” for Jupiter (for example, Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.446;

warned three times (13:33, 35, 37) to stay awake for the moment of testing, the disciples fall asleep when they should be praying, and Jesus asks, “Were you not strong enough to stay awake for an hour?” (14:37). This is emphasised by Jesus’ final return to them: “He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy” (14:40). They were not even strong enough to hold their eyelids open, let alone face their forthcoming crisis.

In contrast, Jesus prays and obtains strength, peace and a resolve that cannot be missed by the reader. He arrives in a state of alarm and distress, and collapses on the ground (14:33–35), but after surrendering his will to his Father, attains a complete peace and readiness for what lies ahead (14:42: “Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand”). He sounds almost cheerful.

But the disciples move in the opposite direction—from sleep, to fear and flight. When Jesus returns to find the disciples sleeping, he urges them to “keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (14:38). We are then told that the Jesus “again went away and prayed, saying the same words” (14:39). These words could hardly be the words of 14:35–36 in which he prayed that the cup be taken away, but then came to acceptance of the Father’s will, or he would have been continually vacillating—hardly a good model. Rather, having accepted what he must face, he went away and prayed *for strength*, just as he urged the disciples to do, saying the same words, that is, “The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.”<sup>111</sup> This becomes the model prayer for Mark’s readers.<sup>112</sup> In Gethsemane,

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Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 1.531). Mark adds “Abba,” a term known to the Roman Christian community as a term for the God of Israel, and father of Jesus (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

<sup>111</sup> This point was made in a talk given by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor.

<sup>112</sup> Dowd (*Prayer* 119–20) describes the praying Jesus in Mark as a model for the community. Jesus had prayed twice before in the Gospel, once very early in the morning (1:35: “while it was still very dark), and the other in the evening (6:46–47). It is possible that Mark is reminding his readers of their only possible times for prayer, given the bustle of the Roman day which began at dawn when shops opened and tradesmen commenced work. Martial lamented, “There is no place in the city where a poor man may have a quiet moment of thought . . . Before dawn, bakers disturb you.” Cited in Freeman, *Romans* 125. Pliny reported that “it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight” (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96), but this was for communal prayer once a week. The scenes in Mark are of solitary prayer, and he may be suggesting that personal prayer for strength is best done before work, and in the evening, daily.

Jesus models the struggle that a disciple must go through, showing that what is needed is prayer for the strength to overcome the fear.<sup>113</sup>

Although the power of God/Jesus is demonstrated comprehensively in the first half of the Gospel, as the crucifixion draws nearer, the reader is told three times that everything is possible: “All things are possible for the one who trusts” (9:23), “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God” (10:27), and “Father, for you all things are possible” (14:36).<sup>114</sup> Each wording is slightly different. The first emphasises the believer’s need to trust. The second emphasises the power of God to do anything: there, the father of the epileptic boy laments that he is willing, but weak: “I do trust; help my lack of trust” (9:24)—a model prayer similar to 14:38. The explicit teaching on the need for prayer to obtain strength concludes that scene. But the third instance emphasises the need for the believer to trust that God can do *this* thing, *now*. In the first two, Jesus had taught others, but, in Gethsemane, confronted by his imminent arrest, he must believe it himself, just as the reader must believe when it comes to the crunch. In Gethsemane, fear and trust are dramatically put side by side. Jesus begins in fear, but prays, is enabled to trust, and so finds strength.

### PART III: DO NOT BE LEAD ASTRAY

*The one who endures to the end will be saved (13:13)*

Chapter 13 has long been regarded as material for defining the circumstances of Mark’s community. Although parts of that chapter have already been discussed, any proposal for identifying the situation of the community has to be able to show how the rhetoric of that speech relates to the issues at hand for Mark and his readers. Therefore, the chapter will be read anew, but, instead of focusing

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<sup>113</sup> Fear is the cause of his “sorrow” and distress in Gethsemane. There is a continual contrast between fear and trust throughout the Gospel, and Jesus shows here how to deal with it. He knows that his betrayer is coming (14:42) and he has just spoken to his disciples about giving his life, his blood “poured out for many” (14:24). He has also predicted that he would be “struck down” (14:27), and all his friends would desert him (14:29–31). The distress follows in v. 33, and we need look no further than the preceding few verses for the cause.

<sup>114</sup> Dowd (*Prayer* 91–93) provides evidence of a contemporary debate about whether everything was possible for God.

on sources, or on what the historical Jesus might have said, as has so often been the case in the past, the approach here will be to show that it reads very well as a piece of rhetoric composed for Roman Christians in late 71.<sup>115</sup>

This chapter, in particular, seems to have been designed to be obscure to outsiders, and much has been written about its perceived apocalyptic nature.<sup>116</sup> Although some similar elements are present, it is unlike other apocalyptic writings, only alluding in a minor way to cosmic events and heavenly conflicts.<sup>117</sup> Rather, it is very down to earth in interpreting events that have caused Mark's readers to lose their perspective. Like the only other long discourse (4:11–32), it deals with the mystery of a kingdom in which those doing the will of God are killed and are surrounded by tragic events, a kingdom where the king does not seem to be in control at all. Both chapters address the reason for their suffering, and both point to a future harvest (4:20; 13:10).

Jesus might appear to be addressing the four disciples who are with him on the Mount of Olives, but Mark's readers are the real addressees of this carefully composed speech. It is certainly meant to address readers personally, with its many uses of second person plural pronouns, unnecessary in Greek, and inserted for emphasis.<sup>118</sup> It concludes with, "What I say to you [disciples], I say to all" (v. 37).

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<sup>115</sup> For a summary of the extensive scholarship on Chapter 13, the great majority of which has been redaction or source critical work, see Beasley-Murray, *Last Days*. For a good summary of the history of interpretation, see William S. Vorster, "Intertextuality and *Redaktionsgeschichte*," in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 486–89; he sees the speech as of Mark's own making, using Old Testament allusions.

<sup>116</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic," in D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983) 305, says that apocalyptic language "elicits understandings, emotions and reactions that cannot fully be conceptualised and expressed in propositional language." If so, it can be concluded that the whole of Mark's Gospel operates in the same way as texts that are more obviously apocalyptic.

<sup>117</sup> In contrast to the typical colourful apocalyptic imagery of Jewish literature, Mark, in fact, is quite subdued, adding only the stars falling from the heavens (13:24) and some darkness (13:24; 15:33). His style contrasts heavily with Tacitus and Suetonius, for whom portents abound in times of change and dramatic events. See, among many examples, Tacitus, *Annals* 13.58; 14.22; 15.7, 47; 16.13; *Histories* 1.10, 62; 4.83; 5.13; Suetonius, *Nero* 36, 46; *Galba* 1; *Vespasian* 5. Tacitus (*Histories* 3.56) describes a darkness caused by a flock of birds during Vitellius' speech as an omen of disaster. The darkness at the cross would be seen by a Roman reader as a portent of doom. There, Mark appears to compromise his campaign against looking for signs.

<sup>118</sup> See Fowler, *Reader* 85.

This speech of Jesus is initiated by the disciples' exclamation: "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" The chapter begins, then, with an extraordinary lack of perception by the disciples. Despite Jesus' condemnation of the Temple and the religious leaders, and the fact that Jesus has just noticed something far more impressive—the sight of the poor widow giving her life—his companions see only the imposing buildings and the grandeur of the state that they are meant to signify. Jesus sounds justifiably frustrated in his response: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (13:2).<sup>119</sup> In other words, 'Do you think this is impressive? God will effortlessly reduce it all to a pile of rubble.'<sup>120</sup> The disciples look at the great buildings; Jesus looks at ruins.<sup>121</sup>

The disciples' response should be considered closely, as there has been much debate about the way in which the following speech addresses their questions: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" (13:4). What is missing is the response that the reader should expect—alarm.<sup>122</sup> Jerusalem without the Temple was inconceivable, and its destruction would mean the destruction of the city and its politico-religious system. It is surprising, then, that there is no response from the disciples when Jesus announces that it will be destroyed, if they are seeking positions of power themselves (cf. 10:37).<sup>123</sup> As the disciples have misunderstood Jesus on every occasion so far, *prima facie*

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<sup>119</sup> *Katalyō* ("thrown down") is only used by Mark in two other places (14:58; 15:29), and both are used of the destruction of the Temple *by Jesus*.

<sup>120</sup> Balabanski (*Eschatology* 60) argues that the passive construction and the double *ou mē* of the prediction (13:2) suggest that it could only be carried out by God.

<sup>121</sup> The use of *mellō* with the infinitive ("certainly") in 13:2 indicates a definiteness in the prediction, as in 10:32: "He began to tell them what was (certainly) going to happen to him."

<sup>122</sup> As pointed out by Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 389.

<sup>123</sup> The lack of response by characters at various points in the Gospel is as revealing as explicit reports of response. In 3:4, the non-response by Jesus' opponents is a comment on their inability to distinguish between good and evil. At 6:54–56, large crowds on Jewish territory flock to him and are healed, but there is no response at all, and no one follows him. In contrast, Jesus goes into Gentile territory and heals one man (7:31–37), as a result of which everyone publicises what he has done, even alluding to Isa 35:5. The Gentiles are said to be "astounded beyond measure" (7:37), while the Jewish crowds are silent. See also the lack of response by the disciples after Jesus' outburst in 8:17–21.

it should be assumed that they misunderstand here. The disciples' questions (13:4) are ambiguous: they could either refer to God's judgement in a special act of destruction, or to its demise along with everything else at the end of time.<sup>124</sup> But the former is most unlikely, as they ask about "these things" (*tauta*). Rather, they appear to think that Jesus is just commenting on the transitory nature of such things, and so they are not alarmed. The reader, however, would think of the recent razing of the Temple by the Romans, prompted by its mention in 13:2.

It is significant that Jesus' response does not begin with any reference either to the end of the world or to the end of the Temple, but with a warning against being deceived. It would be difficult to overstress the importance of the speech's beginning: "See that no one leads you astray" (13:5). Because of the contrast between Jesus' meaning and the understanding of the disciples, Mark appears to be dealing with an expectancy by some that the end of the Temple is associated with the eschaton, and he considers that this would lead them astray; this suggests that news of the Temple's destruction is a recent event. The warning in 13:5 ("watch out") sets a theme of perception and alertness that resounds through what follows: *blepete* means to see, to look out, to perceive, and it is said three more times (vv. 9, 23, 33).

For this speech, Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives, looking down on the Temple. It begins, "Then Jesus began to say to them . . .". In 8:31, where a similar 'beginning' occurs ("Then he began to teach them . . ."), he had told them what would happen to him. But, in 13:5, he begins to tell future followers what would happen to *them*.

For Mark's reader, the first half of the speech reminds him or her of recent events, listing the causes of their past troubles and anxieties. Yet, after each, a calming explanation follows: "Do not be alarmed . . . good news must be proclaimed . . . do not worry . . . the one who endures to the end will be saved . . . he has cut short those days" (vv. 7, 10, 11, 12, 20). The reader is first reminded of the recent wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes and famine (vv. 7–8).<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> *Syntelesō* can mean destruction by God as punishment (Deut 32:23; Jer 14:12; Ezek 6:12; 7:5; 13:15), but not in the New Testament, where it more generally means "bring to completion" (Luke 4:2, 13; Acts 21:27; Rom 9:28; Heb 8:8).

<sup>125</sup> As discussed on Page 94, "wars and rumours of wars" describes the Roman situation of the late sixties very well.

In v. 8, “nation against nation” is likely to remind them of the Jewish War (66 CE), and “kingdom against kingdom” points again to the divided kingdom of 3:24, reminding them of the Roman civil war (69 CE). Mark groups the calamities by type more than chronology. In any case, the events of vv. 7–8 overlapped, with the Jewish War continuing after the civil war had ended, and earthquakes and famine occurring at various times during the sixties.<sup>126</sup> Romans considered earthquakes to be particularly revealing signs of the divine mood.<sup>127</sup> But the reader is not to be alarmed—it is “not the end yet”—“it is just the beginning of the suffering.” Here Mark uses *ōdin*, usually translated as “birth-pains,” perhaps overly influenced by its use in 1 Thess 5:3, where Paul uses childbirth as a simile, referring to the Parousia, but it is a common literary figure (cf. John 16:21–22), each time having a different meaning. The word can just mean “suffering” or “agony”—Acts 2:24 uses it to describe the agony of Jesus’ death and, in Job 21:17 LXX, it simply means pain. A comparative word might be “travail,” which does refer to birth-pains, but also means any severe suffering that will pass. The emphasis then is not on ‘giving birth’ to something like the spread of the gospel, but only that agony *will* be experienced and *will* pass. In this case, the wars and natural disasters are over for the reader, who is reminded that suffering has come and gone, and “it is not the end yet” (v. 7).<sup>128</sup> In addition, Mark may mean *archē* in v. 8 more in the sense of “origin” or “cause,” so that the verse would then be translated simply, “These things will be the cause of suffering.”<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> “Famines” could include the one in Rome during the latter part of Nero’s reign, together with the other food shortages during the period (see Page 157). Persecutions also overlap all the other events.

<sup>127</sup> During a crisis in 193 BCE, the senate forbade earthquakes being reported. See Leibeschuetz, *Continuity* 24. For a list of earthquakes in the sixties, see Hengel, *Studies* 23. Readers may have been frustrated that Nero had not been killed in one that occurred just after he left the theatre at Pompeii in 62. Suetonius, *Nero* 20. It “largely demolished” the town, according to Tacitus, *Annals* 15.22. Perhaps, too, Mark has added “earthquakes” to bring to mind that famous scene with Elijah: “Yahweh was not in the earthquake” (1 Kings 19:11). In the Book of Revelation, earthquakes coincide with actions of God (Rev 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18), so that some Christians may have been seeing these recent events as signs of God’s increasing activity, leading to the end. Josephus (*JW* 4.287) regarded an earthquake as a portent of coming destruction.

<sup>128</sup> The “troubles and persecution” of 4:17 (*thlipsis* and *diōgmos*) may refer to the same kinds of troubles as 13:7–8 (natural disasters, wars and civil strife) and 13:9–13 (persecutions). As a more general word, the use of *thlipsis* in 13:19, 24 appears to describe all that has happened. *Diōgmos* quite specifically refers to persecution in 10:30.

<sup>129</sup> There is no verb, but the *esontai*, already used twice in the verse, can be

Verses 9–13 remind the reader of the persecutions that have already occurred. The use of *blepete* to begin this section suggests that it is more than a reminder of the past, as all uses of the word refer to current *and* future events (v. 5: false prophets; v. 9: persecutions; v. 23; the gathering of the faithful; v. 33: being ready). More persecutions are expected.

Mark and his readers would be well aware of the beheading of Paul in Rome during the Neronian persecutions. Verses 9–10 may be a veiled tribute to Paul who, after all, would be regarded by Mark as an outstanding model of endurance in spreading the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world, including Rome. First, in v. 9, Mark lists the various authorities before which Paul was arraigned, and they progressively move, in chronological sequence, to Rome: first Jewish (“Sanhedrins” (*synedria*) and “synagogues”), then Gentile (“governors and kings”).<sup>130</sup>

In v. 10, *prōtos* can mean first in chronological terms, or first in importance. Mark uses the word in the latter sense in 6:21 (“the leading men”), and in the ‘last will be first’ sayings in 9:35; 10:31, 44, as well as for the greatest commandment in 12:28–29. Given the Markan stress on the importance of the spread of the gospel, it makes most sense to translate vv. 9d–10 this way: “You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them. Most importantly, the good news must be proclaimed to all nations.”<sup>131</sup> Now, it leads into the advice about what they are to say in v. 11 far better.

Verses 9–10 are quite Pauline in both language and sequence. Two reasons are given for being brought before the authorities: (1) “as a witness to them” (v. 9), and (2) to preach “the gospel” to “all the nations” (v. 10). In Rom 10:18, Paul had written of the necessity of witnesses, so that their words might go “to the ends of the

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assumed, because “will be the cause” best fits the context of this speech, which is in the future tense.

<sup>130</sup> 13:9 describes the persecutions of Paul “exactly,” according to Gaston, *Stone* 18, citing Lohmeyer and Bultmann. See Acts 5:40; 22:19; 2 Cor 11:24 on reports of his beatings in synagogues. For Paul before Roman provincial governors, see Acts 23:33–26:32, and for his appeal to the emperor, see Acts 25:10–12.

<sup>131</sup> Hengel (*Studies* 23) suggests that the *kai* should be translated, “However, the gospel must first. . . .” But *kai* can probably be read as a connective that can be ignored, as the link to the preceding verse is obvious if “first” is read as proposed. There is no textual indication that the use of *prōtos* means that these things must occur before the Last Day, and Jesus is not speaking of the end time here, but the reader’s past.



world.” 13:9–10 serve as a reminder of Paul’s mission and his martyrdom, and they become a tribute to that great missionary who endured to the end. They also serve to remind that, regardless of persecution by the authorities, the gospel has spread. A reader, however, would also recall that Paul was one of those who had been executed in Rome.

Accordingly, again stirring painful memories, Mark goes on to remind the reader of the arrests, trials and executions that have occurred amongst them (v. 11). Once again, but more emphatically this time, as it relates to the reader’s situation, he declares that the moment of trial becomes an opportunity, an occasion when the Holy Spirit would empower the disciple to witness.<sup>132</sup> In vv. 11–13, Mark pulls no punches, bringing to mind betrayals by relatives (v. 12),<sup>133</sup> and reminding them in the final words that they have been “hated by all” (v. 13). No reason is given for the hatred (the only use of *miseō*), just as no reason is given for the intensity of the opposition to Jesus by the Jerusalem crowd (15:11). He does not boast of this hatred as Ignatius would when he later wrote to the Romans on his way to martyrdom—“the greatness of Christianity lies in its being hated by the world, not in its being convincing to it” (*Rom.* 3.3)—but is more puzzled by it. Irrational hatred seems to rule, and the suspicion is that Satan is the real force behind events.

The ‘Trial Section’ (vv. 9–13) concludes with an allusion to the suffering to be endured, but it also provides a word of comfort: “The one who endures to the end (*telos*) will be saved” (v. 13). Interrogation, torture and death are all implied by this verse,<sup>134</sup> and the reader should recall that the one who will be saved is the one who loses their life (8:35). Before this point in the speech, “the end” (v. 7)

<sup>132</sup> No details of the charge are given. The crime is apparently known by the reader.

<sup>133</sup> There is no reason to see 13:12 as “an apocalyptic commonplace” citing Old Testament and other Jewish writings, as Gaston does (*Stone* 21). Hengel (*Studies* 24) argues that it is based on Mic 7:6. None of the parallels are very close, and we would do better to read it just as it is. This is ordinary language that any good rhetorician might use, and Mark does not need to allude to Scriptural texts. He is simply building pathos. Nevertheless, emotive as it is, Mark would have had to accurately reflect the way in which betrayal did occur in the community if he was going to stir the desired response in his reader.

<sup>134</sup> *Hypomenō* can have a wide range of meaning, including simply “remaining,” or “persisting in the face of difficulty.” In 1 Pet 2:20, however, it is specifically used (twice) of enduring a beating.

could have been read as referring to the end of the world, but the wording here leaves the reader in no doubt that “the end” refers to the martyrdom of the believer. The way in which *telos* is used ambiguously in v. 7, and then refers to martyrdom in v. 13, suggests that it is used in this discourse to speak against the false expectancy of those looking for a rescuing Last Judgement. By concluding this Trial Section with this reference to “the end,” Mark redirects the reader’s attention to its other meaning: ‘the end’ of the martyr’s physical life.<sup>135</sup>

In vv. 6–8, the reader had been reminded that the end did not come when there were wars and natural disasters (v. 7). But, in vv. 11–13, they are reminded that ‘the end’ *has* come for many through persecution, and is likely to come for others in the future.

The next section (vv. 14–18), as proposed in Chapter 3, reminds the reader of the recently received news of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, albeit in a somewhat cryptic manner, and his graphic depiction again stirs up the readers’ emotions, this time the fear of Titus. This scene also makes clear what happens to a city that does not conform to God’s plan for his people.

#### SHAKING AND GATHERING

*For the sake of those chosen (13:20)*

With v. 19, at about the halfway point, the speech turns fully to the present situation, and prepares the reader for the future. This is a further indication that news of the Temple’s destruction has recently been received. Verses 19–20 have often been allied with vv. 14–18, and thought to be still referring to the distress at the destruction of the Temple. However, a distinct change occurs at this point, as the speech turns to hope and promise. Verse 19 is the transition. “In those days” (vv. 17, 19, 20, 24) seems to be a general term for the period of time covered by this speech, and is used to refer to all of

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Enduring to the end’ is also suggested by earlier references to prophets sent by God (6:4; 9:12–13). At the Transfiguration, Jesus is with the two figures of Israel most known for their steadfastness in the face of opposition—Elijah and Moses. On the Jewish view of these two figures, see Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus’ Rewritten Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 291–97. This scene would be comforting for the reader—Jesus meets two long-dead people who suffered for the sake of their mission, both alive and with God.

the troubles that have gone before, as well as the time “after that suffering” (v. 24). In v. 19, it emphasises that there has never before been such distress. Verse 20, however, promises that God has “cut short those days.” It makes no sense to suggest that God cut short the days of the destruction of Jerusalem so that some of the “elect” might be saved—the destruction was complete, and no reader of this Gospel was saved by any divine shortening. Rather, it is a promise that the difficult times will pass, and that a faithful remnant will survive, similar to the expressions of hope for a faithful remnant found in Israel’s exilic writings (for example, Zeph 2:7, 9; 3:12–13; Ezek 11:13–20).<sup>136</sup>

At this point (vv. 21–23), the speech returns to its opening subject—the false prophets (*pseudoprophētai*) and false Messiahs (*pseudochristoi*) who would “lead astray” (v. 22). They may have been predicting the imminent return of Christ to rescue the persecuted.<sup>137</sup> If so, they were of a kind with those “false prophets” that Josephus described, who called upon the people to just climb up on the sanctuary during the final Roman assault on the Temple and await “signs (*sēmeia*) of deliverance.” Josephus laments that this caused them to rely wholly on “expectation” (*JW* 6.285–88).

Although it has often been proposed that the mention of false Messiahs alludes to rebel leaders or prophets in the Jewish War, these opponents may just have been members of the Christian community who were claiming that recent catastrophic events indicated the end.<sup>138</sup> The widespread fear of the end of the Empire during the late sixties has already been noted. However, it is also possible that Mark does allude to false Jewish prophets during the war, thus warning his readers not to be led astray as the inhabitants of Jerusalem were by their false expectations, resulting in their downfall. This discourse is very much about the power of God, and the deceivers are

<sup>136</sup> The citation of Zech 13:7 in 14:27 also promises the survival of a remnant.

<sup>137</sup> It is likely that v. 6 and v. 22 refer to the same people, with Mark using different terms to describe them. Each term suggests that they make false claims to power. The ones who say “I am” (v. 6) would remind the reader of Jesus, walking on the water, and also saying *egō eimi* (6:50). Ironically, they use “I am” to claim a special status, when they should be preparing to use “I am” to admit to the Roman judge that they are followers of Jesus.

<sup>138</sup> Nickelsburg (“Passion Narrative” 181) proposes that the false prophets must have been drawing a following with their eschatological claims for Mark to pay so much attention to them in this discourse.

likely to have been claiming to know how God would exercise his power.<sup>139</sup> But Mark has already warned that God cannot be expected to rescue them through a visible display of power, as the gospel must be proclaimed by their witness through martyrdom (8:34–37).

It is not necessary to imagine that the false prophets were working miracles to mislead people; they only “give (*didōmi*) signs and prodigies.” They could just have been employing the typical Roman means of prediction, reading the “signs and omens” (v. 22: *sēmeia kai terata*), common terms for portents.<sup>140</sup> In Rome, much attention was paid to signs of various kinds, as is evident in most Roman writers,<sup>141</sup> and there was a widespread belief in astrology in this period.<sup>142</sup>

Theissen suggests that the mention of the false messiahs and prophets producing “signs and omens” (13:21–22) is anti-Vespasian propaganda.<sup>143</sup> As noted on Page 170, Vespasian was known to be susceptible to superstition and omens, and he seems to have encouraged the circulation of stories of omens, prophecies and miracles that confirmed his destiny to be emperor.<sup>144</sup> The people seem to have accepted them; Tacitus comments: “It was only after Vespasian’s rise that we came to believe in the mysterious movings of Providence, and supposed that portents and oracles had predestined the throne for him and his family” (*Histories* 1.10). Theissen could be correct, and Mark could have been hinting that Vespasian was a false saviour,

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<sup>139</sup> *Planaō* or *apoplanaō* (v. 6, 22: lead astray, deceive) are only otherwise used in the episode where Jesus twice tells the Sadducees that they are very much “mistaken” about the power of God (12:27). That scene occurs shortly before this discourse.

<sup>140</sup> BAGD 747–48, 812.

<sup>141</sup> Magistrates were expected to watch for any unusual sign, which would be an indication that the peace of the gods had been upset, and could halt official proceedings, as could the augurs, if a sign was observed. As Jupiter was the god of the sky, the magistrate was really questioning Jupiter. Cicero said that the augurs were the interpreters of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and warned that disobedience would be punished with death (*On the Laws* 2.20–21). For an explanation of auspices, prodigies, omens, haruspices and other signs, see Dupont, *Daily Life* 181–85; Beard, North and Price, *Religions* 166, 171–72, 354–55.

<sup>142</sup> Carcopino, *Daily Life* 230; Leibeschutz, *Continuity* 23; Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 239–41.

<sup>143</sup> Theissen, *Gospels* 268.

<sup>144</sup> Plutarch (*Otho*, 4.4–5.1) describes “prodigies and apparitions” when “Vespasian and his party first began to put themselves forward.” Prophecies and omens related to the rise of Vespasian are listed in Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4–5, 7; Dio, *History* 65.9.1; 66.1.2–4. See also Josephus’ own prophecy (*JW* 3.401–4). Scott (*Imperial Cult* 19) concluded that Vespasian must have encouraged these stories.

perhaps even suggesting that the false messiahs in the community are thinking like the emperor in relying on portents and signs.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Mark again denigrates sign-seeking (cf. 8:11), and by this mention of the sign-seekers (v. 22), he points back to the disciples' opening requests for a sign.<sup>145</sup> So far, however, Jesus' speech has not told the reader anything that she or he did not already know. Jesus has brought to mind their past troubles and noted that the only 'end' that has occurred is the death of martyrs, and has reminded them that there is still work to be done (v. 10). As these are all things that had to happen, according to Jesus, he simply advises the reader to ignore the false prophets who see these events as signs. Moreover, he adds that these warnings should hardly be necessary at all—"I have already told you everything" (v. 23b).<sup>146</sup>

Jesus now makes a prediction of his own: "The stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken" (v. 25), and "they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds" (v. 26). With this prediction, Mark suggests that those who have been looking for signs in the heavens will be surprised by the way in which Jesus will 'shake up' those heavenly bodies. As the stars and planets were thought to be gods by the Romans, the phrase "the powers in the heavens" would be read first in Rome as referring to the Roman gods.<sup>147</sup> In the Septuagint, "shaken" (*saleuō*) is used of earthquakes

<sup>145</sup> The *sēmeion* that the Pharisees ask for (8:11) is probably also a "portentously heavenly wonder," as Marshall (*Faith* 67) suggests. When the disciples ask for a *sēmeion* in 13:4, they put themselves in the same league as the false prophets, looking for signs of the end.

<sup>146</sup> Marshall (*Faith* 146) has commented that the framing of 13:5–23 with *blepete* shows that the false prophets are regarded as more dangerous than the persecutions. However, he views them as Christians who are 'Parousia pretenders' claiming to be Christ coming with signs and wonders (147–48). There is no need to imagine such a dramatic and unlikely scenario. The more dangerous situation is the subtle influence of those who claim they can foretell the imminent future, and divert Christians from their mission.

<sup>147</sup> See Bas M. F. Van Iersel, "The Sun, Moon, and Stars of Mark 13,24–25 in a Greco-Roman Reading," *Bib* 77 (1996) 84–97, who argues that vv. 24–25 should be read from the perspective of a Roman reader, who would first think of the gods rather than heavenly bodies or Old Testament passages. He argues that previous interpretive methods have wrongly focused on the author's perspective and the sources he used. He suggests that these verses signal the "dethronement" of the Roman gods, who are the "they" who will see the coming Son of Man. However, it is unlikely that Mark would speak of the Roman gods as "they," that is, as real enough to see such a thing, even allowing for literary licence. Nevertheless, his observations suggest that, in v. 25, Mark is also alluding to Roman power, which is never separable from its gods.

caused by Yahweh;<sup>148</sup> here, it is used of the powers of the heavens. Ironically, therefore, while some might look to earthquakes as signs of the times, ‘heavenquakes’ will really be the eye opener, that is, when Jesus ‘shakes up’ the Roman gods, and his true identity is revealed. This would be at a time when Jesus will gather *some* people to himself (v. 27).

This scene of the coming of the Son of Man, usually thought to refer to the Parousia, is unusual.<sup>149</sup> Mark possibly used standard prophetic motifs in vv. 24b–25 of the sun and moon not giving light, and the stars falling (cf. Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7–8; Joel 2:10; 3:15; cf. Rev 6:12–13; 8:12), but has added the unique feature: “and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (v. 25).<sup>150</sup> Nothing happens to the earth, and it does not appear to be the end at all: the heavenly bodies are not destroyed, the sky does not roll up like a scroll (Isa 34:4; Rev 6:14), and the powers in the heavens are only “shaken.” Since earthquakes were seen as a sign of divine displeasure, this shaking points to the power of the Son of Man over Rome, and over the “powers in the heavens” behind it.<sup>151</sup> But there is no prediction that Rome will come to an end; it will only be ‘shaken,’ just as earthquakes do not bring the earth to an end. These verses continue the apocalyptic flavour of the parables of the satanic kingdom and house (3:23–27); there, too, Rome is not destroyed, and there is just a promise that “his own” will be taken away (3:27).<sup>152</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Jdgs 5:5; Mic 1:4; Nah 1:5; Hab 3:6; Ps 18:7; 60:2; 114:7; Jdt 16:15; 1 Chron 16:30.

<sup>149</sup> For example, Marcus (*Mystery* 61) says: “Chapter 13 evidences a lively expectation of the parousia.”

<sup>150</sup> Gaston (*Stone* 32) suggests that Mark did not intend to quote at all, but wrote four lines of poetry with parallelism, summed up in the fourth line.

<sup>151</sup> With the strong Flavian belief in astrology (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 14, 25; *Titus* 9; *Domitian* 15; Dio 66.9.2), the image of the stars falling from heaven may be a jibe at their reliance on such signs. Suetonius (*Vespasian* 25) notes: “All accounts agree on Vespasian’s supreme confidence in his horoscopes and those of his family.” Vespasian kept an astrologer, Seleucus, at court “to guide him” (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.78).

<sup>152</sup> Kee (*Community* 68) recognised the apocalyptic nature of Mark’s literary style, especially in his use of Daniel: “The literary device of speaking to the crises of the religious community in the present under the guise of an account from the past is a characteristic feature of the apocalypticists.” He added (66) that there are two conceptions in apocalyptic literature: the literary mode, that describes the cause of the crisis and the reasons for the martyrdom of the faithful, and the eschatological-historical mode, in which God’s plan is thwarted by demonic powers, and the faithful are called on to persevere until God vindicates them. Kee’s analysis matches

The way in which Jesus will effect the rescue and vindication of the ‘chosen’ is not spelt out, and its timing is left completely undefined. Verse 24 begins by directing the reader to the time “after that suffering,” but gives no indication when that might be. Against the idea that it must be imminent, or is even the present time of the reader, other biblical promises of comfort for those who are suffering are typically unspecific (cf. Isa 25:8–9). At the time of vindication promised in 13:24–27, there is no judgement scene, no mention at all of what happens to the wicked, no mention of the rising of the dead, and no contrast between this age and the age to come, so that it does not look like the Last Judgement. Unlike Paul’s image of being “caught up in the clouds” when Christ’s angel sounds the trumpet (1 Thess 4:16), Mark’s image is far less explicit.<sup>153</sup>

The scene predicts only a gathering: “Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven” (v. 27). The word *episyngō* (“gather”) joins this verse with other typical promises of the gathering of the faithful, especially as found in these Isaian texts:

He will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa 11:12).<sup>154</sup>

He will gather the lambs in his arms (Isa 40:11).<sup>155</sup>

I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you (Isa 43:5).

For a brief moment, I abandoned you, but, with great compassion, I will gather you (Isa 54:7).

A further parallel can be found in 2 Macc 2:18:

We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils.

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well the motifs in the Gospel, especially Chapter 13, including Mark’s generalised promises of vindication that avoid specifying any details of God’s victory over Rome.

<sup>153</sup> Certainly, Mark uses a number of elements common to 1 Thess 4:13–5:10 (angels, clouds, suffering, staying awake), but he may be deliberately using, in a new way, images that had become general language among the churches for Christ’s return, springing from, or as evidenced in, Paul’s letter, in order to say that Christ will come, but not in the way that some expect.

<sup>154</sup> Gordon D. Kirchhevel, “He That Cometh in Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30,” *BBR* 4 (1994) 109, suggests that the reference to the gathering may come from the Targum on Isa 11:12, which speaks of bringing the exiles of Judah “from the four winds of the earth.” In Zech 2:6, of the dispersion of Israel by the Assyrians, there is: “I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven.”

<sup>155</sup> Mark cited Isa 40 in his opening verses (1:3).

Jer 31, containing the well-known promise of a new covenant, has Yahweh promising to gather the remnant “from the farthest parts of the earth” (Jer 31:8).<sup>156</sup>

If Mark wanted to predict that the end was coming soon, he could have done so much more clearly, in language as explicit as Paul’s. As it is, he seems to be more concerned with a general promise directed towards those who have suffered through all “those days.”<sup>157</sup> It does not appear to be the end of the world, or even the beginning of a new age for the world, only the end for those who have been gathered.<sup>158</sup> This gathering, then, is not at the Parousia, but is the gathering to heaven of followers who endure to the end under persecution.<sup>159</sup> Mark does not use the word *parousia*, and he may have wanted to distance himself from Paul’s expectation of a visible coming.<sup>160</sup> For him, Jesus’ coming is one that is not visible. He comes as a hidden presence that empowers the believer at their time of crisis, gathering the faithful to eternal life.

This vindication of the oppressed will be witnessed by their enemies, indicated by the “they” of v. 26. In 14:62, Jesus prophesies to the High Priest that “you (plural) will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds,” which, as proposed on Page 151, refers to the witnessing by the Jerusalem priesthood of the destruction of the Temple in 70.<sup>161</sup> The similarities

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<sup>156</sup> Kee (*Community* 115) suggests that 13:27 echoes the expression in Matt 23:37 and Luke 13:34 that Jesus longed to gather his people for protection “just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

<sup>157</sup> Collins (“Among Jews” 407) observes that the coming of the Son of Man in Mark does not portray any “cosmic transformation” or defeat of evil powers, but only the gathering of the elect, and she cites *1 Enoch* 62.14, perhaps written before Mark’s Gospel, of believers looking forward “to the day when the righteous will dwell with that Son of Man forever.”

<sup>158</sup> Thomas R. Hatina, “The Focus of Mark 13:24–27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?” *BBR* 6 (1996) 43–66, argues that vv. 24–27 do not relate to an eschatological event at the second coming of Christ as is usually held, but that the Markan audience would have understood these prophecies as pointing directly at the destruction of the Temple. However, it is difficult to understand how the gathering of the elect in v. 27 could relate to the fall of the Temple, as the readers have not experienced any protection by God, and the Roman gods (the powers in the heavens) have not been shaken by that event; rather, the gods of Rome seemed to have been victorious.

<sup>159</sup> The phrase “from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven” may merely suggest the removal of the believer far away from their earthly sufferings.

<sup>160</sup> *Parousia* is widely used in the New Testament, including 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23 and Matt 24:27, 37, 39.

<sup>161</sup> Hatina (“Mark 13:24–27” 63) suggests that the “they” in 13:26 is the temple



between these two predictions (13:26; 14:62) have often been noted. Both are predictions of vindication, and both quote Dan 7:13, in which “dominion, glory and kingship” are given to the Son of Man over all the earth, following which “the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever” (Dan 7:18). The “saints” will possess the kingdom, and the kings of the earth will be overcome. Gaston argues that Dan 7 was used in the early church to speak of the exaltation of Christ, not the Parousia, and that it was closely connected with martyr theology, pointing to the allusion to it in Acts 7:56, where it is used to indicate the vindication of the martyr, as it is in 14:62.<sup>162</sup> This further suggests that the vindication of the faithful is the prime concern here, and that it is not related to the Parousia, but to an event in history.<sup>163</sup> Hatina points out that cosmic portents in the Old Testament and pseudepigrapha typically refer to historical events, together with a gathering of the righteous, and the overcoming of a political power.<sup>164</sup>

Therefore, v. 26 refers to an event in history, but “they” does not refer to the Jewish leaders here. For Mark, Rome will be shaken when the Son of Man is revealed through the witness of his followers. If it had worried when Jupiter was ill at ease, it will be even more shaken when it discovers that it had killed the one who directs

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authorities, as 14:62 is directed at them. But it makes more sense for the warning in 13:26 to refer to the Roman authorities. After all, it occurs immediately after reminding the reader what the Romans had done to them and to the Jews of Jerusalem. This would mean that Mark promises God’s action against Rome using similar language to the warning directed at the Jewish authorities, and the reader knows that God has already acted against the latter.

<sup>162</sup> Gaston, *Stone* 385–92.

<sup>163</sup> Kee (*Community* 110–11) has pointed out that Mark cites Zechariah in a number of places—14:27 (Zech 13:7–8); 11:1–10 (Zech 9:9); 6:34 (Zech 10:4). Zech 14:21 (cf. Mark 11:15) could be added. If so, Mark may have more of the motifs of Zech 14 in mind: in Zech 14:5, the Lord comes with the “saints” (*agioi*), and becomes Lord of all the earth (Zech 14:9); the powerful nations are subdued and are forced to submit to Yahweh Sabaoth, a military designation of Yahweh. There is no thought in Zechariah that this was the end of the world, only the establishment of Yahweh’s dominion over the nations.

<sup>164</sup> He points to the similarities between 13:24–27 and Joel 2:10, 3:15, and to the use of Joel in Acts 2:14–21. He also observes that Dan 7:13 refers to Israel’s rescue. This comes together in 4 Ezra 13 in the first century CE where the Son of Man is God’s son, and in 4 Ezra 12:10–35, the fourth beast in Dan 7 is identified as an eagle, a symbol of Rome. Hatina, “Mark 13:24–27” 54–62. If so, the allusion to Joel may indicate that this shaking of the powers will be caused by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believer.

the stars, and finds that only followers of “Chrestus” will be gathered.<sup>165</sup>

This victorious proclamation at the end of Mark’s reminders of ‘the troubles’ brings angels into the text again. In 1:13, they had ministered to Jesus; in 8:38, they were said to come with Jesus to be present at the trial of the believer. Again, they come to gather those who had been “chosen” to endure to the end.

### JUST STAY AWAKE (AND PRAY)

*For you do not know when the time will come (13:33)*

One thing is clear about the events described so far in this discourse—‘these things’ occur very suddenly, and there is nothing that the reader can do about it, as the phrase “when you see,” recurring in vv. 14, 29, indicates. In the same way, it will be too late when the reader’s end comes.

The fig tree in v. 28 is a dramatic contrast with the one in 11:20; this one will spring to life and, like the fig tree called Ruminialis (see Page 144), it is a sign of hope, just as the mention of summer is a promise of brighter times.<sup>166</sup> However, the reader is told to “learn the parable of the fig tree,” drawing attention back to Jesus’ action outside Jerusalem, and to the suddenness of its end on the day that the Lord came.

Verse 29 is less clear: “So also, when you see these things take place, you know that he is near, at the very door [or gate].” Again, “these things” probably refers generally to the suffering that has occurred. It is a promise that Jesus will be near when the moment of crisis comes suddenly. He will be standing at the door or gate, ready to accompany the Christian to court.

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<sup>165</sup> *Saleuō* (“shaken”) also means “confused” or “disturbed,” as in Acts 2:25; 2 Thess 2:2. There is an interesting conjunction of “gathering” (*synagō*) and “shaken” (*saleuō*) in Acts 4:31, where the disciples “are gathered” (passive) and the place is “shaken, and the Holy Spirit is poured out on them again. That shaking is to do with the Spirit, not the Second Coming. For Mark, however, the power of the Holy Spirit becomes evident only at the trial of the Christian, so that he may be suggesting that it is through the Holy Spirit ‘speaking’ at such trials, and the martyrdom of the Spirit-filled Christian, that Rome will be shaken.

<sup>166</sup> Balabanski (*Eschatology* 64) sees the fig tree parable as a further call to readiness, “lest the disciples . . . be found like the [other] fig tree, bearing no fruit,” whereas Tolbert (*Sowing* 267) sees it as a promise of “a gloriously fruitful season just about to arrive.”

In v. 30, the reader is told that “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” As “all these things” include the gathering, through martyrdom, of the faithful, and “this generation” addresses the reader, it is a further prediction that there will be more persecutions, and repeats the promise that Jesus would gather to himself those who are faithful. Mark would not have meant that the Last Day will occur in the lifetime of the reader, as he is attempting to divert attention away from it. Verse 30 should be read with v. 31—“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”—connected by the double use of “pass away” (*parerchomai*). It is an expression of certainty that God would carry out his saving will (cf. Isa 55:11)—the *only certainty* of the chapter, other than the prediction of further persecution. God’s promise of gathering the faithful to eternal life *will* be accomplished, only here it is not God’s word, but Jesus’ word that can be relied upon for all time.<sup>167</sup>

The speech continues with the warning:

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (13:32–33)

It would appear that the term “the hour” is used consistently by Mark to mean the hour of testing (cf. 14:35, 37, 41). Most significantly, in 13:11, “that hour” is when the disciple is standing before the magistrate.<sup>168</sup> On the other hand, “that day” of v. 32 most reasonably refers to the event of the immediately preceding v. 31—“when heaven and earth pass away”—rather than what would happen “in those days, after that suffering” (v. 24).<sup>169</sup> “That day” is the Last Day, and v. 32 is the only reference to it in the chapter.

At the end of the speech, therefore, but before the final warnings, Mark returns to the questions of the disciples in v. 4, and presumably the claims of the false prophets, about the timing of the end

<sup>167</sup> There is no need to link the mention of heaven and earth passing away in this verse with the cosmic upheaval of vv. 24–25, which certainly does not describe either passing away.

<sup>168</sup> Kelber, *Passion* 44, claims that ‘the hour’ in Mark is a “cipher for suffering.” But 13:11 and 14:41 show that it refers specifically to arrest and interrogation.

<sup>169</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 163) claims that “in those days” alludes to the end time in the prophets, but the phrase is also used of many other events and periods (see, for example, Isa 38:1; Ezek 38:17; Jer 5:18).

time, and compares that end with the true concern—the end of the disciple as the result of his or her arrest. Neither can be predicted, just as the end of the world cannot be predicted, even by Jesus.<sup>170</sup> In this Gospel, it is the Father who is in control of events. In this emphatic statement, Mark simply says about the timing of these events, “God only knows!”

Instead of searching the sky, Mark suggests, his readers should look to contemporary events for the lessons that could be learned. This is how he has constructed the first half of this speech (13:6–18), and how he has shaped his whole Gospel, continually alluding to the contemporary political and social situation. For Mark, it is not a matter of seeking signs that would predict the future, because the future of Christians is clear—they will continue to be hated by society, and martyrdom will be a constant possibility. Mark urges them just to be ready for these things, and he does this repeatedly throughout the Gospel.

The following little Parable of the Watching Servant (vv. 34–36) suggests that the reader must be ready for an event similar to one described earlier in the speech and, of those, the event of most immediate interest for them is their possible arrest and trial.<sup>171</sup> With its first warning—“For you do not know when the master of the house will come” (v. 35)—the reader’s attention is suddenly directed away from all figurative language, and is turned towards the assembly in his or her own house-church. After all, Jesus is master of the house (-church). On Page 240, it was proposed that the three references to the Lord coming in the Gospel—in this verse, in 8:38–9:1, and in 13:26—are all to the day of the reader’s trial, when the decision must be made whether to admit being a follower of Jesus.

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<sup>170</sup> There is no need to wonder about Mark’s Christology when he says that only the Father knows the day or the hour (v. 32); see Donahue, “Neglected Factor” 590–92, on the relationship of Jesus to God implied by that verse. First, Mark uses hyperbole for rhetorical advantage (cf. 10:25); see a list of his exaggerations and use of hyperbole for emphasis in Charles W. Hedrick, “Conceiving the Narrative: Colors in Achilles Tatius and the Gospel of Mark,” in Hock, Chance and Perkins (eds), *Ancient Fiction* 187. Second, Mark is content to depict Jesus as ignorant of some things (cf. 5:30), at least while he was on earth.

<sup>171</sup> The waiting follower is described in v. 34 as “a servant, each with his own work (*ergon*).” The only other use of *ergon* will follow in a few verses (14:6), and will be the “work” that the generous woman does for Jesus in anointing him for burial. It can mean an act of charity. If so, Mark advises his readers to continue with their daily duty of caring for others or perhaps witnessing to the gospel generally, and not to worry about when their ‘end’ might occur.

It is clear that Mark is concerned with preparedness and not with certainty. The discourse ends with repeated exhortations to “watch” (as it began in v. 5), and “stay awake” or “stay alert” (vv. 33, 35, 37). The false prophets are dangerous because they cause community members to focus on their rescue in a Second Coming, building false hopes about how God might work in the world. For Mark, the martyrdoms that have occurred have proven that there would be no rescue from physical death. It is clear that the most important thing is to witness to the Gospel, and to show to the world their firm belief in Jesus’ promise of life.

Cleverly, then, the reader is led through a number of rhetorical stages in the text:

1. An emotive recalling of the traumas and anxieties of recent years (wars and rumours of wars, natural disasters, the civil war, the persecutions, the betrayals, the news of the destruction of the Temple), along with repeated reminders that none of these events had led to the end of the world. Rather, such trials are bound to occur, and are concomitants of announcing the gospel (vv. 5–18).
2. A promise that Jesus will gather to himself those who endure to the end, and will show Rome that he is Lord (vv. 19–31).
3. A warning that no one knows when *either* “that hour” (the moment of arrest and trial) or “that day” (the end of the world) will come, and therefore the disciple should simply remain alert for either event (vv. 32–37).

This progression is evident in a different way in the four uses of *blepete*:

- v. 5 *See* that you are not led astray by those predicting the end of the world and a rescue by Jesus.
- v. 9 Rather, *look for* a different kind of ‘end’—when you are arrested.
- v. 23 But you should *notice* that I have foretold that there will be suffering when the gospel is proclaimed but that, ultimately, you will be saved.
- v. 33 Instead of trying to predict the end of the world, *see* that you are ready when the master of the house comes on the day of your arrest and trial.

Verse 33 (“You do not know when the time will come”) is almost a title for this discourse. In this mysterious kingdom of God, uncertainties abound, and ultimate vindication by God is the only certainty. With such an atmosphere, Mark leads his readers into the strongly emotional account of Jesus’ arrest, trial and execution. Chapter 13 is a pause in the narrative, slowing down the action to prepare for what follows.<sup>172</sup> It allows the reader to pause and reflect, as if in anticipation of his or her own trial. After a suitable time of reflection, Mark moves on to describe the “hour” of Jesus, who shows the way.

### CAN JESUS SAVE?

*Come down from the cross now, so  
that we may see and believe (15:32)*

It can be seen that Mark’s rhetoric, both in its mood and content, matches well the situation proposed earlier for the Christians in Rome. Mark’s passionate appeal is designed to build courage and trust in God for readers who were extremely fearful. Late in the Gospel, there is a scene that exposes the fragility of their trust. It occurs when the authorities mock the crucified and seemingly powerless Jesus: “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe” (15:31–32).

The dominant voice at the crucifixion scene is given to opponents who exclaim that this crucified man had no power at all—he could not even save himself. Their mockery is true, of course. He could not save himself, but must rely on God to save him, as must every reader. After all, whoever attempts to save their own life will lose it (8:35).

But their taunt returns to an issue seemingly dealt with earlier (4:35–6:6)—does Jesus have the power to save? Inadvertently, the mockers acknowledge here that Jesus *has* saved others, reminding the readers of those earlier salvation stories. Yet, at this climactic scene,

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<sup>172</sup> “This discourse takes place in what we call ‘time out.’ It functions as a kind of extended aside of such importance that it brings the narrative virtually to a halt, and for no short space of time at a point of considerable tension.” Barton, *Family Ties* 115.

Mark re-raises the issue of the power of this supposed king. His attention to this a second time reveals how deep were his readers' concerns. The earlier stories had shown that Jesus did have power—during his lifetime. But Jesus had died, and the reader might well have been asking: 'Does he have any power *now*?' When the mockers call out, "He saved others; he cannot save himself," the reader hears: "If he couldn't even save himself, how can he save *me*." It is no wonder that Mark adds, at the centre of the three taunts: "Come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe (trust)"—this is not just the mockery of opponents, but is the cry of the reader who wants to see some action on the part of Jesus. The climax of this drama shows that those who seek to avoid the cross are like those who mock Jesus.<sup>173</sup>

The mocking scene of 15:29–32 points to Ps 22:7–8: "All who see me mock at me . . . they shake their heads . . . let [Yahweh] rescue the one in whom he delights!"—a reminder of the Father who had delighted in his beloved son (1:11; 9:7). Just as the baptism scene had reminded the reader of their own experience of the Father's tender love, here the reader re-experiences all of the bitter feelings of abandonment by that same Father.<sup>174</sup> This arousing of the emotions prepares the reader for the contrast with the deeply comforting scene of 16:1–8.

It is at the execution that the issue of trust comes most to the fore. Jesus' trust is what is extraordinary, and it is what the centurion suddenly understands (15:39: "Seeing how he died . . ."). "Seeing" is the first word (*idōn de ho kenturiōn*), emphasising that this is a moment of perception, and he is said to be "standing right in front of him." This not only emphasises the value of his testimony, but also places the reader before the cross and Jesus' moment of glory.<sup>175</sup> The centurion is not said to be impressed *before* Jesus died, nor when the darkness came. What he is impressed by is "how he died," that is,

<sup>173</sup> It is notable that both Jews (15:29–32) and Romans (15:17–19) mock Jesus.

<sup>174</sup> There may have been deep disappointment in the community that God had not rescued those who had died in the persecutions. Disappointment can have pervasive psychological effects, building on an already existing social powerlessness of the readers.

<sup>175</sup> According to Kenneth E. Bailey, "The Fall of Jerusalem and Mark's Account of the Cross," *ExpTim* 102 (1992) 103–4, the reader is meant to identify with the centurion, so that "almost any reader . . . could say, 'One of us was there! We saw what happened and believed!'"

in darkness, yet trusting fully in God. His response suggests that anyone who dies without any sign of God's rescue or even without any indication of his presence, and does so for the sake of the gospel, can be called 'a child of God.'<sup>176</sup>

In the story, the centurion is the only non-follower who notices Jesus' extraordinary self-sacrifice, and no one seems to pay any attention to him—a solitary voice in the face of a chorus of mockery. In so doing, he becomes an example of the hoped-for effect upon onlookers of the self-sacrificing death of the Christian. Jesus, in death, has been a witness to the gospel, and yet only one person noticed—the leader of the executing party. The message is challenging—even if only one person is impressed, dying is worth it, as the word will spread.

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<sup>176</sup> Paul had already taught the Roman Christians that "all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom 8:14; cf. 8:19).



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SURELY, NOT I?

#### MARK'S USE OF THE DISCIPLES

##### THE CONFUSING DISCIPLES

*Do you still not understand? (8:21)*

This study of the Gospel's setting would be wanting if it did not address one of the major facets of Mark's narrative—his remarkable portrayal of the disciples. Because he depicts them so negatively compared with the other Gospels, there has been considerable controversy about his motives, and analyses of his narrative have led to many conflicting views.<sup>1</sup> Here, the narrative roles of the disciples will be read from the perspective of those who had survived those harrowing seven years (64–71) in Rome, and who knew of Peter's martyrdom in that city. Mark's depiction will be shown to be both cogent and meaningful, and it will further confirm the proposed setting. Moreover, because Mark deals with aspects of Christian failure that have affected his readers, analysis of his use of these characters and known historical persons exposes further details of the community's situation. It confirms not only that the readers feared further arrests, but also reveals that the community was facing internal tensions that had arisen because of apostasy and betrayal by some of its members.

On the surface, Mark's portrayal is so negative that it *can* be taken as a polemic against the disciples, as a number of commentators have concluded.<sup>2</sup> Weeden describes the Twelve as "either obtuse,

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<sup>1</sup> "The enigma of the negative picture of the disciples remain[s] unsolved." Donahue, *Discipleship* 4. On the debate, see Malbon, "Minor Characters" 62; Joel Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (1994) 31–48; Mark Allan Powell, "Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Mark," *Int* 47 (1993) 341–46.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, Joseph B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," *JBL* 80 (1961) 261–68, following A. Kuby; Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); John Dominic Crossan, "Mark and the Relatives of Jesus," *NovT* 15 (1973) 81–113; "Empty Tomb and Risen Lord," in Kelber (ed.), *Passion* 135–52; Kelber, *Kingdom; Mark's Story; Written Gospel*. Others

obdurate or inept"; "I conclude that Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples. He is intent on totally discrediting them."<sup>3</sup> Tyson, Weeden, Crossan and Kelber have all asserted that Mark intended the reader to believe that the disciples were never rehabilitated.<sup>4</sup> Kelber expresses the bewilderment of these scholars with Mark's treatment:

Why this relentless drive to undermine the authority of the disciples, and especially of Peter and the Twelve? How can a Christian author write a story which disgraces the Twelve, the representatives of Jesus? What could possibly be good news in a story which ends with the bad news concerning the Twelve?<sup>5</sup>

A range of theories has been proposed in an attempt to explain this enigma.<sup>6</sup> Most link Mark's negative view of the disciples with his supposed negative attitude to Jesus' natural family, and the conclusion is reached that it was the Jerusalem church, headed by James, the brother of the Lord, that was his real target. Proponents of this theory point to Paul's disagreements with that church (Gal 2) and, from their perceptions of Mark's theological interests, identify Christological, eschatological or ecclesiological differences between Mark and that church and presumably those influenced by its outlook.<sup>7</sup>

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have agreed, including Balabanski, *Eschatology* 98; Williams, *Gospel* 130; Painter, "House" 513; Telford, *Theology* 150-63; Michael D. Goulder, "Those Outside—Mark 4:10-12," *NovT* 33 (1991) 289-302.

<sup>3</sup> Weeden, *Traditions* 28, 50. He argues (12) that there is no way of knowing what the reader knew, although claiming (11) that we must read the Gospel as a first-century reader, and so he does not consider the possibility that readers had Peter's martyrdom in mind, or that Rome was the setting. In a revealing comment (17), he says that Mark "shows no great literary talent."

<sup>4</sup> Tyson, "Blindness" 268; Weeden, *Traditions* 44; Crossan, "Relatives" 109; Kelber, *Mark's Story* 90.

<sup>5</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story* 88.

<sup>6</sup> Kelber, for example, went on to claim (*Written Gospel* 104) that the polemic against the disciples was Mark's attempt to "disown the voices of his oral precursors," undermining the structures based on oral transmission, that is, the appointed authorities. Differently, Petersen (*Literary Criticism* 80) proposes that Mark depicted the disciples negatively as a polemic against false prophets (13:6, 21-22) to show that the disciples, on whom they rely, once had the wrong view, and later abandoned it.

<sup>7</sup> Tyson ("Blindness" 267) thought that Mark might have been influenced in this anti-Petrine view by Paul. The idea that the Gospel was written against a Petrine group has also been suggested by Smith, *Petrine* 195, and by Günther Klein, cited in Robert W. Herron, *Mark's Account of Peter's Denial of Jesus: A History of Its Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991) 3.

In Chapter 6, however, it was shown that Mark used Jesus' family to address the pain of the readers' own rejection by their family and society (3:20–35). Moreover, that motif is quite unrelated to his portrayal of the disciples: the disciples are 'insiders' (4:11),<sup>8</sup> not 'outsiders' like the 'old family' and Jesus' opponents.<sup>9</sup> Further, if the Jerusalem church was the target, there is the major difficulty that there is no attack on James, the brother of the Lord, who headed that church. In addition, by the time Mark wrote his Gospel, over twenty years had passed since Paul had his differences with Peter and "those from James" (Gal 2:12), and there is no evidence that there was a continuing disagreement with a "Petrine view," let alone hostility towards Peter, when the Gospel was written.<sup>10</sup> Nor is there any evidence that Peter was viewed unfavourably in the later Church.<sup>11</sup> If Mark's rhetoric was a polemic against Peter, his attack must have been completely unrecognised, since his Gospel was revered and preserved by the churches—a highly unlikely scenario.

Proposals that the Gospel contains a polemic against the views of the 'heretical' Jerusalem church also overlook the fact that Peter had left that church many years earlier, and had come to Rome and been martyred. It is scarcely conceivable that any reader would think of Peter primarily as part of any Jerusalem group; they would remember him first as one of Jesus' original disciples who became a faithful martyr of Rome.<sup>12</sup> In any event, in 71, Jerusalem was in ruins, and there is no evidence that advocates of the views of that church were influential elsewhere at that time, let alone Rome.<sup>13</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>8</sup> The disciples continue to be treated as insiders throughout, especially at 14:14 ("Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"), and at the final scene (16:7: "his disciples").

<sup>9</sup> Barton (*Family Ties* 123) also shows that the motif of the opposition of Jesus' family can be interpreted as teaching the subordination of family ties for the sake of Jesus and the gospel mission. He cannot understand why Mark would polemicise against now dead leaders. See also J. Lambrecht, "The Relatives of Jesus in Mark," *NovT* 16 (1974) 246, 256–58, who opposes the polemical view.

<sup>10</sup> According to Crossan ("Relatives" 111–13), although James, the brother of the Lord, headed the Jerusalem church, not James, son of Zebedee, Mark's use of Peter, James and John nevertheless points to the Jerusalem triumvirate of Gal 2. That "inner three" are "the villains of the Markan theology." He contends that Jesus' relatives were "directly involved in the failure of the Jerusalem community."

<sup>11</sup> Best ("Mark's Readers" 2.856) has pointed out that "no one would write a letter [such as 1 Peter] in the name of someone who had been discredited.

<sup>12</sup> Peter is remembered as a martyr by the Roman church in *1 Clem.* 5.4–7; 6.1, written ca. 95. Eusebius (*E.H.* 2.25.7; 3.1.3) records his death under Nero.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius (*E.H.* 3.5) says that the Christians of Jerusalem had all abandoned

those who interpret this Gospel as polemic do not identify a setting for the Markan community that was supposedly influenced by such views.

For these reasons, the majority of scholars have not accepted that Mark wrote polemically against the disciples or what they represented.<sup>14</sup> In any event, it will be shown that the features of the Gospel that have led to such a view can be better explained.

Tannehill, using a narrative-critical approach, has read Mark's portrayal quite differently.<sup>15</sup> He sees an initial positive view of the disciples that changes from Chapter 4 as they misunderstand the identity of Jesus and the nature of his way, and proposes that Mark forces the reader to move from an early identification with enthusiastic followers to a rejection of their position. Such a shift in perspective forms or reinforces the views that Mark hopes for in his reader. Accordingly, the disciples serve as negative models.

This school of thought has attracted many followers, and there are many variants.<sup>16</sup> Advocates of Tannehill's view generally recognise that Mark was reinforcing a positive view already held by the readers, who knew or believed that the reconciliation predicted by 14:27 and 16:7 had taken place. Thus, the disciples are not truly failures at the conclusion of the story, which occurs beyond the end of the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> Most critics follow Tannehill's statement that the

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the city and moved to Pella before the Jewish War, and were still away from it when the war ended. His later report (*E.H.* 3.11) of the election of the successor to the Jerusalem see does not say when or where that occurred, and he is silent about the situation while the Roman legions occupied the ruins.

<sup>14</sup> According to the opinion of Donahue, "Windows and Mirrors" 15. For other arguments against the polemical view, see Achtemeier, "*Omne Verbum Sonat*" 105-6, who points out that Mark knew of the disciples' rehabilitation, but does not mention, more importantly, that the readers knew. Best (*Story* 48) makes the useful observations that there is no opposing 'good group' depicted, that Mark relies on the disciples to hand on the tradition, and that no heresy is made clear. See also Barton, *Family Ties* 83-85.

<sup>15</sup> Tannehill, "Narrative Role" 386-405. Against the polemical view, he argues that the positive material would be omitted or minimised if the aim was to discredit the disciples, and that there is a clear intention to restore the relationship in 14:27 and 16:7. For a similar opinion, see David J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction," *JBL* 91 (1972) 500.

<sup>16</sup> Examples are Beavis (*Audience* 181-82), who sees the disciples acting as "foils" for true discipleship, and Malbon ("Text and Context" 91-93), who comments: "The Markan Gospel discredits not the disciples, but the view of discipleship as either exclusive or easy."

<sup>17</sup> For example, Mansfield, *Spirit* 129, and Herron, *Peter's Denial* 137. On the other hand, Wegener (*Cruciformed* 70) speaks of the "ultimately disappointing disciples."

way Mark tells the story indicates that he was trying to “awaken in the readers their failures as disciples and call them to repentance.”<sup>18</sup> A popular term is ‘fallible followers’: Mark wanted readers to identify with the disciples’ understandable human failures.<sup>19</sup> For Marshall, the phrase, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,” sums up the disciples’ story.<sup>20</sup>

However, proponents of this theory tend to adopt a sympathetic view of the disciples’ behaviour that is not supported by the text.<sup>21</sup> Achtemeier excuses them because they could not have understood Jesus or his teaching before the resurrection; thus, they only face the same problems that any follower of Jesus might face. In any case, he argues, God hardened their hearts.<sup>22</sup> Danove, too, sees the disciples destined to follow this path, and their ‘failure’ is the result of a planned testing by God “as a means of perfection.”<sup>23</sup> Such a view

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Tolbert (*Sowing* 127–28, 144–46) also regards the disciples as failures, following the polemical group in part by claiming (156) that readers might think of Peter as ‘rocky ground’ because of the controversy in Gal 2. See Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 186–87) for criticisms of her views.

<sup>18</sup> Tannehill, “Narrative Role” 393. So, too, Marshall, *Faith* 210–11; Thomas E. Boomershine, “Mark 16:8” 237. This view is also largely adopted by Best, *Story* 83; *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel according to Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 128–29; “Mark’s Narrative Technique,” *JSNVT* 37 (1989) 51; *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981). Best (*Story* 121) maintains that Mark was forced to retain negative elements from the tradition with which he did not agree. For example, he claims (*Disciples* 106) that Mark was not attacking James and John in 10:35–45, because the reference to them is pre-Markan. He argues (129) that the disciples are used as a “foil” so that the narrative could move on to further instruction.

<sup>19</sup> Malbon, “Fallible Followers” 29–48; “Minor Characters” 63; “Text and Context” 81–102; Witherington, *Mark* 442; William S. Vorster, “Characterisation of Peter in the Gospel of Mark,” in Botha (ed.), *Speaking of Jesus* 415–33. Black (*Disciples* 251) claims that, like the reader, “they fluctuate between success and failure.”

<sup>20</sup> Marshall, *Faith* 211.

<sup>21</sup> Matera (*Saying* 38) cites “the generous manner in which the first disciples leave their livelihood in order to follow Jesus.” Marshall (*Faith* 224) says that the disciples “have already accepted the claims and demands of Jesus.” Such statements imaginatively assume the disciples’ motives, and are of the same ilk as reconstructions of the ‘gaps’ in the text done at times to ‘fill in’ the life of the historical Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> Achtemeier, “*Omne Verbum Sonat*” 107–13. Similarly, Shiner (*Follow Me* 292) says that the disciples “represent the best human reaction to Jesus.” Matera (*Saying* 48) claims that Mark shows how difficult it is to understand the mystery of Jesus and the cross.

<sup>23</sup> He argues that the second half of the Gospel, rather than depicting their failure, depicts Jesus’ “ongoing commitment” and “God as the source of many of the more difficult necessities of discipleship.” Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark’s Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993) 215–18. But such observations are about Jesus and God, not the response of the disciples.

is untenable: Jesus clearly believes that the disciples are capable of understanding (8:21) and of resisting temptation (13:13, 33–37; 14:37–38).

Further, there has been a tendency, partly in reaction to the proposals that the portrayal is polemic, to identify supposed positive aspects of the disciples. Donahue asserts that “the general picture of [the disciples] is positive.” He points out that they are Jesus’ constant and privileged companions, and that Jesus uses them to feed the people, and to prepare both his entry into Jerusalem and the room for the Passover meal.<sup>24</sup> He considers that 1:1–8:26 gives the “most sustained positive portrait” of them, although some “clouds begin to form on the horizon.”<sup>25</sup> Kingsbury sees 10:28 as Peter’s statement of their “undivided loyalty,” and the section to 6:30 as a portrayal that “could not be more favourable.”<sup>26</sup> Marshall points to their loyalty, courage, obedience, assistance to Jesus, self-sacrifice (10:28), success in ministry, occasional insight (8:29), intimacy with Jesus (6:31; 14:12) and future role (9:9; 13:10, 34; 14:28).<sup>27</sup>

For most commentators, the early part of the story puts the disciples in a favourable light. They draw attention especially to Jesus’ call, his selection of a special Twelve, and his sending them out on mission with authority.<sup>28</sup> However, all of these are *initiatives of Jesus*, and reflect *his* desire to spread the gospel. In each of these events, the text is completely silent about the motives, predispositions and attitudes of the disciples. When 3:19 mentions that one of them would betray Jesus, a perceptive reader might notice that, to this point, the narrative has not provided any inside view of the disciples’ minds.

In Mark’s story, the behaviour of the disciples is inexcusable. Marshall puts it well: “As the story unfolds, the author spares nothing in emphasising their shortcomings.”<sup>29</sup> Part of the difficulty of

<sup>24</sup> Their flight, he argues, is preordained. Donahue, *Discipleship* 12–13, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Donahue, *Discipleship* 53.

<sup>26</sup> However, he later describes their incomprehension as “baffling,” and calls it “their fundamental character flaw.” Kingsbury, *Conflict* 90, 94–96, 102–4. He does not explain Mark’s negative aspects at all.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall, *Faith* 211.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Matera, *Saying* 38–39, and Fay, “Incomprehension” 74–78, who says that, after 4:13, they go on to exemplify good soil turning out to be bad. However, soils do not change in the Sower Parable, and the soils are never related to the disciples. Instead, the pronouns “they” and “others” are used (4:15–18).

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Faith* 209. However, it will be argued that he, like others, is wrong when he sees this negative depiction commencing only at 4:13.

modern readers may be the tendency to read Mark in the light of the softer views of Matthew and Luke. Mark's narrative, however, contains an unrelenting critique of their attitudes and behaviour. He never praises them.

There seems to be a disinclination to see a consistently negative depiction, perhaps to avoid appearing to side with those who see the Gospel as a polemic.<sup>30</sup> But there is no reason why Mark should not have painted a wholly negative picture of the attitudes and behaviour of the disciples in the earlier part of their lives if he knew that his readers would mentally redeem them because of their subsequent roles as evangelists and martyrs.

Accordingly, the idea that Mark intended to attack the reputation of the Twelve can be set aside, and the analysis of the narrative role of these confusing disciples can now focus on how and why Mark used them as one of his key means of persuasion.

#### AN EMOTIONAL ISSUE

*He broke down and wept. (14:72)*

A number of commentators have recognised that this narrative would speak strongly and emotionally to readers who had suffered persecution.<sup>31</sup> G. W. H. Lampe observes that the denials by Peter (14:66–72) seemed to have been shaped to relate to the Church in times of persecution, and Mark's singling out of Peter "in so extreme a fashion" is designed "to draw the parallel between [Peter's] interrogation and that to which in his own day, conceivably in Nero's Rome, Christians might be subjected." He points to the similarities with the practice of threefold questioning in trials of Christians, as evidenced in Pliny's time, and in other martyr stories.<sup>32</sup> He further argues that *arneomai* ("to deny") was a technical term in the vocabulary

<sup>30</sup> Malbon ("Criticism" 30) seems to consider that a completely negative view of the disciples puts a person into the Weeden/Kelber polemical camp.

<sup>31</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 223) argues, following Aristotle, that Mark's treatment is a catharsis, a clarification of the will or mind, not the feelings, and an intellectual experience, not an emotional purging, and Mark instead aims to encourage the audience to search for their own flaws. However, many rhetoricians did not share Aristotle's reservations about appeals to the emotions, as noted in Chapter 1.

<sup>32</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "St Peter's Denial," *BJRL* 55 (1973) 350–53. He cites *Mart.*

of persecution in the New Testament and many later writings; “Peter’s act of ‘denial’ therefore makes him an archetype of the Christian who disowns his Lord under persecution.” However, he observes, Mark makes him go even further than this, in that he curses Christ, as the Roman authorities required of the apostate.<sup>33</sup> Peter becomes “the archetype of the worst class among the *lapsi*,” and is contrasted with a disciple who uses his or her trial as an opportunity to witness.<sup>34</sup>

Other commentators have noted how this Gospel identifies with such a situation. Van Iersel has argued, following Radcliffe, that persecution in Rome had led to a divided community because of betrayal, and the Gospel “enabled the Roman Christians to come to terms with the suffering caused by the persecution . . . as well as with the remorse for personal failure,” by providing a plot and characters who “reflected their various roles in the persecution.”<sup>35</sup> Brown has perceived that the failure of the disciples suggests “a community that had been persecuted and failed,” perhaps in a Roman persecution.<sup>36</sup> He sees the denials of Peter providing hope for those who had failed and denied Christ:

A Peter who had once denied and later borne witness could constitute an encouragement that repentance and a second chance were possible. For that reason it may have been important to underline the seriousness of what Peter had done. . . . If Mark was written at Rome, the example of Peter would be even more persuasive in the place where he died.<sup>37</sup>

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*Pol.* 9–10; John 18:33, 35, 37, Roman law, and the “strong biblical emphasis on the solemn weight of threefold testimony.”

<sup>33</sup> Lampe, “Peter’s Denial” 354. He cites Pliny (*Letters* 10.96): “It is said that those who are in truth Christians cannot be forced into performing any of these acts,” that is, cursing Christ, invoking Roman gods, or offering incense to the Emperor’s image or to the gods. See also Donahue, “Windows and Mirrors” 17–19, and Benko, *Pagan Rome* 10, who argues that cursing Christ was an early requirement of the Roman authorities, although his reliance on 1 Cor 12:3 is doubtful, as that probably refers to the same requirement in the synagogues. Daniel Boyarin, “Martyrdom” 585, argues that *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* provides evidence that the demand to curse Christ was an established practice by the second century.

<sup>34</sup> Lampe, “Peter’s Denial” 354–55.

<sup>35</sup> Bas M. F. Van Iersel, “Failed Followers in Mark: Mark 13:2 as a Key for the Identification of the Intended Readers,” *CBQ* 58 (1996) 245–48, 262; cf. Radcliffe, “Apocalyptic” 176–89. Van Iersel criticises Tannehill and Malbon for not addressing the question of what ‘fallible followers’ might have to do with the situation of the intended readers. He concludes that it is easier to argue a Roman origin than any other, and that the best interpretation is to assume that the Gospel community held Peter “in high esteem.”

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *Introduction* 162.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New



Donahue maintains, too, that Mark's motifs of failure amidst persecution (4:17) and betrayal (13:11–13) relate to events familiar to his readers. Citing Lampe, he says: "The story of Peter's apostasy would be a strong motive to accept and forgive those leaders and ordinary Christians who betrayed others under the horrors inflicted by Nero."<sup>38</sup>

These views, it is suggested, correctly focus on the nature of the issues present in Mark's community.<sup>39</sup> However, Van Iersel, Lampe and Brown argue that Mark wrote before 70, and that the Gospel appeals to those who failed. Donahue is the closest to the position adopted here, but he has only related his insights to certain aspects of the text, and has not fully tested them against the whole of Mark's rhetoric.

In this analysis, it will be argued that Tannehill's understanding of how the narrative develops is not quite correct. Certainly, as he points out, Mark leads his reader to reject the disciples' behaviour, beginning at Chapter 4. He is correct, too, but for the wrong reasons, when he says that "the first part of Mark's Gospel encourages the reader to have high expectations for the disciples."<sup>40</sup> Instead, it will be argued that the early part of the Gospel does not have a positive view of the disciples at all, but that this is not immediately realised by the reader, who is later shocked to discover their real motives and has to reconsider the early scenes. Mark's portrayal of

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York: Doubleday, 1994) 2.599, 624–26. However, he contends that, as Christians were also tested for their faith in other places, as 13:9 shows, this is no firm proof of Rome. But surely 13:11–13 represent the more likely setting of the community and is the counterpart to the scene of Peter's denial. See also Henry Wansbrough, *The Lion and the Bull: The Gospels of Mark and Luke* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996) 50. Lane (*Mark* 17) also suggests that this scene would have offered restoration to apostates: "The situation of the Christians in Rome was too intensely critical for them not to read the Gospel in this way."

<sup>38</sup> Donahue ("Windows and Mirrors" 16, 24). He considers (25–26) that the denial of Peter and his rehabilitation "would constitute a summons to be reconciled with those who had all too recently re-enacted Peter's denial of Christ in their own lives. Through Mark's Gospel, we may see, as through a glass darkly, the trials and hopes of the Roman church in the early seventies of our era." See also Donahue and Harrington, *Mark* 34, 44, 429.

<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the conclusions of this study have been reached independently of these recent works of Van Iersel, Brown and Donahue.

<sup>40</sup> Tannehill, "Narrative Role" 397–98. He considers that the "view of the disciples is basically positive through 6:30," and the only "negative note" is the mention of Judas' betrayal in 3:19. He also notes that the disciples "stand together" in the controversies of Chapter 2, and he points to the statements about the new family in 3:20–35. The latter, however, are really about those who do the will of God, and the disciples do *nothing* in Chapter 2, other than act like followers of a Davidic king (see Page 330).

the disciples will be shown to be consistent from their first appearance on the stage until the final curtain.<sup>41</sup>

Danove argues that the rhetorical function of the narrative is a “tender trap” that occurs when the “interpreter” realises that “s/he is the other who was judged critically,” so that readers who experience failure are led to look at their own failures.<sup>42</sup> He is partly correct: it is a trap, but not the kind that he and others envisage. Mark does not use the disciples to induce in his readers a realisation their own failures or shortcomings. Instead, he has two very specific rhetorical goals: to demonstrate the catastrophic results of falling for the allures of Roman society, and to evoke his reader’s sympathy toward those who have failed under pressure.

This analysis will begin at the point where both the disciples and the reader are surprised, the former by Jesus, the latter by the revelation of the disciples’ real motives.

#### DISMAYED DISCIPLES

*Look, we have left everything! (10:28)*

There is a sad moment in this Gospel, one that evokes a sense of regret in the reader. In 10:22, a rich man turns away from Jesus’ call to follow him, and the reader is disappointed. Jesus had “looked at him and loved him” (10:21), and the reader feels Jesus’ disappointment as he watches the man leave, unable to set aside his wealth. The impact of this scene is strong: modern-day readers hope that the man came back, even though they themselves might not be prepared to take such a drastic step. Indeed, the reader only learns in the last verse of the scene that the man owned many possessions (10:22),<sup>43</sup> and that Jesus was quite right when he said that the man

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<sup>41</sup> Räisänen (*Secret* 18–20) is perplexed by the seeming changes in the characterisation of the disciples, concluding that it is inconsistent and incoherent, so that we should consider the possibility that “the characters serve different functions and operate at different levels at various points.” Shiner (*Follow Me* 7, 29) agrees, arguing that the Gospel should be viewed as a construction of individual episodes, as ancient audiences did not expect continuity as we do; “The disciples do not maintain a single, stable, rhetorical function throughout the Gospel.” He relies on its episodic nature on pages 200, 211, 223 and 225.

<sup>42</sup> Danove, *End* 218–24.

<sup>43</sup> Fowler (“Rhetoric” 117) suggests that Mark’s revelation, only at the end of the

“needed one thing”—to focus on the true treasure, the one in heaven.<sup>44</sup> Dramatically, the man leaves Jesus, “saddened” (*stygnozō*: its only use in Mark) and “distressed.” 10:21 is the only place in the Gospel where the word “love” occurs. It is an emotional moment.

With the phrase, “Come, follow me” (10:21), the scene reminds of Jesus’ earlier calls of disciples (1:16–20; 2:14) and, by inducing sorrow in the reader over the rich man’s refusal of the invitation, it leads him or her to subconsciously reaffirm the correctness of leaving everything to follow Jesus. Such an appeal to the emotions of the reader as a preparation for explicit teaching of the disciples is quite unique in the Gospel, suggesting the importance of this moment in the narrative.

Yet, not everyone is sad and disappointed. In a dramatic movement, Jesus “looks around” (*periblepō*) at the disciples. In 3:5, Jesus had looked around (*periblepō*) at the Pharisees and was angered at their hardness of heart and, in 2:6–8, he had perceived what was going on in the minds of the scribes. In both cases, he had challenged his opponents, and he now confronts his disciples in a similar perception of their inner attitudes, suggesting that they have an opposing view. His statement, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God!” (10:23), is intended to shock them, and it succeeds: “The disciples were astounded by these words” (10:24).

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encounter, that the man was wealthy, makes the reader review the whole episode. More importantly, Mark’s placement is designed to lead into the response of the disciples that follows.

<sup>44</sup> *Klēmata* referred exclusively to landed property by Mark’s time. BAGD 455, citing Josephus, Philo, and Plutarch, among others. Thus, Mark concentrates particularly on the man’s real estate. In Rome, where real property was central to status, this emphasis would have been particularly meaningful. Fergus Millar, “The Fiscus in the First Two Centuries,” *JRS* 53 (1963) 29–42, notes that, in the first century, there was “a vast mass of imperial properties [and] palaces.” Mark’s scene may have reminded the reader of Vespasian’s many properties, but it could as easily have pointed to the propertied position of any member of the upper class that persecuted them. For the Roman reader, the fact that a person with many properties is unable to follow Jesus also adds to the explanation for the refusal of Roman high society to respond to the gospel. In contrast to the rich man’s desire to hold on to this ‘earth,’ he is offered a place in heaven where treasure can be kept for him, as *thēsauros* (10:21) means a storage place, such as a strongroom. Giving up these properties would involve a loss of social status, which both the man and his Roman counterparts are unwilling to accept. Status remains an issue as Jesus turns to his disciples.

Some degree of surprise on their part would have been understandable: in the biblical tradition, Abraham had been a type of the man blessed by God, associating wealth with God's blessing in Jewish thought. Yet, the disciples are "astounded" (*ethambountō*), a verb used twice in this scene (v. 32), and elsewhere only used when Jesus first shocked the crowd by demonstrating his power (1:27). This issue appears to be one that affects the disciples deeply.

Jesus' challenge contains the first of three iterations of "the Kingdom of God" (with vv. 24, 25), a density of references to it unparalleled in the Gospel. Here, he confronts the disciples with an obstacle to entering that kingdom proclaimed by him at the beginning (1:15). His statement is deliberately provocative, and he exaggerates in order to make a strong point, squeezing a camel through a needle.

The disciples' alarm continues; they ask, "Who then can be saved?" (10:26). But it is odd that they should be so alarmed at Jesus' announcement of the difficulty rich people would have in entering the Kingdom, since the disciples were not rich. They had left their homes and work without hesitation—the Zebedees had even left behind the family business—so that it is difficult to see why they should be so concerned now.<sup>45</sup> The strength of their reaction indicates self-interest, especially in view of their earlier behaviour (cf. 6:37), and betrays their expectations of becoming rich in this kingdom that Jesus had been proclaiming.

Their astonishment is again mentioned explicitly in v.26 and v.32, and the sense of agitation continues through these verses: "Then who can be saved? . . . Look, we have left everything . . . They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." Jesus' response is comforting, and yet challenging: "For God everything is possible."<sup>46</sup>

Peter speaks for the group in v.28, and he is alarmed: "Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything. . . .'" Seen in context, his response can hardly be taken as an affirmation of his loyalty. It is the only occasion where a disciple uses *idou* to speak to Jesus, and its use reveals his anxiety. This is no calm dialogue.<sup>47</sup> It

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<sup>45</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 328–29) does not understand why the disciples ask this question, and puts it down to just another misunderstanding on their part.

<sup>46</sup> Donahue (*Discipleship* 40) says that "all things are possible" is "a reaffirmation of the absolute gratuity of salvation." But it is also a statement that even the disciples can be saved!

<sup>47</sup> Juell (*Mark* 143) says that to regard 10:28 as self-serving is to read too much

is similar to 8:31, where Jesus “began” to tell them what he expected to occur, but Peter here begins to lay on the line what he had been hoping for, and it is clear that his concern is not really the giving up of everything, which he had already done, but the lack of compensation.<sup>48</sup> He does not mention possible eternal rewards; he only reminds Jesus of his earthly loss. He is still thinking of another way, as he was in 8:32 when Jesus began to teach him of his way, and this scene is comparable to that earlier rejection of Jesus’ mission; there, Jesus had accused him of thinking of “the things of men” (8:33).

Jesus’ response to Peter’s alarm is in the form of a solemn pronouncement: “Truly (*amēn*) I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters . . .” (10:29–30). The ‘rewards’ for Peter and the others will include a new community, and persecutions to go along with it, but the ultimate reward will lie in “the age to come,” that is, “eternal life” (10:30). Like the rich man, they should be focusing on the rewards in heaven. This is the only explicit mention of eternal life, again indicating the importance of this section of the text, and suggesting that Mark here addresses real or potential false attitudes of his readers that he considers to be critical to their future welfare.

In 10:33, Jesus provides an *idou* of his own and adds further to the disciples’ alarm: “*Look*, we are going up to Jerusalem.” Only now does Mark name their destination—a further indication of the significance of this confrontation.

This is quite an emotional moment: Peter is only worried about what would happen to him, that is, his failure to gain expected wealth and power (10:28: “*Look . . .*”) and, a few verses later, Jesus

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into the text; rather, he just “states a fact.” However, in arguing this, he omits the *idou* from his quote, presenting Peter’s response as calm, and does not recognise the mood disclosed by the adjacent verses. E. J. Pryke, “ΙΔΕ and ΙΔΟΥ,” *NTS* 14 (1967–69) 419, in analysing Mark’s use of *idou*, concludes that it is employed more than as a “mere interjection,” and that his “sparing use of the word gives it an artistic forcefulness and finesse.” *Idou* occurs elsewhere only in 1:2; 3:32; 4:3; 10:33; 14:41, 42; in each case, it is used to draw attention to something of great importance.

<sup>48</sup> Commentators often recognise that Peter is primarily concerned about his position and rewards here, but there is a wide variety of interpretations. For example, Hawkin (“Incomprehension” 137) calls 10:28 “the potentially proud statement of Peter,” which gives rise to “a promise of restoration.” Tannehill (“Narrative Role” 401) regards 10:23–30 as “poking fun” at Peter’s feeling that a reward is due “by speaking in extravagant terms of a present reward ‘with persecutions.’” However, he does not note the shock of the disciples, nor connect it with James and John.

is trying to tell Peter “what was to happen *to him*, ‘Look . . .’” (10:32–33).<sup>49</sup> They talk at cross-purposes, and it is here that Jesus gives his final and by far the most graphic prediction of his suffering and death.<sup>50</sup>

The disciples make no response to Jesus’ impassioned prediction, and, in denial once more, James and John ironically ask for “positions on the right and left” (10:37). For the reader, this phrase points to the positions held by Titus and Domitian, Vespasian’s princes, and the language is of an earthly kingdom. But it is not only James and John who are focused on such a kingdom: “When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John” (10:41).<sup>51</sup> “The ten” includes Peter, confirming his continuing focus on political ambition, regardless of Jesus’ rejoinder in 10:29–31, which included his repetition of the teaching that “many who are first will be last” (v. 31; cf. 9:35).<sup>52</sup>

The request of James and John, and Jesus’ reply (vv. 35–45), make clear that the disciples are interested in political glory, while Jesus is speaking of a quite different type of glory—suffering for the sake of the gospel—underscored by the use of the double-meaning words of “cup” and “blessing,” and his exhortation to be servants of others. Jesus has followed each prediction of his martyrdom with a teaching on the true nature of discipleship.<sup>53</sup> After the second prediction, the disciples argued about who was greatest, but it was not clear what they meant. Only now does it become apparent that they were thinking of political greatness throughout. None of Jesus’ replies has had any effect on them, and there is no reason to believe that their focus is altered here either.

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<sup>49</sup> The use of *mellō* in 10:32 points to the certainty of what would happen to Jesus, and can be compared with the uncertainty that concerns Peter.

<sup>50</sup> Fowler (“Rhetoric” 121) points out that this third prediction is the closest Jesus comes to an “explicit identification” of himself with the Son of Man that is to suffer and die. It is striking that Jesus becomes explicit only at this emotional point where it becomes clear that his followers neither care about his fate nor his mission, but are completely focused on their own ambitions.

<sup>51</sup> Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.1.23–24) discussed rhetorical techniques to produce anger in the listener. Mark may have wanted his readers to become angry at this point. Certainly, he would have expected a strongly negative response in a reader faced with the self-serving interests of James and John.

<sup>52</sup> The inclusion of this saying in the context of political power and ambition is virtually a judgement statement against the rulers of Rome (cf. 10:42–45).

<sup>53</sup> See 8:34–38; 9:33–37; 10:17–31, 35–45. Each of these teachings lies after, or surrounds, a prediction.

Although seemingly interrupted by the first explicit mention of the journey to Jerusalem and the third prediction (vv. 32–34), vv. 17–45 should be viewed as one rhetorical unit that addresses the false expectations of the disciples—first wealth, and then political power.<sup>54</sup> The reader cannot escape its prolonged impact: moved by its emotional beginning, wondering at the reaction of the disciples, and then shocked to discover that, despite Jesus' repeated exhortations, they are hoping for political power and wealth, the reader suddenly has to reconsider the whole story of the disciples up to this point. Why *did* they answer Jesus' call? What were they expecting at the very beginning? Have they been after the wrong sort of power all along?

Before this point, the reader, sympathetic to the disciples from the beginning, was likely to have been impressed by their seemingly noble and courageous response to Jesus' call (1:16–20).<sup>55</sup> Their failure to understand the parables (4:13, 33), and even their fear in the boat (4:41) may have been viewed as readers do today—they are, to say the least, very slow, but Jesus is so different. Even their behaviour at the two feedings is of the same ilk. In Jesus' passionate plea (8:17–21), his accusation that they are hard of heart (8:17) can be taken as a warning not to be like the Pharisees (8:15). The confrontation between Peter and Jesus in 8:32 could be taken as an expression of Peter's concern for Jesus' welfare, since Mark has not told the reader what Peter says. The disciples' responses through to Chapter 9 seem to stem from a failure to understand Jesus' or his teaching, as commentators often conclude.

But that view can no longer be sustained when Chapter 10 is reached. Suddenly, it becomes clear that the disciples have had an underlying motive and a completely different agenda from Jesus. It is at this point in the narrative that the greatest alarm is expressed by any of the characters, and it is prolonged, demonstrating that this is a key rhetorical moment. They are described as headed for

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<sup>54</sup> There has been a tendency to consider the scene with the rich man in isolation from the text that follows. Kee (*Community* 154) considers that Mark merely appended “a string of sayings” of Jesus about wealth and being saved, and misses the drama of the whole scene altogether. Söding (“Evangelist” 37–38) considers 10:1–12, 17–27, 35–45 to be “a small compendium of Christian ethics,” based on a pre-Markan collection, citing Lührmann.

<sup>55</sup> One to read their call in this way is Marshall (*Faith* 137), who sees their response as “only comprehensible on the assumption of a sudden, revelatory insight into the divine authority with which Jesus addresses them and a preparedness on their part to do the will of God.”

Jerusalem “amazed” and “afraid” (10:32), having experienced the Great Shock. But so, too, have the readers, who find that their heroes in the story (apart from Jesus) are men of worldly ambition.

#### FISHERS OF MEN

*Blessed is the coming kingdom of  
our ancestor David (11:10)*

As the reader reconsiders the earlier scenes, or even goes over them again, it now becomes apparent that Mark has been very reticent indeed about the inner thoughts of the disciples. When Jesus walked by the lake and called Simon and Andrew in 1:16, the reader had to fill in the gaps: Did they already know Jesus? Had they heard him preach? Did Jesus say anything else to them?

However, in the light of the disclosures of the disciples’ ambition for political power, that invitation to become “fishers of men” (1:17) now takes on a quite different nuance. Although the readers are likely to have initially thought of the disciples’ later preaching role, Mark has chosen a term that is teasingly ambiguous. Wuellner has shown that “fishers of men” had a very wide range of uses in ancient literature, but all of them involve having power over other people.<sup>56</sup> From the beginning, the disciples may have had different ambitions than at first glance. On review, the opening scenes even suggest the reason: perhaps they had heard about the “powerful one” that John the Baptist was predicting (1:7); John was not even worthy enough to perform a menial task for that person. Perhaps they then linked John’s prediction to Jesus’ announcement of the imminent arrival of a new kingdom (1:15).

The unusual nature of Jesus’ call has often been noticed: Mark does not use *akoloutheō* (“follow”) here, as he does in Levi’s call in 2:14, in 8:34, and in sixteen other places, but employs the unusual phrase *deute opisō mou* (“Come after me”). The only Septuagintal use of this phrase occurs in 2 Kings 6:19, where Elisha leads blind men to the northern capital, where they are in danger of execution (2 Kings 6:20–21).<sup>57</sup> If this is an intentional allusion, Mark has chosen

<sup>56</sup> Wilhelm H. Wuellner, *The Meaning of ‘Fishers of Men’* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), especially 64–133.

<sup>57</sup> Mark has: “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men” (1:17), while



these unusual words to point, at the moment of the disciples' introduction into the narrative, to their inability to see *at all*. Jesus becomes another messenger of God, leading the blind to the city, where death is threatened.<sup>58</sup>

At the next mention of the disciples (1:36: "Simon and his companions hunted him down"), their interest seems to be control, and Simon's only words are: "Everyone is seeking you." The verb is *zēteō*, used only by Mark of seeking for the wrong motives.<sup>59</sup> Jesus' reply makes clear that his intention—to go elsewhere to preach—is opposed to the disciples' desire to limit him to their own domain.<sup>60</sup> This is the first indication that Jesus and the disciples are at odds, and it occurs on the second day.

The disciples are silent during the controversies of 2:1–3:6, but, by plucking the corn as they make their way through the field (2:23), they already appear to be acting like men of the king, sequestering the harvest.<sup>61</sup> Jesus' response to the criticism of the Pharisees (2:24–28) appears odd, as he compares the behaviour of his disciples to that of David's followers. At first glance, this would seem to contradict Mark's insistence that Jesus is not a new Davidic Messiah (cf. 12:35–37). However, Jesus is not pointing to himself, but to what his disciples are doing. His response is directed to the accusation of a breach of

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2 Kings 6:19 has the similar: "Come after me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." Wolfgang Roth, *Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone, 1988) 89, argues that Mark's Gospel is patterned on Elijah passing the Spirit to Elisha. He builds on observations by A. M. Hartmann and R. E. Brown on the points of contact between the depictions of John/Jesus and Elijah/Elisha.

<sup>58</sup> Kee (*Community* 69) notes that *CD* 1.9 speaks of the early Qumran community as being "like blind men," until the Teacher of Righteousness was sent to guide them.

<sup>59</sup> In 8:11, 12, it is used of sign-seeking; in 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 11, 55, it refers to the attempted killing of Jesus; in 3:32 it refers to the wrong seeking of Jesus' family; in 16:6 it refers to the wrong seeking of the women at the tomb, expecting only the dead body of "Jesus the Nazarene." Smith (*Petrine* 154, 163) argues that, in 1:36–37, the use of both *zēteō* and *katadiōkō*, often meaning "persecute," shows Mark's disapproval of their action. Tolbert (*Sowing* 138) regards *katadiōkō* as carrying an "often hostile sense."

<sup>60</sup> Culbertson (*Poetics* 151) sees the disciples here as "unhappy even indignant" when Jesus fails to be where they want him.

<sup>61</sup> Deut 23:25 has been cited as legitimation of the plucking of the grain (Lane, *Mark* 114), but the disciples are hardly just entering a "neighbour's standing grain," as dealt with by that law; they are "making a way," as if for Jesus the king (see Hooker, *Mark* 102, citing Derrett). Nor is Lev 19:9–10 applicable, as there is no indication that the grain had been harvested, leaving some for the poor and for aliens, and, in any case, Mark does not cast the disciples in either of these categories (cf. 14:7). Bryan (*Preface* 90) sees the disciples acting as if the kingdom were already present.

the Sabbath, which risks his mission.<sup>62</sup> He does not approve of their demeanour, but only argues that their behaviour has a precedent. However, in making this comparison with David and his men, Jesus seems to be well aware of his disciples' expectations, even at this early stage of their relationship. In retrospect, his alluring promise to be 'fishers of men' now seems as if it was deliberately ambiguous.

When the Twelve are appointed (3:13–19), there is no indication of their hopes and expectations. The mention that one of them will betray him suggests the presence of false hopes and ambitions among those he chose.

The first explicit instance of incomprehension by the disciples occurs in 4:13, and it is striking that they begin to be baffled as soon as Jesus tries to explain "the Kingdom of God" (4:11) to them, indicating that they had been thinking of a quite different type of kingdom. In the boat scene (4:35–41), the disciples challenge Jesus and, when they find that even the winds and the waves obey him, they become afraid. In the next mention of the disciples, however, they seem to have discovered that Jesus' powers are limited, and their retort (5:31: "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ) is abrupt and sarcastic.

Much has been made of the 'success' of the mission of the Twelve (6:7–13), but a reader might now notice that, despite intending his disciples "to preach and to have authority to cast out demons" (3:14–15), Jesus only sends them out "with authority over the unclean spirits" (6:7), suggesting that he has reservations about their preaching the Kingdom. But they go out preaching regardless, do not cast out demons, and instead use oil to heal sick people (6:12–13). When they return, in a very muted response, they "gather around" Jesus (cf. the Pharisees and scribes in 7:1), and tell him all "*they* had done and *taught*." Their teaching activity is emphasised, and they give no glory to God or to Jesus. Jesus does not respond; notably, he does not praise them.

In 6:36, the disciples are unwilling to spend money to feed those coming to Jesus, and tell him to "send them away so that they . . . may buy something for themselves." They are beginning to sound hostile to Jesus' unreasonable demands upon them, although he has

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<sup>62</sup> The attack is quite serious, as breach of the Sabbath was punishable by death according to *Jub.* 50.8; *m. Sanh.* 7.4. Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 12–13.

just shown compassion on them and on the crowd. Their second retort, in what is a small argument between Jesus and the disciples, shows their interest in money, literally reading: “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii of bread, and give it to them to eat?” (6:37), as if the people were going to devour their money. In the second feeding story, the disciples appear even more hostile and even sarcastic (8:4: “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?”).<sup>63</sup>

Even though they were told not to take bread or money with them on their mission (6:8), they have bread at both feedings, and money,<sup>64</sup> and one loaf is apparently kept aside and not given out (8:14), as only broken pieces are collected at the end of the meal (twice mentioned: 8:8, 19). Indeed, at the first feeding, the reader might begin to wonder where the disciples had obtained such a considerable sum of money; they do not claim that they cannot afford to buy the bread. As they have just returned from mission (6:31–33), after having been told not to take any money (6:8), a reader might suspect that they accepted (demanded?) money for their healing ministry.

Rereading Jesus’ lengthy plea for comprehension (8:17–21)—to which the disciples do not respond—the reason for the apparent stupidity of the disciples in so much of the first half of the Gospel becomes clear. Throughout, their minds have been on something completely different, and their goals have been entirely at odds with those of Jesus. This explains the so-called motif of incomprehension that has been the subject of so much debate.<sup>65</sup> It is not so much a motif of incomprehension as a motif of contrary goals.

Within a few verses, Mark begins to drop hints about the disciples’ wrong agenda. In the much-discussed scene of ‘Peter’s confession,’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This is almost a direct quotation from Ps 78:19, where the people complain against Yahweh, in a psalm that describes at length Israel’s faithlessness. Tannehill (“Narrative Role” 399) sees the disciples’ incomprehension at the second feeding story as “a perverse blindness that must disturb the reader.”

<sup>64</sup> “They are ultimately callous to his wishes” in carrying bread and money. Fowler, *Loaves* 118.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Frank Matera, “The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter’s Confession (Mark 6,14–8,30),” *Bib* 70 (1989) 155–62, who argues, following Focant, Nineham, Lagrange and Taylor, that the disciples’ hardness of heart was divinely ordained, and that the mystery was too great to comprehend. But Mark disapproves of their incomprehension, and expects the reader to do the same.

<sup>66</sup> Peter’s response has usually been incorrectly labelled as his “confession,” but

the disciples' responses to Jesus' first question about his identity (8:28) echo those of Herod's advisers about John (6:14–15). They, too, act like (incompetent) advisors to the king.<sup>67</sup> Then, immediately after Peter's declaration (hope?) that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), Jesus rebukes *all* of the disciples as he would any demon that would lead others astray (8:30; cf. 1:25). For "rebuke," Mark uses *epitimaō*, which is only otherwise used of Jesus' exorcisms of demons (1:25; 3:12; 9:25), his calming of the demonic storm (4:39), and his rebuke of Peter (8:32). The demons, too, had cried out many correct titles of Jesus (1:24: "Holy One of God"; 3:11: "Son of God"; 5:7: "Jesus, Son of the Most High God"), but they were not permitted to tell people who he is. Demons could hardly be trusted to explain the real meaning of those titles. Mark's use of *epitimaō* suggests that the disciples cannot be trusted to explain "Messiah" either.<sup>68</sup>

In his second rebuke, Jesus calls Peter "Satan" (8:32), and wrong thinking is explicitly mentioned, confirming his lack of understanding: "You are intent not on the things of God, but on the things of human beings" (8:33). This now reads as a specific accusation that Peter's ambition is for secular power and wealth, rather than merely being a statement that he does not yet understand God's ways, as commonly proposed.

Therefore, 8:29–33 reveal no shift in the disciples' position, so passionately confronted in 8:17–21. There is no development in Peter's appreciation of the identity or mission of Jesus.<sup>69</sup> Instead, this squabble between Jesus and Peter is where the difference in their

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it is not a public witness of true faith in Jesus. Kelber (*Mark's Story* 47–49) argues that to use the phrase "Peter's confession" totally misreads the text, and he calls it "the confrontation between Jesus and Peter." Shiner (*Follow Me* 291), however, thinks that it is a "recognition scene," as "Peter discovers Jesus' identity."

<sup>67</sup> 6:14 simply has "and they were saying," without stating who "they" were. However, a reader would assume that Herod heard through court advisers. The scene seems to depict Herod evaluating these opinions before reaching his own conclusion.

<sup>68</sup> Donald H. Juel, "The Origin of Mark's Christology," in Charlesworth (ed.), *Messiah* 451–53, argues that the claim that Jesus is the Messiah is "absurd," as it is a royal term. When the High Priest and the soldiers call him Messiah or king, it is mockery.

<sup>69</sup> According to Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, John Reumann, *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973) 69, Mark allows "some credit" to Peter here in being the first to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. Hawkin ("Incomprehension" 500) calls it a "thematic progression," as Jesus accepts the "confession." Shiner (*Follow Me* 229) calls it "an advance in understanding."

outlooks comes to a head. Jesus rebukes Peter (v. 30), Peter rebukes Jesus (v. 32) and Jesus rebukes Peter again (v. 33). It is a climactic clash of wills, as Jesus' motivation collides with Peter's.

Indeed, many commentators, recognising that Peter's statement that Jesus is the Messiah is true and matches his title in 1:1, have been perplexed by Peter's (apparent) sudden ability to discern correctly.<sup>70</sup> But there is no subsequent indication that Peter has any new understanding of Jesus' identity or mission. The Great Shock in Chapter 10 confirms that he has not shifted in his outlook. The more Jesus teaches, the less the disciples hear and understand, and, when Peter voices the opinion that Jesus is the Messiah, he merely blurts out what he and all of the disciples had hoped for when they decided to follow him—that Jesus would be king, a warrior Messiah like David.

As the story progresses, the disciples continue to act as if they were the entourage of the would-be king. They stop others from acting in his name (9:38), and they keep children away (10:13), although Jesus had explicitly taught his disciples to welcome them (9:37). On both occasions, he says, "do not stop" them (9:39; 10:14).<sup>71</sup>

It is likely, then, that Mark was biding his time when he did not disclose what Peter said in his rebuke of Jesus (8:32) so that he could reveal the disciples' real motives just before their triumphal entry into Jerusalem—a placement that maximises its impact. Accordingly, in 10:17–45, Mark reveals that the disciples think that they are following a Davidic Messiah just before bringing on the stage a man who also thinks that Jesus is the Son of David. In 10:48, the disciples are silent when some try to stop Bartimaeus calling out, "Son of David, have mercy on me"—they would be delighted by this man calling out such a title, triggering the Messianic exclamation by the

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<sup>70</sup> Matthew is among them, as he puts it down to a divine action (Matt 16:17). Räisänen (*Secret* 18–20) cannot see how they move from total incomprehension in 8:17–21 to a "rather advanced understanding" in 8:29. Matera ("Incomprehension" 165) calls Peter's confession a "narrative problem"—how can he suddenly come to this conclusion if he has not understood the feeding miracles?—but concludes (169) that, with Peter's "confession," the disciples "now see clearly everything which has happened thus far in the narrative," and see Jesus as the Shepherd Messiah. He compares Matthew's account, and it would appear that he has interpreted Mark in the light of Matthew.

<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the Roman emperor, Jesus is presented as a king who is fully accessible by those thought by society to be last.

crowd in the entry scene that follows. Ironically, it is a blind man who proposes that Jesus is Son of David.<sup>72</sup> Jesus' response is to enable Bartimaeus to see, and to invite him to follow the supposed Son of David into Jerusalem and see what sort of Messiah he really is.<sup>73</sup>

The triumph of the Jerusalem entry (11:1–11) builds on the expectations of both the crowd and the disciples, and the royal motifs often noted in that entry come to a very revealing climax in v. 10: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" The crowd seem to have picked up the repeated acclaim of Bartimaeus, who does not appear again in the narrative; he may be leading the chorus, along with the disciples, who just seem to blend in with the crowd in this scene, (wrongly) welcoming the new king.

The depiction of the disciples in Jerusalem is consistent with a continued expectancy of gaining political power.<sup>74</sup> Peter seems pleased when Jesus demonstrates his power by killing the fig tree (11:21), and Jesus tries to give his disciples a lesson on humble self-sacrifice, using the poor widow as an example (12:43). In 13:1, they wrongly focus on the greatness of the Temple buildings. At the meal in Simon's house, "some" complain, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?" (14:4), and the reader could reasonably assume that the disciples were those who spoke up, as they were the last to complain about wasted money (6:37).

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<sup>72</sup> Mark has already suggested that the disciples are blind in 1:17 (see Page 329), and 8:18.

<sup>73</sup> Eckstein ("Markus 10,46–52" 49) contends that only the blind man sees correctly that Jesus is Son of David, but he does not take into account the broader context, focusing on redactional and source considerations. Kee (*Community* 117) notes that Jesus never accepts 'Son of David' as a title. The two pericopes of healing of blind men (8:22–26; 10:46–52) have often been seen as framing the central discipleship teaching. But each story not only ironically points to the blindness of the disciples that is revealed in this section, but also relates to the following scene, that is, they point to the blindness of the disciples *and* the Jerusalem crowd, who both wrongly acclaim Jesus as a Davidic Messiah (8:29; 11:10). If so, compared with the instantaneous healing of Bartimaeus, the two-stage healing process of the man in 8:22–26 suggests that the enlightening of the disciples is the more difficult.

<sup>74</sup> Shiner (*Follow Me* 284) claims that in 11:1–12:44 the disciples are portrayed as loyal followers, and that, if their failure were "the main point" of 8:27–10:52, the "sudden shift in their portrayal in the following chapters would be inexplicable." However, it is contended that the disciples are not portrayed positively in the Jerusalem section—only Jesus' attitude to them. It is striking that the disciples are never said to be afraid once they reach Jerusalem. Instead, their victorious arrival seems to have given them a new confidence, as expressed in 11:6; 13:1; 14:16, 29, 31. This fits best the interpretation that they consistently have their eyes on a messianic takeover of power, riding on Jesus' popularity with the people.

By the final meal, the disciples, despite their protestations, seem to be playing tragic roles. When, twice (14:27, 30), Jesus predicts that they will “all fall away,” they still show no understanding of the situation; even Peter’s gallant offer to die with Jesus is just what should be expected of a warrior’s lieutenant facing an imminent battle. When they all say, “even though I must die with you” (14:31), they seem to envisage being part of an armed uprising. Finally, when the crowd with swords and clubs comes to arrest Jesus, a disciple is found to be carrying a sword, and strikes out at those who are attempting to defeat their plans, but when it becomes obvious that Jesus will not support violent resistance, “they all desert him” (14:50). Here, they are not even described as disciples.

This rereading shows that there is a consistent negative portrayal of the disciples, and that Mark does not intend the reader to identify with any positive aspects of their behaviour in order to teach them about discipleship. Moreover, it shows that he reveals the disciples’ ambitions for wealth and political power suddenly, and that he has carefully constructed his narrative and filled it with ambiguity so that the reader does not realise the disciples’ real motives until just before Jesus faces arrest and execution. It is now necessary to consider why Mark did so.

There are a number of direct and indirect statements against ambition, wealth and political power scattered through the Gospel. In 4:19, a key impediment to the gospel is said to be “the worries of this age, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, [that] choke the word.” Ambition is denounced in 9:33–37 and 10:35–45, and the misuse of power and wealth is stressed in 12:38–44.<sup>75</sup> On Page 222, the suggestion was made that the warning about the scribes (12:38) is a swipe at the ostentatiousness of the wealthy and powerful of Rome. The polemic against “the great ones” who “are tyrants” and who “rule” over the Gentiles (10:42) is a strong direct challenge to the values of Roman society. Similarly, Jesus’ dramatic warning, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God!” (10:23), relates not just to one rich man, but is directed to the attitude of the whole of Roman society. Quite a number of negative tendencies are mentioned in these scenes:

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<sup>75</sup> “Treasury” is mentioned three times in these verses (12:41 twice, 12:43), along with “many rich men” (12:41), and scribes “who devour the property of widows” (12:40) and attend “banquets” (12:39).

political ambition, jealousy, the desire for wealth, an inordinate concern for the worries of the world, the aiming for high social status, the putting on of appearances, and the exercising of tyrannical power over others. These describe very well the concerns of Roman society, which Mark presents as the antithesis of the gospel. In 4:19, Mark notes that such false desires “yield nothing.”

It is possible that some members of Mark’s community were attracted by the Flavian bandwagon, especially those with the most to lose by being a Christian. And yet, all of Mark’s references to wealth and power are only in the form of a warning not to take on the attitudes of Roman society or to otherwise be enticed by its allures,<sup>76</sup> so that Mark appears to be addressing, not those who have already succumbed to such an outlook, but those who may be tempted to do so in some way.

In fact, Mark’s portrayal of the disciples’ false motives is a powerful warning to the readers: it demonstrates that any accommodation with the regime would be disastrous. When Peter’s focus is on the wrong type of kingdom (8:33: “the things of men”), Jesus calls him “Satan,” a term that elsewhere always points to Roman society. This reveals Mark’s reason for having the disciples’ eyes fixed firmly on political power and wealth: by doing so, he assigns to them the same mindset as the members of the Roman upper class who focus on “the things of men.” The disciples become a warning of the consequences of such wrong attitudes. Anyone tempted by such ambitions would never be ready to stand firm for the gospel as Jesus had done. Moreover, Jesus had been ready to confront the authorities, especially over the exclusion of those considered by society to be ‘outsiders’ (2:17; 11:17). To ally with Roman attitudes to any degree would be to negate Jesus’ inclusive gospel and to collaborate with the very outlook that had resulted in the death of many faithful Christians. It would be a betrayal of what the martyrs, beginning with Jesus, had stood for. This is why Mark keeps insisting that it is necessary to be prepared for martyrdom for two reasons: for Jesus’ sake, and for the sake of the gospel (8:35; 10:29; 13:9–10).

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<sup>76</sup> These warnings occur particularly in 4:19; 10:23, 42, and in the repeated teachings of the need to be last in order to be first (9:35; 10:31), but it is implied throughout the Gospel in its critique of Roman attitudes and in its allusion to the alliance of Rome with Satan.



Mark's 'incomprehension motif' can therefore be explained in this way: the disciples act out the sin of Roman society—its unshakeable focus on wealth and power—and, just as the disciples' different agenda means that they cannot understand Jesus, Rome's different agenda makes it unable to understand at all what Jesus' followers are about.

The disciples are effectively said to be the worst of sinners even before they enter Jerusalem and show their true colours. Up to this point, Mark has cast them as sinners in the mould of Roman society not just to provide a narrative reason for their treachery, but also to show his readers that to align with Roman values at all is to be diametrically opposed to the mind of Jesus and to the spread of the gospel. Once in Jerusalem, Mark demonstrates the disastrous consequences of such attitudes: they lead first to a refusal to accept martyrdom for the sake of the gospel, which, in turn, results in the disintegration of the community, the risking of the mission, and the death of the faithful child of God.

#### WHICH IS WORSE: BETRAYAL OR DENIAL?

*Surely, not I? (14:19)*

Mark often places portions of his text so that they comment on the adjacent material, often surrounding one scene with another.<sup>77</sup> There is usually some sense of simultaneity present in such an arrangement,<sup>78</sup> and scenes are placed so that they can be compared or contrasted with one another. The widow is placed next to the scribes in 12:38–44, and the old family and the opposing authorities next to the new family in 3:20–35. On the other hand, the mission of

<sup>77</sup> On intercalations interpreting each other and underscoring major Markan themes, see Donahue, *Christ* 42, 59–61. For a recent discussion on their use, see Van Oyen, "Intercalation" 2.949–76, and Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition and Function* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1993), especially 384, where he concludes: "The function of intercalation as a literary style is to produce dramatised irony." However, irony pervades the whole Gospel, and he must strain the evidence in order to produce a universal conclusion such as this, as in his analysis of the Jairus intercalation (149). Instead, Mark seems to employ the technique for a number of literary effects.

<sup>78</sup> Fowler (*Reader* 143–47) calls Mark's use of intercalations a "crafty manipulation at the discourse level that creates the illusion that two episodes are taking place simultaneously."

the disciples and the return to Jesus surround the horrific story of the fate of John the Baptist in 6:7–44, while Jesus' journey to raise the dead daughter of Jairus encompasses the healing of a woman whose case is also hopeless in 5:22–43.

At the beginning of the narrative of Jesus' arrest, trials and execution, we find Mark using this technique more frequently. Repeatedly through Chapter 14, Mark places one scene inside another, sometimes with scenes occurring simultaneously as if in a 'split-screen' effect, and once sequentially.<sup>79</sup> The technique has the effect of contrasting a generous, sharing community 'inside' with threats of death 'outside,' and shows that those threats are aided by the infidelity of disciples. Here, Mark begins to move the reader's emotions most powerfully, and this sandwiching technique is an important rhetorical tool in achieving this effect.<sup>80</sup>

The first double scene occurs in 14:1–11. In theatrical terms, the spotlight turns on one side of a darkened stage to show the chief priests and scribes intent on killing Jesus. However, while this plot is underway, another spotlight illuminates the other side of the stage, and we see Jesus at a meal inside the house of a man presumably once healed by him. To the horror of the reader, one of the disciples leaves Jesus and the community meal and moves from one side of the stage, through the darkness, to the other, joining in the plot.

This double scene serves to bring out the immensity of Judas' treachery. It points the reader again to the situation in their house-church, and the 'remembrance' saying of 14:9 especially triggers that memory (see Page 221), as might the mention of the collection for the poor (14:5). Their sacred meals also occur in the midst of darkness, surrounded by hostile authorities, and in the knowledge that, at any moment, one of those 'inside' might, for some inexplicable reason, decide to go 'outside' and inform on the community. It is an emotive picture of the Roman Christian gatherings. It is like the

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<sup>79</sup> Reinhold Zwick, *Montage im Markusevangelium: Studien zur narrativen Organisation der ältesten Jesuserzählung* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989) compares Mark's scene-setting with similar techniques in the direction of movies.

<sup>80</sup> Frank Kermode, *A Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979) 63, has astutely commented: "We may find in this sequence of betrayal, desertion and denial, a literal construction of considerable sophistication, one that has benefited from the grace that often attends the work of narration—a grace not always taken into account by scholars who seek to dissolve the text into its elements rather than to observe the fertility of their interrelations."

‘beautiful scene’ of 6:31–44, which reminded them of the Eucharist ‘feeding,’ surrounded by enemies. But in this beautiful scene, there is also conflict among Jesus’ followers (14:4–5).

The reader is not explicitly told why Judas betrayed Jesus.<sup>81</sup> Money is only offered after Judas promises to hand him over. With the Roman practice of offering money to informers, the reader is led to suspect that it was the reason. But Mark seems to deliberately leave his motives unclear and, in doing so, he forces the reader to ask, ‘Why would a follower do such a terrible thing?’ No answer is provided, just as no reason had been given earlier why so many members of Roman society would not receive the word, and persecute those who do. The motivation of those Christians who betrayed others in Rome may also have been just as unclear—did they do it for the money, were they disillusioned with Christian goals, did they hope to win the favour of the Roman authorities, or did they just do it to save their own skins?

In 14:17–31, the pattern seems to repeat itself. This ‘beautiful scene’ is the meal (14:22–25) at which Jesus generously gives himself to his disciples (v. 22) and “for many” (v. 24), and it is framed by predictions of betrayal (vv. 17–21) and of denial (vv. 26–31).<sup>82</sup> Again, the scene becomes a reminder of the Roman situation—Eucharist in a house setting, surrounded by threats. But, in this framing, no political authorities are mentioned. Here, the only threats are by those who claim to be followers of Jesus. Indeed, the way in which Mark has arranged the Last Supper scene forces the reader into a reading sequence: treachery—meal—treachery. In the act of reading, he or she becomes aware of their own situation: Eucharist surrounded by the threat of betrayal, apostasy and abandonment. And in placing betrayal and denial either side of the Eucharist, Mark invites the reader to compare the two, and to ask, ‘Which is worse: betrayal or denial?’<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 211) contends that the Judas’ reasons were “of no concern to the author of Mark.”

<sup>82</sup> 14:26–31 actually contain a prediction of both denial and abandonment. The two are not quite the same, as followers can abandon Jesus and the Christian community without publicly denying them. Yet, Jesus ties the two together by answering Peter’s insistence that he would not abandon him with a prediction that Peter would *deny* him, emphasising Peter’s double failure. The disciples only flee after they have been seen to be with Jesus; abandonment also becomes a public event.

<sup>83</sup> See Shepherd (*Sandwich Stories* 354, 388–91) for his discussion on 14:12–31,

The most challenging rhetorical question of the Gospel occurs in the first part of this scene, at the critical moment that Da Vinci brilliantly recognised in his *Last Supper*, when Jesus predicts that he would be betrayed and the disciples become alarmed, asking, “one after another, ‘Surely, not I?’” (14:19).<sup>84</sup> Pointedly, each disciple asks the question. As a question, and not a statement, it adds an element of doubt—anyone is potentially a betrayer.

Perhaps for this reason, Judas’ name is not mentioned in this scene, and he is never identified while at the meal. Instead, we have the repeated refrain, “One of the Twelve . . . One of you, one who is eating with me . . . one of the Twelve, who is dipping bread into the bowl with me . . . one of the Twelve” (14:10, 17, 20, 43).<sup>85</sup> It could be anyone. This refrain also underscores the enormity of the crime against the Eucharistic community, as does the ‘brotherly kiss’ of Judas (see Page 286).

Although this key rhetorical question occurs in the betrayal prediction, this does not mean that betrayal is worse. The question is equally applicable to denial, and it still hangs in the air as the reader faces the predictions of denial and abandonment. It is apparent that Mark hopes to bring his reader to an awareness that *anyone could fail* in any of these ways. Moreover, the addition of the words “and they all said the same” at the end of scene (14:31) is not just a note of the failure of all the disciples in the story; it is a reminder that all those who had failed in Rome had also once been part of their Eucharistic gatherings, had promised faithfulness and love, and had broken under pressure. This Gospel asks: ‘Who can say that they would not fail under any circumstances?’ Mark’s readers likely witnessed many apparently strong Christians betraying family and friends

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and for his references to the few commentators that have concluded there is an intercalation in this structure. However, he sees narrative links that meet his criteria for an intercalation only between the betrayal and the Eucharist. John Sergeant, *Lion Let Loose: The Structure and Meaning of St Mark’s Gospel* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1988) 14, notes that the betrayal and denial surround the Eucharist.

<sup>84</sup> The question, “Surely not I?” is quite different from that found in John 13:25 (“Lord, who is it?”), which seeks to identify the betrayer in their midst.

<sup>85</sup> The distinction between the Twelve and the disciples in the Gospel has been the subject of much discussion. See Donahue, *Discipleship* 7–10. In Chapter 14, the use of “the Twelve” seems to be simply a way of emphasising that betrayal and denial comes from those closest to Jesus. It indicates that the reader’s situation is one where he or she was being reminded of those whom they had thought to be closest friends, but who had betrayed and denied other Christians, pointing to the depths of the unhealed memories and relationships present in the community.

or denying Christ when faced with their own torture and execution, and Mark now leads each reader to recall the trauma of those events, and to ask, ‘Surely, not I?’ Thus, the word “all” keeps recurring over and over again throughout the predictions of the disciples’ failures (14:23, 27, 29, 31).

Therefore, Mark’s rhetoric here was not directed to ‘failed followers,’ inviting them to repent and return, nor did it seek to help people within the community to deal with their own “remorse for personal failure.”<sup>86</sup> The above analysis reveals that this text challenges readers *who have not failed*, but confronts them with their own propensity to do so. One cannot move a reader who had failed by saying that ‘even you might fail’—he or she already knows this only too well. Rather, the key rhetorical question—“Surely, not I?”—makes even those who are not guilty aware that they, too, could have failed in the same way as those who had betrayed, denied and abandoned the community. This is soon emphasised with Jesus’ model prayer in Gethsemane—“the flesh is willing but the spirit is weak” (14:38). This memorable saying and prayer stirs sympathy for the weak.

It is proposed, then, that Mark was confronting the painful question of forgiving and readmitting apostates and betrayers who were seeking to return to the community.<sup>87</sup> Mark’s narrative is designed, through emotional appeal, to engender sympathy for them.<sup>88</sup> Those first readers are likely to have been deeply affected by this text, as it would have been hard to forgive those who had caused their relatives, friends and leaders to be killed. It would have been very difficult in those small house-churches to deal with this.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Van Iersel, “Failed Followers” 245.

<sup>87</sup> Russell (“Pastoral Response” 208) comments: “It would not be surprising if the number of apostates was high. How many would be able to face up to the prospect of an agonising death by fire or crucifixion or being torn apart by dogs?” However, he assumes that the Gospel appeals to those seeking forgiveness.

<sup>88</sup> It is possible, too, that Mark was trying to help his readers forgive those who were not seeking to come back, but the motif of return is very strong, and his prime focus seems to be on those who were repenting.

<sup>89</sup> Senior (*Passion* 105) also notes the painful and intense situation that would exist in small house-churches if those who “abandoned the community” were “drifting back.”

## CHILD, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

*It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins  
but God alone? (2:7)*

With this in mind, the early emphasis of this Gospel on forgiveness and on the inclusion of sinners needs to be re-examined. Kee has observed: "Clearly, forgiveness is a central concern for the Markan community."<sup>90</sup> A motif of inclusion begins as early as 1:40, with a leper coming to Jesus saying, "If you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus indignantly replies, "I do want to; be made clean" (1:41), and heals the man, pointedly returning him to the community by sending him to the High Priest for his 'certificate of health.'<sup>91</sup> The plea of the afflicted man is the plea of someone excluded from the community,<sup>92</sup> and Jesus is so troubled that this man is an outsider that he is prepared to become an outsider himself (1:45). Soon, there is more on excluded people: Levi, a 'sinner,' is called to follow Jesus (2:13–14), and Jesus eats a meal with "sinners" and says that he has come to call "sinners" (2:15–17). The words "sinner" and "sin" keep being repeated (seven times in thirteen verses).

There is a concentrated motif of inclusion here, and it surrounds a moving scene where forgiveness is granted without the sinner even asking for it. In 2:1–12, a desperate, paralysed man forces his way into a house (with the help of friends), and obtains both forgiveness and healing.<sup>93</sup> Mark has the scene in a house where Jesus is "speaking the word" (2:2), a clear reminder of the reader's own gatherings.<sup>94</sup> If 'sinners,' that is, betrayers and apostates, were seeking to

<sup>90</sup> Kee, *Community* 115.

<sup>91</sup> Malbon ("Minor Characters" 64) notes that inclusiveness usually occurs in the context of healing.

<sup>92</sup> Neusner (*Judaic Law* 213) points out: "The synonym of unclean is not sinful, but outsider."

<sup>93</sup> Intriguingly, William Reginald Halliday, *Greek and Roman Folklore* (London: George G. Harrap, 1927) 42, says that, in the ancient world, a person who had been falsely reported dead was "not allowed to enter the house by the door. A hole was made in the roof, through which they were lowered," and he or she then had to go through a ceremony in which they were "re-born." Unfortunately, he gives no reference.

<sup>94</sup> His use of such a formula here is anachronistically out of place in a story of Jesus' early ministry, but is in place in the situation of the developed church where "speaking the word" is a familiar term. It is odd that Jesus teaches the public in a house in this scene. Mark places him outside everywhere else, so that situating him inside for this scene is artificial and is designed to evoke the house-church

return to the house-churches, perhaps with the help of truly faithful friends, this scene is likely to have spoken emotively to the community as it was read aloud. Sinners were ‘at the door,’ unable to gain entry.

This scene has Jesus forgiving sins away from the Temple.<sup>95</sup> As mentioned earlier, the paralytic would not have been welcome there. But, if house-churches were also excluding sinners, here Mark accuses them of being guilty of the same type of exclusion. Jesus will later object strongly to people being excluded from a house of worship (11:17).

Jesus’ surprising opening words—“Child, your sins are forgiven” (2:5)—goes to the heart of the problem. The fact that he deals first with forgiveness, not even requested, acts in a parabolic manner to shock the reader into thinking laterally; what is needed first of all is forgiveness. And when Jesus asks, “Which is easier . . .?” the reader is told that forgiving should be easy. When Jesus says that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (2:10), they would be reminded that he had delegated that authority to his followers, emphasised by the phrase “on earth.”<sup>96</sup>

“Child” (2:5) is only used elsewhere by Mark of disciples (10:24), so that Mark emphasises with a word that a person who has decided to return is already a true disciple—they know that they are sinners (cf. 2:17). “Child, your sins are forgiven” becomes a further model for the reading community—as the solemn declaration that should be made in welcoming back sinners.<sup>97</sup>

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setting. Hanhart (“Son” 1004–16) observes the strangeness of this story, but concludes that it relates to the exclusion of Gentile converts, suggesting that it represents the needs to forgive Romans. He is close to the proposal argued here by detecting that it speaks to the Markan community about excluding someone regarded as a sinner, but he has the wrong ‘sinner.’

<sup>95</sup> Marshall (*Faith* 184–86) sees Jesus as “abrogating to himself the task of the High Priest, who had power to proclaim God’s forgiveness on the basis of repentance and sacrifice,” and cites Lohmeyer and Gaston as seeing “the scribes’ response as an objection to Jesus’ encroachment on the cultic domain or to his granting of forgiveness without demanding restitution or expiation.”

<sup>96</sup> Alternatively, the use of the phrase may indicate that some members in the community were claiming that the sins of the apostates could only be forgiven “in heaven” after death, that is, not “on earth.” This is also suggested by the reaction of Jesus’ opponents—that only God could forgive.

<sup>97</sup> Marcus (*Mark* 221) regards, “My child, your sins are forgiven,” as “easy to imagine in church contexts such as the Lord’s Supper.” Kee (*Community* 157) considers the phrase to have been a liturgical formula used in the community.

Thus, Mark moves to his little joke about only the sick needing the doctor (2:17). “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” might appear to speak to the scribes of the Pharisees, but it is also a criticism of those Christians of the house-churches who do not want to “eat with sinners” (2:16). Moreover, the offended scribes in 2:7 may act in the same way as Christians of the house-church who react against suggestions that such sinners should be forgiven and be readmitted to the Eucharist. Christians, too, might have retorted: “Blasphemy!” As Mark’s previous scene (1:40–45) is of a man who is healed and sent to those in authority to be re-incorporated into the community, the scene with the paralytic may be particularly addressed to those Christian leaders who were responsible for the continued exclusion of the apostates and betrayers.

It is forgiveness that first leads to opposition in this Gospel. The fact that this motif of forgiveness of the excluded sinner occurs at such a key point indicates the importance of this issue for Mark and his community. The extraordinary praise of the onlookers at this point (2:12), unique in the Gospel, emphasises its importance further. Marcus has observed that the first use of the Son of Man title occurs here, not in an image of God as a judge of sinners as in Dan 7, but “as a forgiver of sins.”<sup>98</sup>

When the reader comes to 3:28: “Truly I tell you, the sons of men shall be forgiven all sins,” this Gospel is already good news. It is also notable that the tenor of the teachings on a proper attitude to the Sabbath (2:24–3:6) is that of an impassioned plea to forget ‘the rules’ and to put people first, emphasised particularly by Jesus’ frustration in the synagogue with the leaders who cannot see that healing is good and God’s will, especially on that special day on which they meet.

In Chapter 3, it was argued that 11:22–25 allude to the replacement of the Temple by the house-church as the place of forgiveness. The final verse, then, would have been a moving injunction to the reader—“When you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against someone, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.” It is a fragment of the ‘Our Father,’ a reminder of that common prayer,<sup>99</sup> and warns that those who

<sup>98</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 223.

<sup>99</sup> Other fragments of the “Our Father” occur in 14:36, 38, suggesting that the prayer was known.



would deny forgiveness to returning sinners should take note that they likewise stand before the Father as sinners. If sins are not to be forgiven, then they, too, are in trouble. This injunction also stresses that the house-church, the place of prayer, should be the new holy place where forgiveness *precedes* anything else. It constitutes an appeal for reconciliation and healing in the community, and it is directed *at those who need to forgive others*, not to those who need to be forgiven.<sup>100</sup>

As the readmission of sinners would have been such an emotive issue for the Markan community, it is no wonder that we find betrayal and denial positioned as key motifs in the climactic scenes of the Gospel. This significant theme shows that Mark hoped to convince those who would exclude the lapsed that it does not matter how grave the sin has been, and that betrayal is as bad, and as forgivable, as denial.

#### PETER THE ROCK

*This man is one of them (14:69)*

The centrality of Peter in the portrayal of the disciples has long been noted. However, the comprehensive failure of all of the disciples has been demonstrated by the time the Gethsemane scene is completed. They are all guilty of the worst of sins: holding attitudes similar to those of the persecuting society, betraying Jesus, and abandoning the mission. It is significant, then, that Peter is made to stand out as he does in the Gospel, especially in the denial scene.

For Roman readers, Peter, one of their martyrs, was a person to be admired, having ultimately accepted the cross for the sake of the gospel. Thus, Peter was an ideal person for Mark to use, not just as an example of right action, but also because memory of his sacrifice would have emotionally moved his readers. This also suggests why James and John appear in Mark's narrative together with Peter as those who act as witnesses to three key events (5:37; 9:2; 14:33). Peter, James and John are usually considered to have historically been an "inner three" among the Twelve,<sup>101</sup> but there is no indication

<sup>100</sup> In contrast, Matt 5:23–24 urges readers of that Gospel to go to anyone *who needs to forgive them*.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) 31.

that this was so in Paul's writings, and later evangelists may just have drawn on Mark.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, these three do not appear to be leaders at all in Mark's narrative. Peter has been seen as the leader of the disciples because he is mentioned first (1:16; 3:16), and because he supposedly acts as their spokesman.<sup>103</sup> However, he could be introduced first because of the important role that he plays in the narrative; he does appear to be mentioned last (16:7) for this reason. He is never named as the spokesman for the group; he just puts his foot in his mouth before the others do. He just seems to voice the thoughts of all the disciples: when he says that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), it soon becomes clear that they all hope for the same; when he says that he will not deny Jesus (14:29), they all say the same; when Peter does not know what to say to the transfigured Jesus (9:5–6), there is no indication that the others could fare any better. In 10:28, he mouths the concern of all, as in 11:21. Once, John speaks for them all (9:38), so that Peter is not the only spokesman and, in 10:35, James and John consider that they are entitled to the top leadership roles when Jesus attains power. Peter is never appointed leader, and never takes any action as leader. Nor do James and John. The trio seem to serve only as witnesses at key points.

In 10:39, Jesus tells James and John, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised," and this very likely points to the martyrdoms of both

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<sup>102</sup> Hengel (*Studies* 10) says that the disciples "always form a hierarchy" in lists of their names, and that Mark follows a very old order. But Mark's list is the oldest we have, and he may have been the one to construct it. James, son of Zebedee, is never said in the New Testament to be a special leader. The report of his beheading by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2) may mean no more than he was a prominent figure, perhaps just one of the Twelve. Paul called John "an acknowledged pillar" (Gal 2:9), but he, too, could just have meant that he was one of the Twelve. However, Acts 3:1–4:23; 8:14–25 do treat John as a key member of the Twelve. The list of the eleven in Acts 1:13 begins with "Peter and John and James," but Luke may have based his priority on the list established by Mark, but with John in second place.

<sup>103</sup> But Timothy Wiarda, "Peter as Peter in the Gospel of Mark," *NTS* 45 (1999) 19–37, argues that Peter does not act as *the* spokesman, and there are times when he could act as one, but does not; rather, he tends to function as a representative figure. He further observes that Peter exhibits "significant individual behaviour," and is a model for the reader to follow, arguing against claims that characters in ancient literature are merely types. Because of this high degree of individualisation, he concludes (33) that Mark "may have portrayed Peter under the constraint of a prior conception of his person."

James and John before this Gospel was written.<sup>104</sup> We know that James, the son of Zebedee, had already been martyred (Acts 12:2), as had Peter, when Mark wrote.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Mark pointedly adds the information, as if the reader did not already know, that the James and John who would accept the ‘cup’ and ‘baptism’ were the sons of Zebedee (10:35), perhaps to avoid confusion with James, the brother of the Lord, but more likely to remind them of the martyrdoms of both Zebedee brothers.

It is likely, then, that Mark presents the so-called ‘inner three’ as key figures only because his readers knew that all three had already been faithful to the point of martyrdom.<sup>106</sup> Together, they perform no function other than to act as witnesses to three moments of glory (the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the Transfiguration, Jesus’ surrender to God’s will in Gethsemane), all of which also point to suffering and death. Three martyrs become witnesses to the correlation between suffering and glory.

These three were called, along with Andrew, as two sets of brothers (1:16–20), and Andrew is mentioned with them only once more—

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<sup>104</sup> Hengel (*Studies* 13) considers that 10:39 presumes both James and John had already been martyred, and cites a fragment from Papias that “John the theologian and James his brother were killed by the Jews.” He presumes that John was killed in Judea in “the turbulent sixties.” Schenke (*Markusevangelium* 35) agrees. Culpepper (*John* 139–74) examines the issue of the death of John the Apostle in some detail, also citing the Papias fragment. He notes that Clement (*Stromate* 4.9) lists the apostles who were not martyred, and that James and John are missing. He also cites (124) a homily of Aphraates in the fourth century that mentions their martyrdom. He concludes that there is scattered evidence for their martyrdom that is not dependant upon 10:38–39, but that this evidence does not override the tradition of John’s long residence in Ephesus because, if he had been martyred, mention is likely to have been made of it more often. This is an argument from silence, and he does not sufficiently consider the literary meaning of 10:38–39. Michael Oberweis, “Das Martyrium der Zebedaiden in Mark 10:35–40 (Mt 20:20–3) und Offb 11.3–13,” *NTS* 44 (1998) 74–94, has argued that the mention of the “two witnesses” of Rev 11:3–13 is an allusion to their martyrdom. It was argued on Page 118 that all of Jesus’ predictions in the Gospel had been fulfilled by the time that Mark wrote.

<sup>105</sup> *1 Clem.* 5.4–6 mentions that Peter and Paul died as a result of “jealousy and strife,” suggesting the possibility that Peter may have been betrayed. Donahue (“Windows and Mirrors” 23) argues that it suggests divisions within the community. See Richard Bauckham, “The Martyrdom of Peter in Early Christian Literature,” *ANRW* II, 26.1 (1992) 539–95, for an extensive discussion of the evidence that Peter was martyred in Rome.

<sup>106</sup> It is possible, then, that Peter’s primary significance for the Roman church may not have been as leader of the Twelve, but as an original follower of Jesus who came to Rome and became an example, like Paul, through martyrdom. The author of *1 Clement* only depicted Peter as a martyr to be emulated (5.5).

to receive the prediction of the future suffering of the Church (13:3). The majority of this four, like Jesus, had “endured to the end” (13:13), but perhaps the special mention of Andrew, who is not included as a witness to the connection between glory and suffering, indicates that he was known to be still living when the Gospel was written. If so, the reader knows that three of four brothers have been martyred, and Andrew’s inclusion may be to show that faithful discipleship does not necessarily mean martyrdom (cf. John 21:18–23). It would also stress the severe effect on the church leadership, with three of four having been killed.<sup>107</sup>

Mark’s use of these three would be persuasive for his readers, as all three had attained true glory. In particular, when a reader remembered Peter, his or her emotions were already stirred, calling to mind also all those who had died with him in Rome, together with the pain and suffering of recent years. In the person of Peter, Mark forces the reader to face the pain of persecution, betrayal and apostasy, and the difficulty of forgiving those who had caused that pain. He is an ideal rhetorical tool.

This is demonstrated by the extraordinary scene of Peter’s denial (14:66–72). Burnett has remarked how exceptional it is within ancient literature that Peter, a secondary character in the narrative, is brought to the forefront in such a scene.<sup>108</sup> The scene is even unnecessary:

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<sup>107</sup> There is also the enigmatic name “Sons of Thunder” given to James and John by Jesus (3:17). David Parker, “Sons of Thunder,” in Porter, Joyce and Orton (eds), *Boundaries* 141–49, argues that the phrase is an allusion to Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus/Jupiter, and cites Rendel Harris who, in 1903, pointed out that they often appeared in early Christian hagiography (the original idea was put forward by Sir J. G. Frazer). He concludes that Jesus made a “witty classical allusion.” Culpepper (*John* 40) proposes that Jesus named them this because of their role as “thundering witnesses.” However, Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 24–30, points out that, according to Roman myth, Castor was mortal and Pollux (Polydeuces) was immortal. When Castor died, Polydeuces asked Zeus to slay him; MacDonald compares this request with that of James and John (10:37) and argues that, since John lived to old age, James represents Castor, and John Polydeuces. However, MacDonald also notes (29) that Polydeuces successfully asked Zeus if he and Castor could share a single immortality. It is possible, then, that Mark is reminding his readers through the use of this title for these brothers that they had already shared immortality through martyrdom. After all, in this same verse, Mark explicitly notes Judas’ destiny—as betrayer of Jesus.

<sup>108</sup> Even a whole scene of dialogue with other secondary characters is “almost unheard of in ancient literature.” He cites Auerbach as saying that the scene “falls entirely outside of the domain of classical antiquity.” This scene encourages the

Peter could simply have abandoned Jesus along with the others. Nevertheless, the fact that he ran away with the others (14:50), only to return and fail in an even greater way, does build both the enormity of his crime and greater sympathy for the sinner.

Moreover, Mark has given this scene a place of great importance. Commentators always note the intercalation of 14:54–72, with Peter’s denial framing Jesus’ confession.<sup>109</sup> However, an important structure has also been created by making The Trial of Peter (and so it should be called) the centrepiece of The Three Trials.<sup>110</sup> The Trial of Peter lies between the Trial of Jesus before the Jewish authorities and the Trial of Jesus before the Roman authority. *Peter has centre stage*. And, at this critical moment, Peter is put on trial by a slave girl (Mark uses the diminutive), and fails the test.

It is an emotional scene, and it becomes more emotional as it proceeds. Peter, already outside, pointedly “warming himself” (twice: vv. 54, 67), moves further outside as he is confronted, and denies everything. The nature of his denials have received considerable attention, and, as discussed earlier, echo the denial and cursing of apostates—a reader in Rome was not likely to miss the comparison. However, the nature of the accusations has received less attention; they are:

14:67 “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.”

14:69 “This man is one of them.”

14:70 “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.”

The first is a clear reminder of his appointment to be “with Jesus” (3:14), which he abrogates. Ironically, a servant insists that the

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reader to take an interest in the character of Peter, he argues, and there is attention to Peter here that is unique in the plot, suggesting “that ‘personal’ aspects of characters in the gospel narratives . . . played a more important role in early Christian proclamation than form and redaction critics have been willing to admit.” Burnett, “Characterisation” 21–22.

<sup>109</sup> Examples are Donahue, “Windows and Mirrors” 17; Best, “Narrative Technique” 52; Beavis, *Audience* 47; Senior, *Passion* 103; Smith, *Petrine* 178; Van Iersel, *Reader-Response* 348. However, Smith also points to verbal links between Peter’s denial scene and the following trial before Pilate, especially with the use of *aulē* (14:54, 66; 15:16).

<sup>110</sup> John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994) 172, sees 14:66–72 as the centre of a chiasmic structure that covers the whole of 14:1–16:8, but he does not explain how readers would have recognised or benefited from such large-scale arrangements of the text.

disciple identify himself as a follower of Jesus, the servant (10:45). However, the second two are similar: in each case, Peter is accused of being “one of them,” that is, in the story, a member of the group following Jesus. For the reader, however, these accusations speak of being a member of the Christian community. The apostate does not just deny his or her relationship with Jesus, but with the others in the community. Indeed, Mark, in wanting to echo the threefold denial of the apostate, has had to repeat one of these elements, and the one he has chosen is the latter, stressing the break with the community, and giving it the greater importance.<sup>111</sup>

This scene stirs the reader’s awareness of Roman hatred of Christians. On Page 62, it was argued that ‘Galilean’ was a derogatory term for Christians in Rome. Even the phrase “one of them” has a derogatory sense. Thus, Peter reacts to an intended insult that he is a member of the group that follows Jesus. There is no narrative reason why this slave should be interested in the disciples as a group—the accusation should be that Peter had been seen with Jesus, the accused, not that he was “one of them.” For a Roman reader, however, the repeated use of the term would speak of the disparaging Roman attitude toward Christians.

Significantly, there is no indication that Peter’s accusers would have turned him in, and yet he fails *simply because of fear of delation*, so that, in this climactic scene, the greatest fear of the reader is brought to the fore.<sup>112</sup> Even the youngest slave could become the one to inform; ‘the least’ can also be the greatest danger to the Christian. Notably there are three informers mentioned in the final scenes—Judas, the Jews (15:3), and (potentially) the slave girl—indicating how much delation is at the forefront of the reader’s concerns. In this scene, Peter dramatically acts out the dilemma faced by a Christian fearing arrest and execution, and places the reader in the situation of those who have failed in similar circumstances.

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<sup>111</sup> Peter had made an earlier threefold assertion: that he would not desert (14:29), would be prepared to die with Jesus (14:31), and would not deny him (14:31). All of these relate to his relationship with Jesus, but when it comes to the crunch, he predominantly denies being a member of the Christian community. Paul Q. Beeching, *Awkward Reverence: Reading the New Testament Today* (London: SCM Press, 1997) 41, has commented on the “double irony” of Peter’s exclamation, “Even if I must die, I will never deny you,” as it later becomes true with his martyrdom in Rome.

<sup>112</sup> There is no hint that Satan plays any part in leading Peter to fail—only human fear is blamed here.

Mark builds sympathy for the apostates by stirring the reader's own fear, and by showing that even Peter "the rock" could fail due to the intensity of this fear.<sup>113</sup>

Peter's denials move to a climax, becoming stronger with each one, until he curses Christ.<sup>114</sup> The comprehensive negative portrayal of the disciples climaxes in this pathetic scene: they have now failed in every way imaginable, personified in Peter. The reader is led to ask the question: 'Could any Christian do anything worse than Peter did?'

Peter's final moment has been much debated because of the wide range of possible meanings of *kai epibalōn eklaiei* (14:72).<sup>115</sup> Brown gives nine different alternatives for *epibalōn*, and prefers "he went out" and began to weep,<sup>116</sup> but the NRSV has "he broke down and wept." In any case, the question is what the weeping means—is Peter expressing remorse, or is it relief?<sup>117</sup> The latter is most unlikely for

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<sup>113</sup> This scene occurs while Jesus is being beaten by the guard (14:65), so that the reader also has the general fear of the usual ill treatment running in the background. To add to the emotion of the scene, the taunting bystanders would remind of the spectators at the trials and execution of Christians.

<sup>114</sup> The mood of the scene may also have been heightened by the use of the cockcrow. Although a cockcrow indicated a time of night, Suetonius (*Vitellius* 9, 18) reports that a cock once perched on the shoulder of Vitellius as he was approaching Rome, and that he was later killed by Antonius Primus, a Gaul (*gallus*, also meaning "cock") who had the nickname in his youth of "rooster's beak." Thus, "the outcome corresponded with these omens." It may just be a coincidence that the mention of a cock and the cutting off of an ear (see Page 176), both reported by Roman writers in relation to the death of Vitellius, occur a few verses apart in Chapter 14. Perhaps Mark used elements of stories about this murder less than two years earlier to add an atmosphere of foreboding to these scenes. However, cries by animals at critical moments were generally regarded as omens of doom: Valerius Maximus (1.1.5) gives the example of the cry of a shrewmouse during a ceremony that resulted in Fabius Maximus resigning as dictator, and C. Flaminius as magistrate. Cited in Hodgson, "Valerius Maximus" 688. Halliday (*Folklore* 59) states that the Romans, as well as the Greeks, regarded as evil omens "the cawing of a crow, the hooting of an owl, or the howling of a dog." Writing in the sixties, Petronius (*Satyricon* 74) said that it was a bad sign to hear a cock crow.

<sup>115</sup> For a bibliography on the weeping of Peter, see Agustí Borrelli, *The Good News of Peter's Denial: A Narrative and Rhetorical Reading of Mark 14:54, 66–72* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 112. He concludes (113) that Peter does not repent, but his weeping is just another sign of his weakness. He further argues (194) that Mark could have clearly shown that Peter repented, but did not.

<sup>116</sup> Brown, *Death* 2.608–610. He points out that *klaioō* is mostly used in the New Testament to refer to weeping over the deceased "so that a very emotional reaction seems to be implied here."

<sup>117</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing* 218) claims that this sorrow does not prove a change of heart, but she takes no account of the reader's knowledge of Peter. Thus, she concludes

a reader who knew Peter, and who knew his subsequent life, and they would very probably have seen it as the remorse that resulted in his change of heart, the foregoing of his earlier ambitions, and his subsequent role as an apostle.

With the weeping, Mark elicits sympathy for Peter, and it is only here, finally, that the reader can sympathetically identify with him and the other disciples. Boomershine, stressing that the Gospel was read aloud, urges interpreters to try it with Peter's denial, showing that it could hardly result in anything but sympathy for Peter. "Reading aloud . . . makes certain interpretations impossible."<sup>118</sup> He concludes: "One tells such a story as an invitation to others who have the same feelings to identify with the story and make it their own."<sup>119</sup> Augustine's *Confessions* was a comparable document, a work intended to elicit sympathy for sinners in order to argue for their acceptance in the Church during the struggle against Donatism.

Mark does not try to elicit sympathy for Jesus on the cross, as the crucifixion scene is constructed to deal with the reader's doubts and fears. Sympathy is only stirred up for Peter. In this Gospel, it is the one who has denied Jesus that is shown sympathy, the very effect Mark is trying to create in his readers so that they will accept sinners back.

It is only when Peter appears again in the text, in name only, that his story is completed. There has been much analysis of the tomb scene, but perhaps the most important element is what is *not there*. Given what the disciples have done and said, a reader would expect Jesus to scold the disciples, at least. But in his message to them, there is not even a hint of a reproach, and we have here the

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that the reader is meant to think that Peter ultimately failed. Wegener (*Cruciformed* 66) argues that Peter's remorse "scarcely mitigates the readers low opinion of his character." Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 430) claims that their knowledge of Peter "protected" them from this painful story. This misunderstands the effect on the reader: there is certainly no intention to protect the reader from this story, as there is every indication that Mark tries to involve them in it as emotionally as possible.

<sup>118</sup> Boomershine, "Peter's Denial" 59. He observes (56–57) that the characterisation of Peter reveals that it is not polemic, but the establishment of a sympathetic relationship. In "Mark 16:8" 237, Boomershine sees Peter's weeping as "a poignant appeal for sympathy." Kelber ("Biblical Hermeneutics" 102) denies that this is so, claiming that the reader pities Peter. However, he pays no attention to the reader's knowledge of Peter's subsequent actions.

<sup>119</sup> Boomershine, "Peter's Denial" 60.



best news of all. After all, Jesus came “not to call the righteous, but sinners” (2:17).<sup>120</sup>

The announcement is that Jesus “will go ahead of you to Galilee,” just as the God of the Exodus continued to go ahead of Israel (Exod 33:14–17; 34:11) despite their unfaithfulness. The message is directed to “his disciples and Peter” or, better, “his disciples, even Peter.”<sup>121</sup> The reader knows that the invitation was accepted, and that reconciliation did occur. It is an emotional ending.

Mark’s message to those who had been faithful during the persecution is that it is no use modelling your life on Jesus the Martyr unless you are also going to be like Jesus the Forgiver, who unconditionally, readily, and without recrimination, forgives even those who do the worst things imaginable to you. The final scene is the climax of this message: *even Peter* is welcome back. So, too, the reader should welcome back those who had failed, rather than leaving them outside, weeping in the darkness.<sup>122</sup>

Because of the reader’s knowledge of Peter’s subsequent self-sacrifice, Mark could use him as the exemplar of the repentant sinner. He could depict him as negatively as necessary for the sake of his rhetoric, because here was a man who had been transformed by his experience of the self-sacrifice of Jesus, demonstrating in himself the love of God and the divine drive to tell people of that saving love. Readers may even have known that Peter used to emphasise his conversion in his preaching, speaking of his “earlier life,” as Paul once had (Gal 1:13). Mark may then have built on this reader awareness, doing no harm to Peter’s reputation as a result, but producing a powerful story of the changed life of the sinner who was warmly welcomed back by Jesus.

<sup>120</sup> Juel (*Messiah* 68) sees Peter’s denial as an illustration of this principle.

<sup>121</sup> As preferred by Brown, Donfried and Reumann (*Peter* 72), and Herron, *Peter’s Denial* 143.

<sup>122</sup> The emotional impact of 16:7 is continued through into the final verse. Norman R. Petersen, “When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark’s Narrative,” *Int* 34 (1980) 157, 162–63, has argued that, because the reader cannot believe the ending, it “creates a discontinuity in the temporal world which the narrator shared with his reader.” Thus, Mark deliberately opens the eyes of his reader to their own world. Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, “The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8,” *JBL* 100 (1981) 213–33, especially 220, demonstrate that it was the original ending by showing that the use of *gar* as the final word is compatible with Mark’s technique elsewhere. They bring out well the emotional force of the final words.

## JUDAS THE BETRAYER

*It would have been better for that one  
not to have been born. (14:21)*

Mark does not say what happened to Judas. But, when he has Jesus, as his last (indirect) words, issue an invitation to the disciples to return and be reunited with him, surely he intended his readers to realise that Judas would also have been welcome. Whether or not Mark and his readers already believed that Judas had committed suicide (cf. Matt 27:5; Acts 1:18), his omission of any mention of his fate serves to imply that Judas had the same opportunity to be restored as any other disciple. After all, betrayal and denial are equally culpable—both risk the lives of other Christians and the success of the mission.

But it is more likely that Mark and his readers did know that Judas had not rejoined the disciples, and so he is treated differently.<sup>123</sup> Judas does not weep, implying that he did not repent, and there is a stern warning about his fate (14:21). He is the one who fails *because he did not return*. He just ‘disappears’ from the text, like those who had disappeared from Mark’s community. The woe statement over his betrayal—“It would have been better for that one not to have been born” (14:21)—expresses sorrow for those who had gone, and horror toward their likely fate.

Nevertheless, the warning echoes the laments of both Jeremiah and Job (Jer 20:14–18; Job 3:3–19), who wished that they had never been born but who, in the end, were vindicated by God. It leaves open the possibility of reinstatement, as with Peter. Klassen argues that the “woe” is more in the vein of “sympathetic sorrow” rather than condemnation, and does not threaten damnation, but warns; such a warning is “an expression of deep sadness,” and “reveals a misery which love itself cannot prevent.”<sup>124</sup> The sombre statement

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<sup>123</sup> Collins (“Noble Death” 492–97) considers it possible that Mark might have created the story of Judas. See also Kermode, *Secrecy* 84, and Mack, *Myth* 304, who claims that Mark invented the betrayal by Judas to make the Jews a scapegoat. It is more likely that Mark built on already known basic facts (cf. 1 Cor 11:23), than he was disclosing what had been unknown for the last forty years—that one of Jesus’ close disciples had been instrumental in his death.

<sup>124</sup> William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (London: SCM Press, 1996) 78–93. Vernon K. Robbins, “Last Meal: Preparation and Betrayal,” in Kelber (ed.), *Passion* 32, notes that its form is unique in the biblical tradition.

in 14:21, therefore, not only warns readers that someone who fails and does not return (like Judas) suffers a terrible fate, but also offers hope that such sinners will change their mind. The dire warning is not directed at everyone who betrays; after all, any repentant sinner is welcome back (2:5, 15–17; 3:28; 16:7).

A similar warning occurs in 8:38, where, as discussed on Page 240, Jesus addresses those who are “ashamed of me and my words” at their trial. There, a language of honour and shame is used, providing a stern warning, certainly, but it, too, is silent about the sinner seeking to repent. Like 14:21, it tries to deter readers from failing in the future by showing the consequences for those who, for whatever reason, fail and do not return. There is one warning, then, about failing through apostasy (8:38) and another about failing through betrayal (14:21). Although neither refer to repentance, the Gospel makes clear in its final scenes that real failure is to not seek reconciliation.<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, the absence of a warning in Jesus’ predictions of the abandonment and denial of Peter and the others (14:27–31) is striking. Instead, there is a prediction that they will rejoin Jesus, and the quotation from Zech 13:7, with Zech 13:8–9, reassures the reader that God would preserve a faithful remnant after their refining. This lack of warning is perhaps the strongest pointer that the readers knew that the disciples had been re-united with Jesus. It also shows that warnings do not occur in the Gospel unless there is a risk that the sinner will not seek reinstatement.

The above reading explains what has been a stumbling block for so many—the absence of certainty *within the story* that the disciples did return. This uncertainty infuses in the reader an awareness that, as far as the story is concerned, reconciliation would only occur if the disciples respond to Jesus’ invitation. It creates an anxiety in the reader and a conviction, hopefully, which will result in their encouraging sinners to return, and to their own predisposition to return and seek forgiveness if they should also fail.

In the story, the disciples are as culpable as Jesus’ opponents. But there is one big difference in the reader’s mind: the disciples’ came

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<sup>125</sup> The other direct warnings by Mark are towards those who might risk eternal life by encouraging others to fall away (9:42), or by being deceived by earthly wealth and power (8:36). He also warns against falling away because of the desire for wealth (4:19), but it is clear from the story of the rich man that Jesus would welcome anyone who could let go of that inordinate desire and follow him.

back.<sup>126</sup> Thus, Mark's whole presentation of the disciples is the story of sinners who repent. But they must come back to Jesus for the story to end happily.<sup>127</sup> Peter the Apostate is left weeping out in the darkness to create a lack of resolution in the story, a dramatic tension that mirrors the uncertainty whether those who have sinned against the Markan community would be able to return. It would appear that Mark hoped, by building the reader's concern for the potentially lost sinner, to build a welcoming attitude in the house-churches towards those who had left in fear, but who now decided to take the brave step of coming back.<sup>128</sup>

### MARK'S GOOD NEWS

*Change your perception, and believe (1:15)*

What a glutton for punishment is Jesus in this Gospel! As a dramatic contrast to the picture of the unfaithful disciples, Mark presents us with a perfectly faithful and tolerant Jesus.

Indeed, there is only one point when Jesus seems to consider giving up on his companions. In 9:19, he delivers an out-of-character outburst on coming down from the mountain of the transfiguration, a scene that alludes to Sinai/Horeb because of the mention of the two key figures at that mountain, Moses and Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19), as well as the theophany and the shining clothes.<sup>129</sup> A seemingly

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<sup>126</sup> Marshall (*Faith* 224) claims that the difference is that Jesus' opponents refuse "to accept the claims and demands of Jesus," so that it is a difference of "volition rather than cognition," and the disciples' "periodic failures" do not constitute "a deliberate rejection of the truth." Malbon ("Text and Context 92) sees the disciples and the crowd as the same: "Both abandon Jesus . . . both the disciples and the crowd are fallible followers." This could not be so for the reader, who knows what happened subsequently, and Mark could not have intended it.

<sup>127</sup> Stephen H. Smith, "A Divine Tragedy: some Observations on the Dramatic Structure of Mark's Gospel," *NovT* 37 (1995) 223–24, claims that Mark is a tragedy, as "the plain fact is that the epilogue is *not* happy, but mysterious: the overriding mood is one of fear, in the sense of awe." He misses the good news.

<sup>128</sup> Heb 6:4–8 may also reflect later attention to apostates within the Roman church. However, these verses allude to the Sower Parable with mentions of soils, thorns and harvests, and appear to similarly express frustration at the hardness of heart of those who had abandoned Christianity. They do not argue that apostates should be refused readmission.

<sup>129</sup> Exod 34:29–35 has Moses with a shining face, but the LXX uses *opsis*, which can also simply mean "appearance" (cf. Lev 13:3; Joel 2:4). Mark seems to have applied this more general term to Jesus' clothes.

exasperated Jesus cries out, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?” Combined with the surprise of the crowd, the whole scene reminds of Moses’ return to find the people worshiping the golden calf (Exod 32), and of a frustrated Yahweh’s threat to “consume them,” and to begin again with a new people (Exod 32:10). Similarly, Jesus is frustrated in 9:19, and he makes the same decision—to persist with those who follow him.<sup>130</sup> The scene shows Jesus to be faithful, just as the God of Israel had always been with Israel. Like Yahweh, Jesus resumes his patient role, nowhere more evident than in his response to Peter in 10:29–31. There is never again even a hint that he would give up on them. Undeterred by their faithlessness, Jesus is loyal to them to the end, a model of loyalty to the community.<sup>131</sup> Loyalty, of course, means forgiving failures, and Jesus becomes a model for the forgiving community.

This gentleness in Jesus’ dealings with the disciples may reflect Mark’s own experience, just as Paul’s experience of the Risen Jesus shaped his mission and letters. This may have been one motivation for Mark to write this Gospel, hoping to minister healing to others who had been wounded by recent events.

Some further suggestions can be drawn about the person of Mark, and his standing in the community. First, it is doubtful that a text, which appears to criticise Peter, would have been received unless its readers knew that its author had high regard for Peter personally. It may well be that this indicates some sort of historical underpinning to the traditions associating the author of this Gospel with Peter, but this is not to suggest at all that Mark’s stories were Peter’s stories. It is likely, however, that Mark’s readers regarded the Gospel as authorised in some way, and a known association of the author with Peter would have done that. Indeed, perhaps Mark could only creatively shape the story of Peter as much as he did because he could say that he knew Peter.

It is probable that Mark had been involved with the churches of Rome for some time to be able to speak to them as he did, and to

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<sup>130</sup> Jesus’ frustration in 9:19 is directed at the disciples, not at the crowd: there had been no response to his central teaching on discipleship in 8:34–38, and they did not have the strength to cast out a demon, even though they had been given authority over them (3:15; 6:7).

<sup>131</sup> Van Iersel (“Failed Followers” 260) says that the Gospel gives a perspective that “consists above all in Jesus’ unflinching loyalty.”

empathise with his readers. It could well be that he was present in Rome during Nero's attack in 64, and he may even have hidden or perhaps fled Rome to avoid the seeking out of Christians. Perhaps the old idea that the naked young man of 14:51–52 was Mark is true, not historically as was traditionally proposed, but symbolically, depicting his own flight from the City and from martyrdom.<sup>132</sup>

Survivors of experiences of shared suffering in which many others die often feel guilty. Mark was a survivor, while Peter died. Whether or not he hid or fled, it is likely that others in the Christian community did so. This Gospel might also be designed to purge the feeling of guilt of those who ran away rather than remain and become a witness. Rather sadly, the words "at a distance" appear twice (14:54; 15:40), both times referring to disciples looking on events, first at the trial, and then at the execution. Even the words "they fled" in the final verse might remind the reader of their own flight from martyrdom. So close to the words of forgiveness and reconciliation in 16:7, the combined effect would have been powerful. Further, the young man at the tomb (16:5) may symbolise Mark who has been healed and forgiven, and who is now ready to proclaim the forgiveness of the Risen Jesus by urging the community to invite other sinners to return.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> For the discussion on the naked young man, see Harry Fledderman, "The Flight of a Naked Young Man (Mark 14:51–52)," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 412–18; Robin Scroggs and Kent I. Groff, "Baptism in Mark: Dying and Rising with Christ," *JBL* 92 (1973) 531–48; Howard M. Jackson, "Why the Youth Shed His Cloak and Fleed Naked: The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 14:51–52," *JBL* 116 (1997) 273–89; Michael J. Haren, "The Naked Young Man: A Historian's Hypothesis on Mark 14:51–52," *Bib* 79 (1998) 525–31, who claims that he is Lazarus. Kermode (*Secrecy* 62–3), following Austin Farrer, regards the naked young man as performing a symbolic role along with Judas and Peter, so that Judas is Betrayal, Peter is Denial, and the young man is Desertion. There is much to be said for this view, as both Peter and Judas individually personify major issues for the reader, and the young man personifies the indignity, haste and desperation of the fleeing disciples.

<sup>133</sup> Van Iersel (*Reader-Response* 505) considers that the young man in Gethsemane and at the tomb to be "a literary self-portrait in which the narrator portrays himself as one of many who have failed by running away at the moment of crisis." His appearance at the tomb "shows that his failure has been forgiven." However, Van Iersel does not explain what crisis he refers to, whether in Gethsemane with Jesus, or some unnamed crisis in the Markan community. He does not relate it to the persecutions. There is no need to see the two young men as symbolic pointers to the Christian initiate, as do Scroggs and Groff ("Baptism" 540–42), a claim that has been disputed. It cannot be said that the fleeing youth "dies with Christ," as their explanation requires. Collins ("Mysteries" 19) asserts that both young men symbolise the risen Jesus, but the motif would be very difficult, as Jesus would be

Mark's portrayal of the disciples may be one of the strongest pointers to a Roman setting.<sup>134</sup> Tannehill was correct in observing that the picture of the disciples is "presented with considerable care, indicating that we are dealing with a major concern of the author."<sup>135</sup> For Mark to shape so much of his rhetoric around the issue of the forgiveness of betrayers and apostates shows that he was writing to the situation of a specific church, and there is no evidence that such a situation existed anywhere other than in Rome at this early stage.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, only those who knew Peter and were conscious of his martyrdom would have fully appreciated Mark's rhetorical use of that key model of the Roman church.

For this Gospel to be addressing those who would refuse the readmittance of sinners, it is likely that some time had passed since Nero had initiated persecution. However, apostates and betrayers may have been seeking return for some time prior to Mark writing, perhaps beginning as soon as Nero had died in 69. If a few had been accepted back by some of the house churches, the level of tension could have been quite high for some time. Resentment of 'fair-weather' Christians may have been rife. As such relationship issues are not dealt with quickly, this scenario is compatible with the date of 71 proposed in this study. The crisis of Titus' return in that year may have been the final impetus for writing, perhaps providing Mark with the idea of composing his appeals to the community in the form of the life story of the real saviour, Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly, the production of this book, in the new literary genre of Gospel, may have been prompted both by the ongoing internal stresses caused by the failure and return of some, and the mental toll of seven years of

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two people in the Gethsemane scene and would be passing on his own message at the tomb. Rather, the young man at the arrest is clearly a disciple who fails like the others who flee. The further use of a young man at the tomb suggests that Mark deliberately points back to this failure before issuing the invitation to the disciples to return in the following verses.

<sup>134</sup> Both Donahue ("Windows and Mirrors" 24–26) and Van Iersel ("Failed Followers" 262) have concluded that the Mark's portrayal of the disciples points to Rome. However, Donahue ("Windows and Mirrors" 24) has argued that the Markan community, which "bears harsh memories of persecution and betrayal . . . is faced with carving a new sense of identity." Identity was not the issue; this was a community that needed healing.

<sup>135</sup> Tannehill, "Narrative Role" 396.

<sup>136</sup> Rohrbaugh ("Location" 122) correctly observes: "We can only construe Mark's talk about the disciples' failures as 'insider' . . . talk."

external pressures from Roman society, combined with fears of more arrests under the new regime and doubts generated by recent events.

Mark opened his Gospel by promising good news (1:1), but its nature does not become fully apparent until the second last verse (16:7), where it becomes very good news—for all sinners. What also becomes apparent towards the later scenes is that his community faced deeply emotional issues, and the Gospel that he produced is accordingly full of pathos, particularly in its ending. Although earlier chapters of this study showed the deeply emotional time for the Markan community, this chapter shows that there was another emotional situation, perhaps even more difficult to deal with, in the issue of forgiveness *and* reacceptance of those who had caused so much pain in the community. A refusal to forgive can be emotionally and intellectually crippling, and this issue may have clouded the judgement of some members of the community.

Sadly, Mark's passionate appeal that all repentant sinners should be welcomed back seemed to be lost on those Christians who, in succeeding centuries, opposed the return of those who lapsed under persecution.<sup>137</sup> They must have misread this Gospel, as Mark knew back in 71 that such an attitude was incompatible with a community that really believes in the good news of God's unconditional love, illustrated so powerfully through the message from Jesus in 16:7: "Tell his disciples, even Peter."

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<sup>137</sup> Although it was debated up to the time of Augustine whether apostasy was the unforgivable sin, the view that finally prevailed was that, since Peter was forgiven, all sins were forgivable. See the discussion in Lampe, "Peter's Denial" 356–67.



## AFTERWORD

*A classic is a writing that  
is never fully understood. (Friedrich Schlegel)*

Within biblical scholarship in recent decades, the understanding of the ancient world and its literature has developed considerably, as has appreciation of the literary character of the Gospel, while older views of the formation and composition of the Gospels have been heavily revised. This new awareness has enabled the setting of Mark's Gospel to be reconsidered now in an attempt to more closely identify the situation of the Gospel and to explain features that have long been puzzling.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, two steps have been taken. First, based on historical and textual data, the most probable setting of Mark's Gospel has been established. Then, there has been an assessment of the degree to which the rhetoric of the Gospel matches the situation of the Christians in that setting. A fundamental position has been that the setting and rhetoric must be considered together, and that the structure and major features of the Gospel will only be understood by taking on, as far as is possible, the outlook and concerns of both the author and the readers that generated this text. It was the readers' fears, doubts, cries of despair, sorrows, hopes, and even their forgiveness and lack thereof that shaped it, just as much as Mark's intentions.

The likelihood that the Gospel was written in Rome has been increased again and again throughout the course of this investigation, and evaluation of the internal evidence has pointed strongly to

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 20, 196–202, claims that the pursuit of the original Markan community is “not worth the trouble” (202). He bases his thesis primarily on a detailed examination of the attempts by only three scholars—Kelber, Kee and Myers—and points out that, not only did they reach quite different conclusions, but also that their interpretations did not depend upon the Markan community that they envisaged (197). He further claims that it is wrong to limit meaning to the original setting (199). However, the works of these scholars have been very heavily criticised (see Chapters 1 and 2), and Peterson seems to ignore the possibility that the problem is not the goal, but the methods employed by those he selected.

the latter part of 71 as the date of writing. Attention has been paid in particular to certain aspects of Mark's rhetorical techniques, especially the mood of the text, its appeals to the emotions, and the use of allusion. These all indicate that Mark's Gospel was written to address the issues and mood that existed among the Christians of Rome soon after details of the razing of the Jerusalem Temple had been received in Rome in July/August 71, and they had experienced the dispiriting and frightening Triumph of the new, but ageing emperor, along with his heir apparent, the feared Titus.

A number of apparent allusions to contemporary events and issues have been identified. It could be said that these textual features are merely coincidental parallels. However, although there can be no certainty that the author intended any particular allusion, it is the presence throughout the Gospel of so many matches to the political, social and religious situation of Rome in 71 that makes coincidence unlikely. The probability that Mark intentionally used this type of allusion as a principal tool of his rhetoric is increased significantly when it is seen that all of the events alluded to had been experienced by the people of Rome between late 69 and mid 71.

We cannot be sure, of course, that his readers noticed or understood all the allusions in the way that he intended. The issue, however, is not whether the listeners in the house-churches would have picked them up, or even that the designated readers would have recognised and explained them. Rather, what is important for understanding the Gospel's design is whether Mark *hoped* or *expected* others to catch on. Nor is it relevant to this task to consider how Mark's readers did or might have responded to his text. Their response cannot be known. Nevertheless, Mark had very good reason to believe that his readers would make just the comparisons that he intended through his allusions, as all of them were directed at issues that would have been of profound concern to his readers, and should have been at the forefront of their consciousness and of their conversations within the community.

Similarly, to explain the Gospel's content, it is not relevant to consider how readers in other Christian churches, or readers in later eras, received, interpreted and used Mark's Gospel. The focus here has only been on its original design and its hoped-for impact. Certainly, the meaning or meanings that can be derived from this Gospel is not limited to Mark's intentions, and no suggestion is intended here that future applications of his Gospel can or should be encompassed

only within its original milieu. As discussed in Chapter 1, a text is put to many uses, and is applied in many ways and in many new circumstances quite independently of the author's intentions and its original setting, and the derivation of meanings other than that intended can be quite valid for certain purposes. Nevertheless, if it is to be recognised that the inherent design of a text should impose limits on its later uses, then the genesis of the text is of prime interest, as it provides an understanding of such things as its form, structure, and motifs, as well as the interweavings of its plot and the use of particular words, phrases and the depiction of its scenes. Its genetics explains the way that the text works. Most importantly, however, this undertaking reveals the beliefs of the author. Such knowledge, if nothing else, prevents claims that the text was originally intended to say certain things or to put forward certain points of view.

The way in which the other Evangelists reworked Mark's Gospel suggest that Mark's particular rhetorical thrust was either quickly forgotten or was perhaps deliberately set aside by the Christian communities away from Rome who were the next users of the Gospel. One reason for this shift may have been that the rhetorical situation that Mark was addressing did not last long. Within a very few years, the mood and issues, even in Rome, could have changed considerably, as the feared large-scale investigations and arrests of Christians did not materialise, and as the Roman churches learned to cope with the new scheme of things—that Christians would have to carry out their mission at the risk of death under a hostile regime. Mark's Gospel may even have been misunderstood as soon as it was passed on to the other Christian communities. There, the manuscript was likely to have been welcomed simply as the first account of the life of Jesus with the strong authority of the Christian community of Rome behind it, as both Peter and Paul had been there. If so, it quickly became a disembodied text that Matthew, Luke and, probably, John drew on for their own Gospels, with little appreciation of the traumas and issues that it had originally been designed to address.<sup>2</sup> After all, you had to be there.

It has become more and more apparent that Mark exercised considerable compositional skills in producing his Gospel, indicating that

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<sup>2</sup> "Frequently Matthew is a resisting reader of Mark." Fowler, "Reader-Response" 75.

he was not significantly constrained by any prior texts or detailed oral traditions. However, it is certainly not suggested that he composed it out of nothing, as his story had to seem familiar to his readers and match what they already knew about Jesus. Nevertheless, it is possible that Mark shaped his story based only on a broad knowledge of Jesus' life and death, combined with some known stories. Many of the Gospel scenes seem to have been carefully constructed to mirror his readers' Roman situation, and this is especially true in the scenes in Jerusalem, including the final meals and Jesus' arrest, trials and execution. Mark's allusions to contemporary events show that he repeatedly used current debates and issues as well as incidents and scenes familiar to his Roman readers in order to move his audience, as did other rhetoricians of his age. As the saying goes, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.

The weight of evidence has shown that Mark's Gospel is best explained as a document written with a very particular, local situation in mind, rather than as a manuscript primarily intended for Christians everywhere. It was not conceived as *The Gospel for All Christians*. Rather, Mark wrote *The Gospel to the Romans*—a hope-filled proclamation for a community under extreme emotional and psychological pressure.

Although this Gospel is a tribute to the extraordinary faith of Mark, the other courageous Christians of his community also live on through his text. It is to their great credit that they not only accepted this Gospel, but also passed it on to other churches, possibly at some personal risk, for the benefit of others. As a result, every person who has read this Gospel has been able to draw on the strength, no doubt obtained through prayer, which those early Christians surely had. Therefore, *The Gospel to the Romans* could also be called *The Gospel of the Romans*.

Certainly, this Gospel is very challenging. It asks for everything. But it does this because the experience of the early Christians was that, through Jesus, God had been willing to give everything for the sake of others, and he invites everyone to do likewise. The Gospel inspires now as it did then, as it is the story of the self-sacrificing God who invites self-sacrifice, because that is the nature of love. Mark's work is not the harsh and demanding Gospel that some have seen in it. Rather, it is the divine drama, with the hidden Father as the main character behind everything—a Father who is selflessly faithful despite human self-will, who has compassion towards those

whose flesh is weak and who unconditionally offers forgiveness and grace for all who will accept it.

The two primary thrusts of Mark's rhetoric are summed up in the images of Jesus the Martyr and Jesus the Forgiver. The former relates to the readers' relationship to Roman society and their fear of martyrdom, and declares the overriding importance of the Christian mission. The latter addresses relationships within the Christian community and, indeed, the nature of that community. The last two sentences of the Gospel demonstrate these two rhetorical aims. The penultimate verse (16:7) movingly invites even the worst of sinners to a reunion with the Risen Jesus and his community. However, the ultimate verse addresses what was, for Mark, the ultimate issue: it challenges the reader to put aside their fear, risking death if necessary, to tell the world not just of life beyond the grave, but also that forgiveness and inclusion are freely available for all. This challenge appears last because Mark knew that the most important thing was to spread the word, regardless of the risk.

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