



# SECRET OF THE SAVIOR

THE MYTH OF THE MESSIAH IN MARK

SID MARTIN



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*The Myth of the Messiah in Mark*

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**Sid Martin**

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*To my sons, Craig and Ryan*



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## *Preface*

This book was a long time coming. It began as a sort of theological serendipity. I was looking through books in the religion section at the University of Tulsa library in 1974 when I came across *The Birth of the Gospel* by William Benjamin Smith. His thesis was that Jesus stood for Israel as the collective son of God. The Gospel was an allegory of Israel. This was new to me. I was familiar with the theory of pagan origins of Gospel mythology, but the idea that Christianity was Jewish after all was eye-opening. I was aware that the Gospel of Mark was considered the earliest written. Mark begins with the baptism, which typologically is often compared with the exodus. I began to wonder if the Gospel of Mark was an allegory of the history of Israel from the exodus onward. I was also aware that Mark was probably written at the time of the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in 70 A.D. This, it occurred to me, could be what is meant by the passion. At the same time, I was reading *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* by Geza Vermes and thought I saw some similarities in Mark's Gospel, especially in chapters 4 and 10. Thus, my theory was born: the Gospel of Mark is an allegory of the history of Israel from the exodus to the war with Rome and was written from the Essenic point of view. It was not until 1977, coincidentally on April 25, St. Mark's day, that I began systematically to interpret Mark in terms of this hypothesis. By the fall, I was ready to offer a course through the Praxis Project, an adult education program in Tulsa. A gentleman in the class invited me to speak at All Souls Unitarian Church. I also taught a course on the subject at the Southwest Unitarian Universalist Summer Institute.

I continued to research the New Testament for the next 30 years. I never felt ready to write a book on it, however. Finally, I enrolled in Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, an accredited seminary affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I earned a certificate in graduate theological studies and then went on to earn a Master of Theological Studies degree in Biblical studies. My master's thesis was on the Gospel of Mark, and I graduated with high honors. A practicing attorney who specializes in legal research and writing, I finally felt ready to brief the Christ case. This book is the result.



## *Acknowledgments*

Particular thanks go to my editor, Susan Payne, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister. We graduated together from Phillips Theological Seminary and gave the two Senior Reflections. Susan has a background in journalism, and she gave expert advice on the manuscript. Thanks also to librarians Sandy Shapoval and Clair Powers and the library staff at Phillips, who provided invaluable assistance in my research. Sincere appreciation goes to my New Testament professors, Dennis Smith and Brandon Scott, charter members of the Jesus Seminar. Prof. Smith taught me Greek, supervised my translation of Mark, and taught me a course on the Gospel of Mark. He also helped me formulate my master's thesis and gave me a Greek synopsis of the Gospels as his Professor's Book Award. Prof. Scott taught me Introduction to the New Testament and a course on the parables. He was my thesis advisor and offered firm but constructive criticism. A note of appreciation is also due to Ron Robinson, Unitarian minister and Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship, who taught a course in Unitarian Universalist History and Polity and was kind enough to give me his Professor's Book Award, for, as he put it, a "creative theological mind."

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Quotations from the Dead Sea Scrolls are taken from Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Used with permission of Koninklijke BRILL NV. Permission for use in any electronic format is not given.



## *Introduction*

# Myth of the Messiah: An Epic of Salvation

*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel,  
the Savior.*

*Isaiah 45:15*

The thesis of this book is simple. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is the personification of divine salvation, which is what the name “Jesus” means, “God saves.” Jesus stands for whomever or whatever Mark sees as the instrument or embodiment of salvation at any given point in time. Jesus represents a series of savior figures and salvation events. Jesus is a process, not a person, the process of God saving. Jesus is a symbol of salvation. God is the savior. Jesus is the savior, not incarnate, but personified. That is the secret of the savior.

The myth of the Messiah in Mark is the story of Jesus which we read in the Gospel. Mark has reworked events in the history of Israel, which to his mind represent the process of God saving, to serve as episodes in his messiah myth. By casting an historical figure in the role of Jesus, Mark is saying that God was saving Israel through that figure's actions. The events which Mark incorporates in his myth are arranged in two parallel chronological orders: the narrative order found in the life of Jesus and the underlying order of God's saving acts in the course of Israel's history. The story of Jesus unfolds over approximately one year early in the first century A.D. The hidden history buried beneath the surface story in this, the earliest Gospel, however, covers events from centuries before the setting of the Gospel until decades afterwards. Our job is to unearth the hidden history and bring it to light.

## A WORKING HYPOTHESIS

*It is the first duty of a hypothesis to be intelligible.*

*Thomas Henry Huxley*

The working hypothesis behind this book is this: The Gospel of Mark is an allegory of the history of Israel told from the Essenic point of view, with salvation as its theme, written in response to the fall of Jerusalem and intended to encourage its readers to keep the faith in spite of the destruction. I would argue that this is a plausible hypothesis. To begin with, allegory is a common feature of religious literature, particularly in the ancient world. An allegory is a story which "says something else," which is what the word *allegoria* means in Greek. The Essenes interpreted scripture allegorically. So did Philo. The Greeks and Romans interpreted their mythology allegorically. Indeed, this might be called the age of allegory. Hence, it is not implausible to approach the Gospel of Mark as an allegory. It is important, however, to distinguish between two types of allegory—philosophical and historical. A philosophical allegory has a moral or metaphysical meaning. Elements of the allegory stand for abstract ideas. In an historical allegory, by contrast, people, places, and events refer to other people, other places, and other events. This technique, which may be referred to as dramatic adaptation or transposition, was used, for example, to create such works as *Robinson Crusoe*, based on the life of Alexander Selkirk, *West Side Story*, based on *Romeo and Juliet*, *Ran* based on *King Lear*, and so forth. The basic story may or may not be true, in whole or in part. In Mark, furthermore, Jesus is a serial composite character who stands for one savior figure after another, and as with any composite character, may be factual as to the components and fictional as to the composition. Jesus stands for the idea of salvation, which again is what the name means,<sup>1</sup> but salvation concretely embodied in a series of historical figures. Mark is a philosophical allegory only to the extent that Mark has a philosophy, or better, a theology of history. Indeed, Mark may be described as a midrash on *Heilsgeschichte*, a creative commentary on the history of salvation.

By Essenic point of view I mean two things. First, the Gospel reflects the anti-establishment, counter-cultural perspective of this dissident sect. Jesus, who may best be thought of as "the true cause of Israel's salvation," is opposed by the Pharisees and Sadducees, rival sects of the Essenes. He is put on trial before the chief priests, and scribes, and elders, the leaders of Jewish society. Moreover, the Essenes viewed themselves as the only true Israel. For that reason, the history of Israel is the history of the Essenes during the time that they existed. We knew of the Essenes from ancient authors, but prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we knew nothing of their history. The Scrolls have given us insight into events in the life of this community, which are reflected in Mark's Gospel. Because the Essenes are the branch of Judaism with the greatest affinities to Christianity, it is plausible to view the Gospel in Essenic terms. We cannot help but remember Renan's famous dictum, that "Christianity is an Essenism

which has had wide success."<sup>2</sup> Significantly, this is found in a chapter entitled "Foretaste of Christianity."

Many attempts have been made to link the Dead Sea Scrolls with Christianity. In the early days of Scrolls research, the Catholic-dominated team of scholars in charge of the Scrolls resisted any challenge to the "uniqueness" of Jesus, while mavericks promoted the view that the Essenes were precursors of Christianity. Edmund Wilson believed that Qumran "is perhaps, more than Bethlehem or Nazareth, the cradle of Christianity."<sup>3</sup> André Dupont-Sommer thought that the Teacher of Righteousness was in many ways "the exact prototype of Jesus."<sup>4</sup> John Allegro claimed that the Teacher of Righteousness was crucified and his followers "took down the broken body of their Master to stand guard over it until Judgment Day."<sup>5</sup> The truth is a good deal less sensational, and more intriguing. Some scholars have rejected a pre-Christian dating for the Scrolls and see the cast of characters in the Scrolls as coded references to characters in the New Testament. Jacob Teicher saw Jesus as the Teacher of Righteousness, a role Robert Eisenman ascribes to his brother James. Both agree that Paul is the Man of the Lie. Barbara Thiering sees Jesus as the Wicked Priest and John the Baptist as the Teacher.<sup>6</sup> In short, they attempt to fit the Dead Sea Scrolls to the New Testament. This book, by contrast, takes an unconventional view of the New Testament and a conventional view of the Dead Sea Scrolls. While the Teacher of Righteousness may be identified with Jesus, it is only within a limited historical context, as we shall see.

Further, the Gospel purports to be about history. It describes events in a certain time and place involving particular people, several of whom are known in the history of the period. The Gospel presents itself as the *culmination* of the history of salvation in Israel. Hence, an allegory of the history of Israel which *incorporates* the history of salvation seems quite plausible. Most scholars, furthermore, believe that Mark wrote his Gospel around the year 70 A.D., when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, because the so-called "Little Apocalypse" in chapter 13 of Mark seems to describe the war with Rome.

The destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly the Temple, the House of the Lord, was extremely traumatic for the Jews and was not easy to explain. It might have appeared to Israel that the pagan gods were more powerful than Yahweh. If, however, Yahweh was the one God and the Jews were God's people, the logical conclusion for the Jews was that God was in charge and that it was God's will that Jerusalem fall. This is a constant theme in Jewish apologetic literature, both of the fall of the first Temple to the Babylonians and the fall of the second Temple to the Romans. Two books were written late in the first century which attempt to explain the destruction as God's will: Second Baruch and Fourth Ezra (or Second Esdras). Both, like Mark, are historical allegories, but unlike Mark, they explain the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in terms of the fall to Babylon. Mark is more creative, using the martyrdom of the messiah to form his allegory. All three books, however, are essentially of the same general type.

This work outlines parallels between incidents in the Gospel and events in the history of Israel. The importance of parallels may be judged on four criteria.

First, is the parallel plausible? That is, does it make sense to think of one thing in terms of another? This is not an ironclad rule, of course. Mark may employ implausible parallels, either because he is being deliberately cryptic or because he is not very adept at allegory. However, to make a convincing case, the parallels need to be fairly plausible. Second, are the parallels consistent? Does one thing always stand for another? If there is inconsistency, there should also be some consistency in the inconsistency. There should always be some definable meaning to it. Third is, are the parallels coherent, and do they work together logically? An allegory consists of many different metaphors. If they do not work together, we have what is called a "mixed metaphor." Fourth, are the parallels extensive, pervading the narrative systematically, or are they merely sporadic and used to color the narrative rather than define it? In Mark, some parallels are primary. They are what Mark is referring to, what the story is about. Other parallels are secondary. They serve to enrich the narrative rather than define it. For example, Mark frequently borrows from Elijah and Elisha as coloring, but he never features them as the main meaning of the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

## STUDYING THE BIBLE

*The Bible is literature, not dogma.*

*George Santayana*

There are basically three ways to study the Bible: as theology, as history, and as literature. To study the Bible as theology is to search for the proof texts of doctrine to find out what to believe and how to live our lives. This is the way the Bible was studied for most of the Christian era. To study it in any other way was often thought to be heresy. In the eighteenth century, however, the Age of Enlightenment, people began to examine whether the Bible could be understood as history, that is, as a record of what really happened. Granted, much of historical criticism, as it is called, has been influenced by theology, by what a given scholar wanted to get out, or not get out, of the Bible. "Criticism" as it is used in Biblical studies, does not mean being critical of, that is, hostile toward the Bible, although it may appear that way to those who take the Bible literally. Criticism means studying the Bible critically, that is, scientifically, as history or literature, and not as theology. Today few scholars wish to be known as "pre-critical," although some are as conservative in their criticism as possible. Historical study of one sort or another dominated much of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The third approach, which became prominent in the latter part of the twentieth century, began to examine the Bible as simply a story to be read and appreciated for its own sake. This is sometimes known as literary criticism. It may also be called narrative criticism or analysis.

This book does not attempt theological study, at least not in the sense of developing doctrine, although the Conclusion examines some of the theological implications. Instead, the Gospel of Mark is primarily analyzed as literature,



comprising the story of Jesus. We will analyze the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. However, an attempt is made to examine how this story relates to history, to what really happened. What is unique to this approach is the examination of how the Gospel is related to history in a non-literal way. Mark may not be *literally* historically accurate, but it is *figuratively* historically accurate, making it ultimately a myth *about* history.

One should not assume that what is read in the Gospel is only true if it is *literally* true. There are many ways the Bible may be true. "The truths of religion are more like the truths of poetry than the truths of the empirical sciences."<sup>8</sup> As Carlton Pearson put it, the Bible is not the word of God, but "the word of man about God."<sup>9</sup> The subtitle to Marcus Borg's book on *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* is, significantly, *Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally*.<sup>10</sup> In other words, no book is true because it is holy, but it is holy only insofar as it is true. The challenge will be to discover what is true in the Gospel of Mark—that which makes it holy.

## FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

*Of making outlines of the Gospel of Mark there is no end.*  
Joana Dewey<sup>11</sup>

This hidden history is the foundation on which the edifice of Mark's Gospel is built. The outline of the substructure determines the form of the superstructure. It provides us with a framework of analysis. Bultmann's verdict that "Mark is not sufficiently master of his material to be able to venture on a systematic construction himself,"<sup>12</sup> is untenable when viewed through this literary historical lens. Mark was very much the master of his material. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he did it very well.

Mark's narrative is literally the story of the rise and fall of Jesus Christ. Jesus rises from obscurity as one of many people baptized by John, calls his followers, and at the height of his career miraculously feeds thousands of people. Then Peter confesses that he is the Christ and, contrary to all expectation, it is all downhill from there. Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, there to be indicted by its leaders, rather than celebrated by them. He dies an ignominious death, deserted by his followers. What does all this mean? To Mark it means that Israel, the chosen people, have paradoxically been defeated by Rome, their Temple destroyed. But in the end, Mark assures us, Israel will rise again, much like the resurrected Jesus of his Gospel.

The purpose of the plot is to resolve the paradox of the martyred messiah.<sup>13</sup> The structure of the narrative reflects the paradox. Part One, the ascending sequence, depicts the rise of the messiah. Part Two, the descending sequence, the fall of the martyr. For Mark, this represents the rise of messianic ideals, culminating in the end of the Essenic community, followed by the fall of Israel, ending in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> The Gospel is further divided into three

periods. The first, or John period, is framed by the baptism by John and by his death. This represents the time period before the setting of the Gospel. This past time covers the pre-War period, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt. During the middle, or independence period, Jesus is no longer in the shadow of John and reaches the height of his popularity. The climax between the Rise and the Fall occurs dead center, with Peter's confession. This middle period represents the pre-siege war period. The third or Jerusalem period represents the siege of Jerusalem.

Each of the three periods is further divided into two series. The first series, during which Jesus calls his disciples, ends with the founding of the Essenic community at Qumran. In the second series, the word of Essenic Judaism is spread. In the first series of the middle period, the Essenes assemble at Qumran during the first two years of the war. The following series depicts the journey to Jerusalem, representing events leading up to the fall of the City. The first series of the third, the Jerusalem period, represents events during the siege before the fall of the Temple. The final series represents events following the fall, including the aftermath of the siege. There are six series in all.<sup>15</sup> The three periods are further divided into three cycles, which overlap the series. Each cycle is divided into an opening phase, which lays down preconditions, and a closing phase, which draws the consequences. There are a total of eighteen phases in all. This may be thought of as a revised chapter structure. Each phase will be discussed in a chapter of this book.

The conservative commentator, Robert Gundry, has stated that Mark's Gospel "contains no ciphers, no hidden meanings, no sleight of hand" and that "Mark's meaning lies on the surface."<sup>16</sup> This analysis puts Gundry's notion to rest, uncovering the hidden history buried for two thousand years beneath the Gospel According to Mark.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1. Arnold M. Rothstein, *The Jesus Idea* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993), 13.

2. Ernest Renan, *History of the People of Israel: Period of Jewish Independence and Judea under Roman Rule* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895), 61.

3. Edmund Wilson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls 1947-1969*, rev. ed. (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 77.

4. André Dupont-Sommer, lecture reported in *Le Monde* (May 28-29, 1950): 5.

5. John M. Allegro, talk broadcast on the BBC Northern Home Service (January 23, 1956).

6. Jacob L. Teicher, "The Damascus Fragments and the Origin of the Jewish Christian Sect," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 2 (1951): 115-143; Robert H. Eisenman, *James, the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1997); Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life Story* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1992).

7. Adam Winn, *Mark and the Elijah-Elisha Narrative: Considering the Practice of Greco-Roman Imitation in the Search for Markan Source Material* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); Thomas L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: the Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an*

*Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis – Kings and Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

8. Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 2

9. Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God* (Azusa Press International, 2006), 7.

10. Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

11. Joanna Dewey, "Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (April 1991): 221.

12. Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1963), 350.

13. Sidney A. Martin II, "Martyr and Messiah: Narrative Structure in Mark" (M.T.S. thesis, Phillips Theological Seminary, 2011).

14. The division of Mark into two parts, climaxing in Peter's confession, is widely acknowledged, though usually without a recognition of the rising and falling pattern.

15. Etienne Trocmé notes that a number of commentators have divided Mark into six portions, generally corresponding to the divisions here. *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 79–80.

16. Robert H. Gundry, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 1.

17. For a broader discussion of myth and history in the Gospel, see the Appendix.



# **The Rise and Fall of Jesus Christ**

## *Part One*

### **The Rise**

# Chapter One

## My Son, the Beloved

*Beginnings are for the most part hidden.*

*Ernst Käsemann*

In the first two chapters of this book, we will examine Mark's allegorical account of the golden age of Israel. This is the only portion of Mark's Gospel which is based on the Biblical Era. The first phase of the Bible Cycle, which is the subject of this Chapter, depicts the election of Israel, the Exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and the Age of Judges. Here the inauguration of the ministry of Jesus represents the early ages of Israel's existence as the Chosen People in the Promised Land. It will form the background for what is to come.

### THE GOOD NEWS      MARK 1:1

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark begins at the beginning. The first verse is probably the Gospel's title,<sup>1</sup> whether to the whole book or just the opening. The Greek lacks the definite article "the." It could be translated, "Beginning of the good news," which sounds more like a title.<sup>2</sup> Mark's book is about a new beginning for the Jewish people, who have just suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of imperial Rome. The Greek word for "good news" is *euangelion*. What is probably meant here is "good news from the battlefield," that is, news of victory.<sup>3</sup> This seems paradoxical considering the destruction of Jerusalem which had taken place shortly before Mark wrote about his "good news." In this, Mark is following the post-exilic prophet known to scholars as Second Isaiah.<sup>4</sup>

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord GOD comes with

might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him (Isa 40:9-10).

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more. Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter Zion! (Isa 52:1-2)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isa 52:7)

Here, as with the earlier conquest by Babylon, the good news is that the rule of the God of Israel will be restored. This reflects contemporary usage. A monument in Asia Minor hails the birth of Caesar Augustus, the "savior," as "the beginning of the good news concerning him."<sup>5</sup> What Mark is saying is that God has always saved his people Israel, and will do so again, no matter how bleak the present circumstances appear to be. Mark has created a myth which reassures his readers that the history of salvation proves that Israel will be victorious in the end.

That is the "good news" about "Jesus." The very name "Jesus" means the "salvation of the Lord."<sup>6</sup> This is the good news about God saving Israel. The Greek word translated "Jesus" in the New Testament, *Jēsous*, in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, and also sometimes in the New Testament, refers to Joshua, the son of Nun.<sup>7</sup> The original Hebrew word *Yehoshua* was later shortened to *Yeshua*, which in itself may simply mean "he saves."<sup>8</sup> Naming the Messiah "Jesus/Joshua" evokes powerful images of Israelite victory over the nations.

Joshua son of Nun was mighty in war, and was the successor of Moses in the prophetic office. He became, as his name implies, a great savior of God's elect, to take vengeance on the enemies that rose against them, so that he might give Israel its inheritance.<sup>9</sup>

In the years leading up to the war with Rome, false messiahs reenacted events from Joshua's campaign. One led the people out to the Jordan and promised to divide it, as had Joshua.<sup>10</sup> Another promised to command the walls of Jerusalem to fall down, as Joshua had done at Jericho.<sup>11</sup> Mark uses this Jesus/Joshua theme to fashion his story, the leitmotif of his messiah myth. Now, let us examine how Mark unfolds the good news of Israel's ultimate victory.

## IN THE WILDERNESS      MARK 1:2-8

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the for-

giveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John the Baptist is a key figure in Mark's Gospel. He represents the hope of renewal. He was a leader in what may broadly be called the "salvation movement," a prophetic figure who is depicted as "preparing the way." His call to repentance attracted people from all over. It is believed by many scholars that John was affiliated in some way with the Essenes.<sup>12</sup> Their settlement at Qumran was not far from where John baptized. He may have been raised as a child by the Essenes, who took children and taught them Essenic ideals.<sup>13</sup> This may be why Luke says "he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel." (Luke 1:80) He may have struck out on his own when he reached maturity and popularized the mission of the Essenes. They, too, were preparing the way in the wilderness. Members of the Community "shall go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him; as is written, *Prepare in the wilderness the way of ...., make straight in the desert a path for our God* (Isa. XL, 3)."<sup>14</sup> The Community interpreted Isaiah "as a prophecy that was being fulfilled in their own time and in the life of their community."<sup>15</sup>

The quote, or better quasi-quote, is actually a mixture of scriptural phrases. The first line recalls God's promise that the Israelites will conquer the land of Canaan.

I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression for my name is in him. But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes (Exod 23:20–22).

The Bible goes on to say that "When my angel goes in front of you," God will destroy the pagans and their gods (Exod 23:23–33). Thus Mark evokes the imagery of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan as the background of John's ministry. Moreover, the quasi-quote is not just from Isaiah, but also from Malachi. For this reason, some manuscripts and translations say "prophets," instead of "the prophet Isaiah." "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me" (Mal 3:1), refers to the messenger, understood to be Elijah, who will prepare Israel for the coming judgment—in effect a latter-day Moses.<sup>16</sup> Mark sees John as an Elijah figure preparing the people for the judgment on Jerusalem which came at the hands of the Romans. Elijah's disciple, Elisha, worked even greater wonders. "Despite all this the people did not repent, nor did they forsake their sins, until they were carried off as plunder from their land, and were scat-



tered over all the earth (Sirach 48:15)." In the same way, Israel failed to repent in spite of John's preaching, and thousands were carried off by Rome.

John was preparing all Israel, not just individual sinners. Mark says that John preached a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sin." Josephus describes John in similar terms.

[He was] a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable in him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.<sup>17</sup>

Although it may seem that there is a difference because Mark might be understood to say that the baptism itself is for "the remission of sins," the sense seems to be that it is repentance that brings forgiveness, while the washing with water is symbolic of cleansing.

Essentially the same concept of a baptism of repentance is found in the Scrolls.

He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness uniting him to His truth, and his iniquity shall be expiated by the spirit of uprightness and humility. And when his flesh is sprinkled with purifying water and sanctified by cleaning water, it shall be made clean by the humble submission of his soul to the precepts of God.<sup>18</sup>

The last line may also be rendered, "being made holy with the waters of repentance."<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the man who refuses to repent shall not be baptized.

He shall not be reckoned among the perfect; he shall neither be purified by atonement, nor cleansed by purifying waters, not sanctified by seas and rivers, nor washed clean with any ablution. Unclean, unclean shall he be.<sup>20</sup>

Like those who came to John, the Essenes confessed their sins before baptism.<sup>21</sup> According to Josephus, the Essenes took a ritual bath twice a day, before each communal meal.<sup>22</sup> An unrepentant sinner was excluded.

They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the men of holiness, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness: for all who transgress His word are unclean.<sup>23</sup>

One difference, of course, is that John's baptism is not said to have been repeated, although, there is nothing to exclude the possibility that repeat offenders returned to John when they were again ready to repent and reform. The first time that a new Essene was permitted to enter the waters, furthermore, may have served as a sort of initiatory baptism. Josephus describes how a candidate for admission to the organization is first tested for a year and then he is "made par-

taker of the waters of purification," although he must wait two more years before he is allowed to live and eat with them.<sup>24</sup> John's baptism, like his whole ministry, may be seen as a popularization of Essenic faith and practice.<sup>25</sup> This may have been its appeal to Mark.

## MOSES BAPTIZES ISRAEL      MARK 1:9-13

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Mark begins this section with the words, "In those days." This is the same phrase used in the Greek Old Testament, or Septuagint, to introduce the ministry of Moses.<sup>26</sup> This is clearer in the King James Version which has "It came to pass in those days," in both Mark and Exodus. John, who has represented Moses in his baptizing of the Jewish people, now becomes Moses himself. Mark takes us back to the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus, who is acknowledged to be God's beloved son, stands for Israel as the collective son of God. The Holy Spirit is bestowed on Israel in the Law, which is divinely revealed through the inspiration of the Spirit. This is a beautiful picture, in effect the Jewish trinity: God the Father, Israel the Son, and the Holy Spirit of divine revelation. That is the essence of the Jewish religion, the covenant relationship in a poetic image. The baptism of Jesus represents the election of Israel against the background of the Exodus, where Israel is "baptized" in the Red, or Reed, Sea. "Jesus' baptism in the Jordan stands as a counterpart of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea at the onset of the Exodus."<sup>27</sup>

The same view is found in Paul.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all are baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all drank the same spiritual drink (1 Cor 10:1-4).

The Song of Moses echoes the same theme:

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone (Exod 15:1-2, 4-5).

It is no good to argue that it was Pharaoh who was baptized, not Israel, which walked on dry ground (Exod 14:26-29). That would be hypercritical. The poetic imagery lent itself to allegory.

Crossan explains it this way:

John's program presumed the validity of that Deuteronomic theology in which oppression by Roman power was a punishment for Israel's communal sinfulness which alone impeded the promised advent of God's transformative power. What was needed, therefore, was a great sacrament of repentance, a popular repetition of ancient Israel's coming out of the desert, crossing the Jordan, and entering the Promised Land.<sup>28</sup>

The wilderness generation became the prototype, or foreshadowing, of the messianic community.<sup>29</sup> "The baptism of John is an initiatory rite for the gathering Messianic community."<sup>30</sup> The Israelites were believed to have undergone a ritual bath which served as model for Jewish proselyte baptism.<sup>31</sup> "[J]ust as Judaism required baptism (along with temple sacrifice and circumcision) of new converts, so John calls Jews to make the same new beginning they require of Gentiles."<sup>32</sup> This, along with ritual immersions at Qumran, may have been the inspiration for John's baptism in the wilderness.<sup>33</sup> The symbolism of the Covenant people crossing over the divided Red Sea may also have applied to Qumran.<sup>34</sup> If Mark saw John as a latter-day Moses, it would be natural for him to utilize John to represent Moses in his messiah myth, a flashback in which John dissolves into Moses.<sup>35</sup>

Since John also called people to go out into the wilderness, where the original covenant was made, and then to reenter the "promised land," baptism as entry into the eschatological people of God awaiting the coming deliverance would fit Mark's understanding of his baptism, however John himself may have understood it.

....

As Israel had once come out of the wilderness, passed through the waters of the Jordan, and settled in Judea and Jerusalem, now the whole people are pictured as returning to the wilderness, passing through the waters of the Jordan, confessing their former sinfulness, and reemerging as the nucleus of the renewed people of God.<sup>36</sup>

Crossan, who recognizes John as an apocalyptic prophet in the years leading up to the Jewish War, explains: "John went, in other words, out into the Trans-Jordanian Desert and submitted himself to the Jewish God and Jewish history in a ritual reenactment of the Moses and Joshua conquest of the Promised Land."<sup>37</sup>

The parallels between Israel as the Son of God at the Exodus and the baptism of Jesus are well known. They are usually interpreted as typology, the theory that Old Testament precedents, or "types," foreshadow or prefigure New Testament corollaries, or "anti-types."<sup>38</sup> It is based on the "conviction that there is an overall consistency of divine activity in salvation history whereby God's acts

in the Old Testament set in motion a rhythmic pattern that is brought to a climax in the New Testament." The parallels are not simply in words but in the parallel situations of Israel and Jesus.<sup>39</sup> The voice from heaven is speaking to Israel. "From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you" (Deut 4:36).

The connection of Jesus with Israel is evident. Just as Israel was summoned by the voice of God to be His people, so Jesus was called by the voice from heaven to undertake His mission as the ideal "Israel" of God.<sup>40</sup>

The thesis of this book is that this is not a prediction of what will happen to Jesus, but that Jesus at the baptism personifies Israel as the focus of Divine Salvation, that the story of Jesus is a myth of history. Nevertheless, typology has provided important insights into the parallels between the myth and history.<sup>41</sup>

## Israel as the Son of God

Israel as the Son of God is a well-known title, which "may be said to express best the aspect of special favor in Israel's elective, covenantal relationship to Yahweh. It represented the status of Israel as the Chosen People."<sup>42</sup>

The theme "son of God" was deeply rooted in the traditional religious ideology of Israel. It was a favourite variant of the election and covenant themes and indeed in the late Jewish period these three were virtually inseparable; for many centuries Israel had been accustomed to thinking of itself as a chosen people, and as God's covenant people and as God's son.<sup>43</sup>

This equation is expressly stated in the Old Testament: "You are children of the LORD your God" (Deut 14:1). "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10), and "He is our Father and he is God forever" (Tobit 13:4). God as Father is the savior of Israel, the Son: "You, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name" (Isa 63:16), and "For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their savior in all their distress" (Isa 63:8). Isaac, the father of Jacob, surnamed Israel, bestows his blessing in these terms: "Blessed be my son Jacob and all the sons of God Most High, unto all the ages. ... May he strengthen thee and bless thee and mayest thou inherit the whole earth" (Jub 22:11), and "My Father, you are the friend of my youth" (Jer 3:4). With this relationship comes the promise of redemption.

I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made (Isa 43:6-7).

"Sonship aims, therefore, at the general recognition of the eternal presence of God in the midst of his people."<sup>44</sup>

Yahweh was father to Israel, his "first-born," because of the gracious and faithful nature of Yahweh. Israel could think of their relation to Yahweh as a sonship not only because of the ancestral tribal belief in the father-god, and all that it implied for the life of the group. They were Yahweh's son, the object of his special favor; by virtue of the acts of Yahweh the foundations of their history as a people—election and covenant—were laid. These were the grounds of their favored status with Yahweh.<sup>45</sup>

Israel as the Son of God is particularly prominent in connection with the Exodus from Egypt, which represents the original act of divine salvation. "Israel is God's son because they are the people he was chosen, and more than this he not only chose but actually created them for himself. The nation is his son because of the birth of the people at the Exodus and the passage of the Red Sea when God was with them."<sup>46</sup> God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, 'Let my son go that he may worship me'" (Exod 4:22). "At the portal of Hebrew History (Ex. 4<sup>22</sup>) stands this lofty pillar of a people's faith and hope."<sup>47</sup> "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11:1). When the firstborn of the Egyptians were destroyed, "they acknowledged your people to be God's child" (Wis 18:13). "Those who had kept your children imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world" (Wis 18:4). Joshua says to them, "God, who is the Father and Lord of the Hebrew nation, has now given us this land for a possession."<sup>48</sup> "In Israelite literature, both early and late, the Exodus was always the great pledge of Yahweh's care for His people. He who had brought them out of Egypt with a strong hand and an extended arm could surely save them from any harm that might threaten them."<sup>49</sup> That is the image conveyed by Mark's depiction of the baptism of Jesus.

## The Beloved Son

Not only is Israel the Son of God; it is "My Son, the Beloved." The original sense of *agapētos*, "beloved," applied to an only child.<sup>50</sup> The voice from heaven declares, "with you I am well pleased." This complements the concept of Israel as the uniquely beloved son of God. The Greek word for "to be pleased" is *eudokeō*, which can also mean "choose." The phrase would be better translated, "I have chosen you."<sup>51</sup> "What is meant is God's decree of election."<sup>52</sup> "In effect, the heavenly voice tells Jesus that he is the recipient of God's 'elective good pleasure.'<sup>53</sup> Of all the terms for election, this word "brings out most strongly the emotional side of the love of Him who elects."<sup>54</sup> The terms "beloved" and "elect" are closely related.<sup>55</sup> Hence, the sense is that Israel is the beloved, the chosen son of God. "You are children of the LORD your God....For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; it is you the LORD has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deut 14:1). The Mishna cites this passage from Deuteronomy to prove that "Beloved are Israel in that they were called children of God."<sup>56</sup>

It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut 7:7–8).

“This love of Yahweh for Israel is absolutely free. Not because of their greatness nor because of their justice does He love Israel, but because He has chosen Israel (Deut 7:7–8).”<sup>57</sup> The newly baptized convert to Judaism was told that “the world was created solely for Israel’s sake, and none are called the children of God, save Israel. None are beloved of God, save Israel.” Proselytes are as beloved as Israel.<sup>58</sup>

## The Holy Spirit

Most Christians are familiar with the following passage from chapter 42 of Isaiah, known to scholars as Second Isaiah because this portion of the book was added later. “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him” (Isa 42:1). This is usually understood to be a prophecy of Jesus. What is not generally realized is that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), this passage refers instead to Israel. “Jakob is my servant; I will lay hold of him; Israel is my chosen; my soul has accepted him; I have put my spirit upon him.”<sup>59</sup> The Greek word translated “servant” is *pais*, which really means “child,” although it could be applied to a servant.<sup>60</sup> Here we have the essence of the baptism scene: Israel, the chosen child, accepted by God, who is well pleased with him, and who puts the Holy Spirit on him.

Yahweh does not find Israel and choose it as son, but gives it being and sonship at once. The creation of Israel is an act of His love, and the covenant is a union of love. His treatment of Israel is that of a father towards his son: caring for its weakness, rearing and nourishing it, instructing and training it, rewarding and chastising it, that it may grow to the likeness of its Father.<sup>61</sup>

The Essenes recognized that what they were doing in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord was based on inspiration by the Holy Spirit. “This (path) is the study of the Law which He commanded by the hand of Moses, that they may do according to all that has been revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit.”<sup>62</sup> “He made known His Holy Spirit to them by the hand of His anointed one, and He proclaimed the truth (to them).”<sup>63</sup>

The bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Israel is expressly stated in the Dead Sea Scrolls. “For you have poured your holy spirit upon us, to fill us with your blessings.”<sup>64</sup> “These things we know because you have favoured us with a [holy] spirit.”<sup>65</sup> This theme is also found in the Book of Jubilees, copies of which were found among the Scrolls. God promises to Moses the restoration of Israel.

And I will create in them a holy spirit, and I will cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from me from that day unto eternity. And their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments, ... and I will be their Father and they shall be my children. And they shall all be called children of the living God, and every angel and every spirit shall know, yea, they shall know that these are my children, and that I am their Father in uprightness and righteousness, and that I love them (Jub 1:23-25).

The same image is found in Ezekiel.

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezek 36:25-28).

Inspiration by the Holy Spirit is promised by the prophets.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions (Joel 2:28).

Desolation will prevail "until a spirit from on high is poured out on, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest" (Isa 32:15). "I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (Isa 44:3). "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD" (Ezek 37:14). "I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD" (Ezek 39:29).

Here in the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as the Bible and related literature, we have the concept of Israel as "my Son, the Beloved" upon whom God bestows the Holy Spirit—precisely the theme of the baptism in Mark. The hope, as in Mark, is that Israel will again be redeemed and guided by the Spirit. His image of the baptism is based in part on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, who very likely represented Israel, or at least the righteous remnant.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations (Isa 42:1).

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed....(Isa 61:1).

The servant<sup>66</sup> will "provide for those who mourn in Zion." They will "build up the ancient ruins" and "raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities...." (Isa 61:3-4). The mythical messiah whom Mark has created,

then, represents the hope of the restoration of Israel following its destruction by Rome. The foundation for his faith is the Exodus, when Israel was first delivered from oppression. God himself declares once again that, "you shall know that I, the LORD you're your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" Isaiah (60:16).

## The Savior of Israel

In spite of the destruction, there is cause for hope. God will gather in the children when they are scattered, as when they are defeated by Rome. "Bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—" (Isa 43:6). Jeremiah prophesies that God will lead his people back. "For I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer 31:9). "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in?" (Jer 31:20) They are "Children of the living God" (Hos 1:10). God must discipline Israel "for the LORD reproveth the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov 3:12). "Return, O faithless children, says the LORD, for I am your master" (Jer 3:14). "Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness" (Jer 3:22). Because Israel is the Son of God, they will ultimately triumph over foreign nations. "Release the children of the almighty and living God of heaven" (3 Mac 6:28). "Gather all the tribes of Jacob, and give them their inheritance, as at the beginning. Have mercy, O Lord, on the people called by your name, on Israel, whom you have named your firstborn" (Sir 36:13-17). This is the Good News which Mark is reporting to encourage Jews who have been dispossessed by Rome.

When Israel goes astray, the Father will chastise the Son, which explains why Israel must suffer, as at the hands of Rome. "Oh, rebellious children, says the LORD" (Isa 30:1). "For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the LORD" (Isa 30:9). Israel calls, "My Father, you are the friend of my youth" (Jer 3:4). "And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me" (Jer 3:19). "Thy chastisement is upon us as upon a first-born, only-begotten son" (Ps Sol 18:4). "Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you" (Deut 8:5). "Because they are sons the punishment inflicted on the Israelites is not destructive but corrective, leading to the rehabilitation of the people."<sup>67</sup> Hence, there is no cause for despair. "Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" (Deut 32:6) Nevertheless, Israel remains faithful. "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father" (Isa 64:8). This is all part of God's upbringing of his chosen people, as the Dead Sea Scrolls testify. "You have established us as your sons in the sight of all the people. For you called Israel <<my son, my first-born>> and have corrected us as one corrects a son."<sup>68</sup>



## The King as Son of God

This title was later transferred to David and his successors as King of Israel.<sup>69</sup> "If Israel was the Son of God, the King as representing Israel was especially God's son."<sup>70</sup> The earthly King represented God as the true King. "And the Lord will appear to the eyes of all, and all shall know that I am the God of Israel and the Father of all the children of Jacob, and King on Mount Zion for all eternity. And Zion and Jerusalem shall be holy" (Jub 1:28). The enthronement Psalm (Ps 2:2), refers to the nations conspiring against "the LORD and his anointed," *i.e.*, the King who is anointed, or "Messiah" in Hebrew, "Christ" in Greek. God says to the King, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." This is seen as an adoption formula. The King is adopted as God's son. He is figuratively "begotten." He will be given dominion over the nations (Ps 2:7-9). As God's heir, the king inherits dominion over heathen nations.<sup>71</sup> Rabbinical literature cites Exod 4:22, "Israel is my first-born son," to interpret this passage about the king.<sup>72</sup> "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (2 Sam 7:14). "I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure" (Ps 89:29). "He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!' I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps 89:26-27). Solomon will build a Temple for the Lord. "He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever" (1 Chr 22:10; *cf.* 17:13; 28:6).

The figure of Israel's sonship appears to have offered the main content for the Davidic divine sonship. As the covenant promises and demands were central constituents of the Israel-Yahweh son-father relationship, they were central also in the conception of the relationship between Yahweh and David and his line. Yahweh had chosen Israel, entered into covenant with him, and called him his first-born son. Yahweh had also chosen David and his "house", entered into covenant with them, called the Davidic king his first-born son.<sup>73</sup>

This is the origin of the Messiah theory. The Dead Sea Scrolls specifically applies the passage in 2 Sam 7:11-14, which originally applied to David, to the coming Messiah. "He is the Branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time."<sup>74</sup>

The book known as Second Esdras or Fourth Ezra, written, like Mark, after the Fall of Jerusalem, addresses the problem of God's people suffering defeat:

And now, O Lord, these nations, which are reputed to be as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your firstborn, only begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hand. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so? (4 Ezra 6:57-59)

The same book has God say, "For my son the Messiah shall be revealed" (2 Esd 7:28-9).<sup>75</sup> God promises that when Israel is oppressed, "my Son will be re-

vealed" (2 Esd 13:32). "Then he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness," and destroy them (2 Esd 13:37) This is the basis for Mark's myth of the messiah. Israel, the Son of God, whom God liberated from slavery in Egypt, will in the end prevail. This is the good news of the victory of Israel as the anointed Son of God. Mark, then, depicts Israel as the Son of God personified as the anointed king, the Christ or Messiah, who, though surrounded by enemies at the time of Moses and now when defeated by Rome as Mark is writing, will ultimately be victorious. "'Son of God', then, would be a possible designation for the people of God which would arise at the end of time when God would triumph through his elect, as it had been the title of the old Israel."<sup>76</sup>

## Wandering in the Wilderness

After the Exodus from Egypt, Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness. To represent this, Jesus is made to spend forty days in the wilderness, like Moses and Elijah before him (Exod 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). Here Jesus is tempted by Satan, as were the Israelites. Indeed, while Moses was receiving the Law on Mount Sinai, and the people saw that he was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people came to Aaron and said, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exod 32:1). Whereupon, Aaron prevailed on the people to contribute their gold jewelry to be melted down to form a golden calf, which they would worship. "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Exod. 32:4). Surely, this was to be tempted by Satan. He was "with the wild beasts." In the Old Testament, wild beasts are "associated with evil and triumph of righteousness."<sup>77</sup> The angels "waited on him," *i.e.*, served him food, just as Israel was miraculously fed by the bread from heaven (Exod 16:4-34), as Elijah was fed by an angel before his forty days (1 Kgs 19:5-8). "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Ps 91:11). In contrast to later Gospels, this account is brief.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

## MARK 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Here Mark begins the story of the conquest of Canaan. After "John was arrested" really means after "Moses died," and Moses, of course, died before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. God did not allow him to lead the people into the promised land, because he did not trust in God (Num 20:12). He died and was buried in the land of Moab (Deut 34:4-6). The Greek word translated "arrested" really means that Moses, alias John, was "handed over" or "delivered

up," in Moses' case, handed over to death. It was now that Joshua assumes the mantle of leadership in the person of his namesake, "Jesus."

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses (Deut 34:9).

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites (Josh 1:1-2).

The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses" (Josh 3:7).

Joshua son of Nun was mighty in war, and was the successor of Moses in the prophetic office. He became, as his name implies, a great savior of God's elect, to take vengeance on the enemies that rose against them, so that he might give Israel its inheritance (Sir 46:1).

Joshua/Jesus enters "Galilee," which is usually understood to mean the region in the north of Palestine. What the term means literally is "Gentile territory." The word "Galilee" in Hebrew, *HaGalil*, means the "circle," or in a broader sense, "region." Isaiah refers to "Galilee of the nations," *Galil HaGoyim*, as part of his prediction of the victory which Israel will one day celebrate (Isa 9:1). He defines it as "the land beyond the Jordan." Here Mark uses it to refer to all the land of Canaan, which, at the time of the conquest under Joshua, was a region beyond the Jordan populated by Gentiles.

Jesus, or Joshua, proclaims the "good news of God." The Greek word translated "proclaiming," *kērussōn*, comes from the word for "herald," *kērix*, the military messenger who heralds the good news of victory.

The coming of the herald of glad tidings in the ancient world was quite an unmistakable sight. Usually bringing news of victory in battle, his face would shine. His spear would be decked with a laurel, his head would be crowned, he would be swinging a branch of palms.<sup>78</sup>

The herald would raise his right hand and call out, "Hail, we are victorious." Here, Joshua heralds the good news of God's victory over the heathen. Mark cleverly uses messianic imagery to describe the conquest of Canaan. The "kingdom of God has come near," that is to say, an Israelite state in which God reigns as king. This describes the situation during the Age of Judges, when God alone was king over Israel.<sup>79</sup> Later the people will demand a human king, in effect rejecting God as king.<sup>80</sup> Now, however, under Joshua's leadership, a literal "kingdom of God" is, indeed, at hand. All that is required is that the people believe in the "good news" — in Israel's victory under the leadership of Joshua.

## A CALL TO ARMS      MARK 1:16-20

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Joshua now sounds the battle call. He summons the tribes of Israel to wage war on the pagan population of the "Galilee of the Gentiles." The key phrase is "Follow me and I will make you fish for people," usually translated, "I will make you fishers of men." In the context of Mark's narrative, this is taken to mean that Jesus is calling his fishermen disciples to be missionaries who will catch converts now instead of fish, a curious concept considering that the fish die when they are caught.<sup>81</sup> This metaphor can have a more sinister connotation, however. It may refer to capturing people rather than converting them. "For the kings shall be as sea-monsters. They shall swallow men like fishes."<sup>82</sup> A stone carving of fearsome warriors actually shows little figures of foreign soldiers caught up in a net. "The ominous ring of the fishing metaphor if taken in its natural sense is confirmed by the Old Testament."<sup>83</sup> "You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. The enemy brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine; so he rejoices and exults" (Hab 1:14-15).<sup>84</sup>

Jeremiah predicts the day when the Lord will deliver Israel as he did from Egypt and return them to their land. The pagan idolaters who have polluted the land with their "detestable idols" will be defeated. "I am now sending for many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall catch them" (Jer 16:16). God says to the transgressors, "The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks" (Amos 4:2). Speaking to Pharaoh, God says, "I will throw my net over you; and I will haul you up in my dragnet" (Ezek 32:3). "I will put hooks in your jaws" (Ezek 29:4).<sup>85</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls contain the same negative imagery. "You made my lodging with many fishermen, those who spread the net upon the surface of the sea, those who go hunting the sons of iniquity."<sup>86</sup> From this we may conclude that what Mark is alluding to is Joshua's summoning the tribes of Israel to conquer, *i.e.*, to capture, the pagan idolaters in the land of Canaan. Mark may specifically be thinking of the ambush at Ai where the Israelites feigned a retreat only to capture and destroy all the inhabitants (Josh 8:1-29).

The call of the disciples suggests the tribes of Reuben and Gad, which were given territory east of the Jordan, but who were required to take part in the conquest of Canaan (Num 32:6-7, 20-22). They vowed to follow Joshua (Num 32:28-32). "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go" (Josh 1:16). They formed the vanguard of the Israelites

(Deut 3:18). They received Joshua's blessing for their faithful service (Josh 22:1-3).

## THE DEVIL GODS OF CANAAN      MARK 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Joshua now functions as High Priest. He assembles the tribes at the holy place of Shechem (Josh 8:30-35; 24:1-28), as Moses had commanded (Deut 27:4), where Abraham had been promised the land of Canaan (Gen 12:6). Here Jacob built an altar to "God, the God of Israel" (Gen 33:17-20). Hence, the reference to "sabbath" and "synagogue" in Mark, which suggests liturgical practices. There he renews the Covenant with God and forces the Israelites to renounce the pagan gods.<sup>87</sup> "He said, 'Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.' The people said to Joshua, 'The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey'" (Joshua 24:23-24). People are astounded that he teaches with the authority of God and not like the pagan priests, here disparagingly referred to as "scribes," the Bible scholars of Mark's day. Joshua has a new teaching, the Torah, which he reads to the people and inscribes on the altar stones, and exercises divinely ordained authority. He confronts the devil-gods of Canaan who possess the poor pagan. Note that the gods are many, they speak in the first person plural. Nothing is more natural than to caricature other people's gods as "demons." In the Song of Moses we read that the Israelites made God "jealous with strange gods." "They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known" (Deut 32:16-17). Does Paul not say that "what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1 Cor 10:20)?

"What does Joshua have to do with us?" the devil gods cry, and call him "Jesus Nazarene." That is what the Greek really says, *Yēsou Nazarēne*, not "Jesus of Nazareth." This use of "Nazarene" is a play on words. Mark is alluding to the crown, or *nēzer*, worn by the High Priest on which is written the words, "Holy to God."<sup>88</sup> Hence, Joshua, the crowned one, the Nazarene, is the "holy one of God." Aaron, the first High Priest, is also called "the holy one of the LORD" (Ps. 106:16). This dramatic confrontation between the religion of the Israelites, under the leadership of Joshua, or "Jesus," and the doomed paganism of the Ca-

naanites sets the stage for what is to follow. Joshua's fame spreads throughout "Galilee of the Gentiles."

## A MOTHER IN ISRAEL      MARK 1:29-31

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

The conquest of Canaan ushered in the Age of Judges. The Israelites were led by charismatic figures known as "Judges,"<sup>89</sup> although judging was only one of their functions. The most important function was defense.<sup>90</sup>

Then the LORD raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them (Judg 2:16, 18).

Only one of the Judges was a woman, and she is best known for her military leadership. Her name was Deborah. "At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment" (Judg 4:4-5). The Israelites had been oppressed for twenty years by a king named Sisera (Judg 5:3). God summoned Deborah to lead the Israelites and sing a song of victory. "Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!" (Judg 5:12) As a result of her leadership, the Israelites were freed of oppression. "The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder, because you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel" (Judg 5:7).

Mark models his story about Peter's mother-in-law on Deborah. She is "in bed with a fever." This, most likely, refers to Deborah's ecstatic fervor as a prophetess.<sup>91</sup> Jesus, *i.e.*, God saving Israel, lifted her up.<sup>92</sup> She awoke and arose a "mother in Israel." She began to serve the Israelites by rousing them to battle. The "Song of Deborah celebrates an event which took place when the tribes had come to realize that their future existence and prosperity were dependent on their acting together."<sup>93</sup> If the Israelites did not achieve victory over the Canaanite confederation, then there was the real danger of a disintegration (through lack of inter-tribal communication) of the religious faith expressed in the Sinai theophany of the song.<sup>94</sup> Mark has chosen this charming domestic vignette to celebrate the role of Deborah as a mother, or mother-in-law, in Israel.

## TWILIGHT OF THE GODS MARK 1:32-34

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Here Mark ends his account of the early history of Israel. Healing and casting out demons, or false gods, represents the ongoing struggle against the Canaanites which characterized the Age of Judges after the victory under Deborah. This brings to an end the opening phase of the Biblical Cycle. In the closing phase which follows, Mark will bring the Israelite state to fruition.

## NOTES

1. M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 29.
2. M. Eugene Boring, "Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel," *Semeia* 52 (1990): 50; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 141.
3. Boring, *Mark*, 30; "Beginning," 56.
4. The prologue of Mark echoes Second Isaiah throughout. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 139.
5. Boring, *Mark*, 30; Craig A. Evans, "Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 68-69.
6. *soteria kyriou*, Philo, *De Mut. Nom.* 21.
7. Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8
8. Matt 1:21, "he will save his people from their sins."
9. Sirach 46:1.
10. *Jos. Ant.* 20.5.1 (97-8).
11. *Jos. Ant.* 20.8.6 (169-70).
12. Otto Betz, "Was John the Baptist an Essene?," *Bible Review* (December 1990): 18-25; John A. T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community," in *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1962), 11-13; A. S. Geysler, "The Youth of John the Baptist; A Deduction from the Break in the Parallel Account of the Lucan Infancy Story," *Novum Testamentum* 1 (1956): 70-75.
13. *Jos. War* 2.8.9 (120).
14. IQS 8:13-15; cf. IQS 9:17-20.
15. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 137.
16. Collins, *Mark*, 136.
17. *Ant.* 18.5.2 (117).
18. IQS 3:6-9.
19. Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 5.
20. IQS 3:4-5.
21. IQS 1:24-26.
22. *War* 2.8.5 (129).

23. IQS 5:13–14.

24. *War* 2.8.7 (138).

25. See the discussion in Collins, *Mark*, 139–40.

26. Mark: *Kai egeneto en ekeinaiis tais hemerais*, “And it happened in those days;”

LXX: *Egeneto de en tais hemerais tais pollais ekeinaiis*, “And it happened in those many days.” Ex 2:11.

27. Don B. Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (July–September 1994): 287.

28. John Dominic Crossan, “Jesus and the Challenge of Collaborative Eschatology,” in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 116.

29. Joachim Jeremias, “Der Ursprung der Johannestaufe,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 28 (1929): 314; “Proselytentaufe und Neues Testament,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 5 (1949): 428; G. de Ru, “De Doop van Israel tussen Egypte en de Sinai,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 21, no. 5 (June 1967): 348–360; Andrew J. Bandstra, “Interpretation in 1 Corinthians 10:1–11,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 6 (April–Nov., 1971): 5–21.

30. A. Oepke, “βάπτω, βαπτίζω, βαπτισμός, βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:537.

31. Jeremias, “Johannestaufe,” 316–319; Ex 24:8; b. Yeb. 46b; Num 15:14; b. Ker. 9a; Ex 19:10; Philo, Dec. 45.

32. Boring, *Mark*, 40.

33. Robinson, “Baptism,” 11–27; Harold Henry Rowley, *From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1963), 211–235.

34. Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins: Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1961), 96.

35. The forty days Jesus spends in the wilderness, standing for the forty years of Israel, may be suggested by the forty days Moses spent on the mountain. Exod 24:18; 34:28; Deut 9:9; 10:10; 1 Kgs 19:8.

36. Boring, *Mark*, 40–41.

37. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanfrancisco, 1994), 45–46.

38. The exodus as a type of baptism was recognized by the church fathers. See de Ru, “De Doop,” 363–369.

39. Garlington, “Jesus,” 291 fn.24.

40. Garlington, “Jesus,” 286.

41. For Old Testament and intertestamental imagery in the baptism, see James R. Edwards, “The Baptism of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (March 1991): 43–57; Dale C. Allison, Jr., “The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18, no. 2 (March/April, 1992): 58–60.

42. Gerald Cooke, “Israelite King as Son of God,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73, no. 2 (1961): 217.

43. Garlington, “Jesus,” 288, quoting Birgir Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son (Matt. 4:1–11 & Par) An Analysis of Early Christian Midrash* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 21.

44. Brendan Byrne, ‘Sons of God’ – ‘Seed of Abraham’: *A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background*, *Analecta Biblica* 83 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 17. 31.



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46. John Howton, "'Son of God' in the Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-4): 228.
47. William Benjamin Smith, *The Birth of the Gospel: A Study of the Origin and Purport of the Primitive Allegory of the Jesus* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 67.
48. *Ant.* 5.1.25 (93).
49. McKenzie, "Sonship," 325.
50. C. H. Turner, "Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΑΠΗΤΟΣ," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (January, 1926): 113-29; J. Howard 3, "Son of God or Servant of Yahweh? – A Reconsideration of Mark I.11," *New Testament Studies* 15 (1969): 333.
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52. G. Schenk, "εὐδοκῶ, εὐδοκία," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 2:740.
53. William R. Stegner, "The Baptism of Jesus: A Story Modeled on the Binding of Isaac," *Bible Review* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 42; Schenk, "εὐδοκῶ," 740.
54. Schenk, "εὐδοκῶ," 740.
55. Marshall, "Son of God," 333-5.
56. Aboth 3:15.
57. John L. McKenzie, "The Divine Sonship of Israel and the Covenant," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946): 324.
58. Gerim 1.1-5.
59. New English Translation of the Septuagint.
60. Marshall, "Son of God," 326-36.
61. McKenzie, "Sonship," 330.
62. IQS 8.15-16.
63. CD 2.12.
64. 4Q504, Words of the Luminaries, 5.15-16.
65. 4Q504, Words of the Luminaries, Fr. 4, 2.5-6.
66. "The speaker, either the prophet or the servant portrayed by the prophet, announces that God has commissioned him through anointing with the spirit (see 11.2; 42:1-4)." J.J.M. Roberts, "Isaiah 61:3," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, ed. Harold W. Attridge et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 990.
67. Byrne, 'Sons of God', 25.
68. 4Q504, Words of the Luminaries, 3.5-6.
69. Cooke, "The Israelite King," 217-8.
70. John Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah*, *Studia Post-Biblica* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 289.
71. Byrne, *Sons of God*, 17, discounts the "adoptive" royal sonship. Logically, however, the king would have to be adopted before he could inherit sovereignty. The concepts are complementary.
72. Midrash Tehillin on Ps 2:7.
73. Cooke, "Israelite King," 225.
74. 4Q174 Florilegium or Midrash on the Last Days I 11-12.
75. Stephen Gero, "'My Son the Messiah'; A Note on 4 Esr 7 28-29," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 66 (1975): 264-7.
76. Howton, "'Son of God'," 230.
77. Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1987), 52.

78. Andrew Spallek, "The Origin and Meaning of Εὐαγγέλιον in the Pauline Corpus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 57 (1993):178.

79. Marco Treves, "The Reign of God in the O.T.," *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969): 230-31.

80. Judg 8:22-23; 1 Sam 8:4-7; 10:18-19; 12:12. Millard Lind, "The Concept of Political Power in Ancient Israel," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 7 (1968-9) 12-14; J. Alberto Soggin, "Zur Entwicklung des alttestamentlichen Königtums," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 15, no. 6 (Nov. -Dec. 1959): 405.

81. Charles Smith, "Fishers of Men: Footnotes on a Gospel Figure," *Harvard Theological Review* 52, no. 3 (July 1959): 187-191.

82. T. Jud. 21:7 (4:8-9)

83. Smith, "Fishers," 189.

84. In 1QpHab 6.1 this verse is taken to refer to gathering plunder.

85. Myers sees this as referring to judgment on the rich and powerful. "Taking this mandate for his own, Jesus is inviting common folk to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege." Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 132.

82:1QH 13.8.

87. This story occurs twice in Joshua, with a short form in Chapter 8, and a longer form in Chapter 24, when Joshua delivers his farewell. This incident forms the basis for the annual renewal of the Covenant by the Essenes.

88. Exod 28:36; 29:6; 39:30; Lev 8:9. LXX has *Hagiasma Kuriō*, "Holiness of the Lord." Note also Judg 13:5 LXX *hēgiasmenon naziraion estai tō theō*. The crown is a sign of consecration. The root is the same.

89. Ze'ev Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 399.

90. Donald A. McKenzie, "The Judge of Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967):118-121.

91. As a prophetess, Deborah may be seen as engaged in "mantic prophecy ... accompanied by trance." Terrance Callan, "Prophecy and Ecstasy in Greco-Roman Religion and in 1 Corinthians," *Novum Testamentum* 27, no. 2 (1985):129. "Ecstasy was also induced with drugs or resulted from fasting or illness." Con C. Benjamin, "An Anthropology of Prophecy," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21 (1991): 136. Hence, Mark's image of fever.

92. "The savior was the Lord, and the part of the human heroes was limited: Deborah was merely an intermediary." Yairah Amit, "Judges 4: Its Contents and Form," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987): 96. "God, and God alone, is the savior of Israel, a savior who makes use of human characters as instruments in a game he has established the rules of." Amit, "Judges 4," 102.

93. A.D.H. Mayes, "The Historical Context of the Battle Against Sisera," *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969): 353-360.

94. P. C. Craigie, "The Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukulti-Nunurta," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 257.

## *Chapter Two*

# Glories of a Shepherd King

*But in new Princedoms difficulties abound.*

*Niccolo Machiavelli. The Prince.*

The closing phase of the Bible Cycle describes the rise and reign of David. This culminates the foreshadowings of Israelite greatness which were laid down in the opening phase, as we discussed in Chapter 1. In this Chapter we will examine how Mark eulogizes David as the great king of Israel. Restoration of the Davidic kingdom will form the basis for messianic expectations in the future.

### THE DAWN OF DAVID      MARK 1:35-39

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Mark, having brought the Age of Judges to a close, now inaugurates the Monarchy. This is the "dawn of David." It is beautifully described in David's last words.

The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land (2 Sam 23:2-4).

The same image is found in the Psalms. The Jews believed that David wrote the Psalms, so to Mark, it is David speaking.

O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch (Ps 5:3).

Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn (Ps 57:8; 108:1b-2).

I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning (Ps 59:16b).

But I, O LORD, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you (Ps 88:13).<sup>1</sup>

Simon and his companions hunt for Jesus, who now represents David, the newest instrument of Salvation.

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons" (1 Sam 16:1).

One by one, Samuel rejected Jesse's sons.

Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward (1 Sam 16:11-12).<sup>2</sup>

Mark then depicts David, as Jesus, proclaiming the message of the monarchy and casting out the heathen "demons."

## THE PHILISTINE AFFLICTION

## MARK 1:40-45

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

David now encounters the opponent who will make him famous. He fights the giant, Goliath, a saga which has become proverbial for the weaker defeating the more powerful. "And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath," who stood about ten and half feet tall (1 Sam 17:4).

He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid (1 Sam 17:8-11).

David, the youngest of his father's four sons, went to the battlefield. He was indignant at Goliath's arrogance. "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam 17:26)

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth."

David is undeterred.

Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" (1 Sam 17:36-7)

David even refuses Saul's armor. Instead, he fights the giant as a shepherd would.

Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field" (1 Sam 17:40-4).

David is not afraid. After all, God is on his side.

But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by

sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand" (1 Sam 17:45-7).

Clearly, David is the "Jesus" or savior figure for his time. God will save Israel through his hands.

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled (1 Sam 17:48-51).

This is the story Mark retells as the story of Jesus healing the leper. How do we know that? Because, according to Jewish legend, when Goliath looked at David, the giant was afflicted with leprosy.<sup>3</sup>

Scarcely did David begin to move toward Goliath, when the giant became conscious of the magic power of the youth. The evil eye David cast on his opponent sufficed to afflict him with leprosy, and in the very same instant he was rooted to the ground, unable to move.<sup>4</sup>

Leprosy was viewed as a punishment for sin. God punished both Aaron and Miriam for slandering Moses.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Goliath was similarly punished for cursing David. Leprosy also was seen as a punishment for "the shedding of blood, taking oaths in vain, incest, arrogance, robbery, and envy."<sup>6</sup>

Thus Mark has Jesus overcome his own leprous Goliath. Mark broadens the metaphor. By defeating Goliath, David healed Israel of the Philistine affliction. Hence, the leper is healed by Jesus, not killed. It is worth noting that instead of the word *splanchnistheis*, translated "moved with pity," when the leper asks Jesus to heal him, other manuscripts read *orgistheis*, "angered."<sup>7</sup> This may reflect an understanding that this was Mark's retelling of David's confronting Goliath, rather than Jesus simply helping a poor leper. Jesus tells the man to "go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." The elaborate ceremony prescribed included beheading a bird (Lev 14:5). This may reflect the fact that David cut off the head of Goliath as proof he had slain the giant. "When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled" (1 Sam 17:51b).

Mark says that, "Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter." Exactly the same thing could be said of David. Because of his victory over the Philistine, the women sang his praises.

And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?" So Saul eyed David from that day on (1 Sam 18:7-9).

David fled to the wilderness, where he gathered a band of warriors.

David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; when his brothers and all his father's house heard of it, they went down there to him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Those who were with him numbered about four hundred (1 Sam 22:1-2; cf. 1 Sam 19:18; 21:10).

Saul hunted David down, but failed to find and kill him (1 Sam 24:1-6). "In hiding from Saul's army, they sought out places of refuge in the inaccessible desert borderlands."<sup>8</sup>

## POLITICAL PARALYSIS      MARK 2:1-12

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

When David returns from hiding out in the wilderness, he first becomes king over the southern tribes of Judah, ruling from Hebron. "All the tribes" of Israel then come to him and declare that David will be "shepherd over my people Israel," and will become ruler over all the people. David then makes a covenant with them, and they anoint him "king over Israel" (2 Sam 5:1-4).

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God,

and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken (Ezek 34:23-24).

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever (Ezek 37: 24-25).

Mark celebrates David's elevation to king with this story of the healing of the paralyzed man, who, of course, stands for Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul. His father and grandfather were slain in the Battle of Mt. Gilboa.

Saul's son Jonathan had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled; and, in her haste to flee, it happened that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth (2 Sam 4:4).

When David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam 9:1), there came this answer: "There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet" (2 Sam 9:3). David sent for him.

Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, "Mephibosheth!" He answered, "I am your servant." David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always." He did obeisance and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?" (2 Sam 9:1-8)

Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he always ate at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet (2 Sam 9:13).

It is remarkable that Mephibosheth is repeatedly described as crippled.<sup>9</sup> As he himself says to David, "Your servant is lame." Hence, the image of Mephibosheth as disabled must have been imprinted on the popular mind. Mark's original readers, whoever they might have been, would have had no difficulty recognizing the paralyzed man who is brought to David, alias "Jesus," as the crippled son of Jonathan. Mephibosheth very likely expected David to have him killed as a royal rival.

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul (2 Sam 21:7).



As heir to the throne, he represented a threat to David's rule. Instead, David was gracious to Mephibosheth and made him a member of his court. "For all my father's house were doomed to death before my lord the king; but you set your servant among those who eat at your table" (2 Sam 19:28). "In this action, David showed a great heart. Monarchs of the day normally disposed of members of rival families; it was rare to bestow such an honor."<sup>10</sup>

When accused of disloyalty to David, Mephibosheth assures the king that he remains a faithful supporter (2 Sam 16:1-4; 19:25-30). The faith of Mephibosheth and his supporters in David as legitimate ruler, no doubt, is what saved him. That is why the Davidic "Jesus" responds to their demonstration of faith in him. While it is true that David did not actually heal Mephibosheth, it is also true that David did heal Israel of the political paralysis it had suffered in the Age of Judges as a result of sin.

Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD, and worshipped Baal and the Astartes. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress (Judg 2:11-15).

Although God raised up judges, such as Deborah, to lead them, the Israelites did not repent but continued in their evil ways.

Yet they did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their ancestors had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD; they did not follow their example. But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died." In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their ancestors did, the LORD had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua (Judg 2:17, 19-23).

The result, not surprisingly, was sheer anarchy. "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25). The salvation which David brought to Israel as king was based, at least in part, on law and order.

Here again Mark broadens the metaphor to refer to the healing effect of David's encounter, first with Goliath, and then with Mephibosheth. The scribes, ever the opponents of "Jesus," the true cause of Israel's salvation, claim it is blasphemy to say "sins are forgiven," which in this case is the equivalent of saying "healed of political paralysis." The people are amazed. They have never seen anything like David's kingdom before.

## THE TAXMAN COMETH      MARK 2:13-17

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Now that David is on the throne, he must organize his government. He makes a deft move in appointing the Levites, that is, members of the tribe of Levi, to be his civil servants. The Levites had no tribal territory of their own but were scattered throughout the country (Num 18:20; Deut 10:9; 18:1, 2). This dispersion of the Levites made them ideal for David's purposes in unifying and governing the kingdom. They had no regional loyalties to North or South and could be trusted to support the central government. The Levites, who also assisted the priests in carrying out their religious duties, served as officers, and judges, and gatekeepers (1 Chron 23:4-5). They were in charge of administration of the Kingdom. "These were his loyal functionaries and representatives, especially in the newly occupied areas and on the border."<sup>11</sup> Among the Levites' duties was tax collection. They were "entrusted with supervising the collection of the tithe and guarding it," mainly for the upkeep of royal temple cities.<sup>12</sup> It is clever of Mark, therefore, to have David, in the person of "Jesus," call Levi the tax collector to follow him. It also is interesting that Mark calls him the "son of Alphaeus," the name of a Greek river god who pursued a nymph named Arethusa through an underground channel which emerged in a spring.<sup>13</sup> Mark may be alluding to the story of David conquering Jerusalem by sending his general, Joab, through an underground water channel fed by a spring, where he emerged inside the city (2 Sam 5:8; 1 Chron 11:4-7). The Levites would be the civil servant successors of Joab, or Alphaeus. Hence, they are the "sons of Alphaeus."

## GUESS WHO CAME TO DINNER      MARK 2:15-17

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

David is now eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. The pagan sinners are the Canaanites whom David appoints as members of his court. Since they did not observe the Law of Moses, they were, in Mark's view, sinners. "It is generally believed that David incorporated Jebusite officials into his religious and civil administration."<sup>14</sup> One, of course, is Uriah the Hittite, who had the misfortune to be married to David's paramour, Bathsheba. For this reason, Uriah did not remain long as one of David's "mighty men" (2 Sam 11:3; 12:9; 23:39; 1 Chron 11:41). Other officials with Canaanite names are Adoram, who was in charge of forced labor, Jehoshaphat, recorder (2 Sam 20:24), and Seraiah, the scribe (2 Sam 8:17),<sup>15</sup> "Examination of David's lists of officials," it has been observed, "makes it clear that Canaanites were among his civil servants."<sup>16</sup>

The list of David's ministers shows quite clearly that he employed non-Israelite officials, who evidently were more expert in the handling of state affairs and administrative routine than his Israelites, so that David made good use of their experience and technical knowhow.

....

It is quite reasonable to suppose that many, if not all of them, came to him from the civil and military services of the Jebusite kingdom. In any case, it is almost impossible to believe that David, who was a brilliant and gifted organizer, would have allowed such a useful and indispensable instrument as a school of scribes to slip through his fingers without an attempt to make use of it and adopt it for the needs of his newly established realm.<sup>17</sup>

David has a bodyguard of foreign mercenaries, the Cherethites and Pelethites.<sup>18</sup> "Foreigners serving David as mercenaries," some would argue, "threatened Israel."<sup>19</sup> Mark did not agree. Foreign mercenaries "tend to be well disciplined, loyal to their commander, and interested in his personal welfare."<sup>20</sup> These sinful heathens must have shared David's dining. "How many of these officers sat at the king's table is not indicated, although the more important ones surely did. Along with David's family, the total number would have been sizable."<sup>21</sup> With them were, to be sure, tax collectors. David's kingdom could hardly function without revenue.

Though no details are given as to how David organized a taxation program or how much was assessed, it is clear that the people were taxed, and possibly quite heavily, as Samuel had predicted (1 Sam. 8:14, 15, 17). One indication is the list of officers just noted. David had general superintendents over the palace treasuries, over products that came in from the fields and cities, and over what was stored in stronghold towers. He had subofficers over various divisions of field workers, vineyards, olive trees, and livestock. These people were no doubt responsible for income from these sources, probably in accord with prescribed assessments.<sup>22</sup>

As stated, Samuel warned that a king would "take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers" and "take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves" (1 Sam 8:15, 17). Hence, the tithe

became a tax.<sup>23</sup> Mark has cleverly defended David for consorting with such disreputable people by saying they were the “sick” who had need of “healing.”

## THE BACHELOR PARTY      MARK 2:18-20

Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.”

Mark bases this interesting vignette on an event in the life of David. After the King became infatuated with Bathsheeba, he sent the hapless Uriah to his death, after failing to cover-up her pregnancy. The illegitimate child was born, and the prophet Nathan confronted David about his adultery. He told David a parable about the rich man who took the poor man’s only lamb to feed his guests. David was incensed and declared that the rich man should die. “You are the man,” Nathan answered (2 Sam 11:7). David was penitent.

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan said to David, “Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went to his house. The LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became very ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his house stood beside him, urging him to rise from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, “While the child was still alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm” (2 Sam 11:13-18).

David fasted and mourned while he knew the child was fated to die.

But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, he perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “He is dead.” Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the LORD, and worshiped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate (2 Sam 11:19-20).

Now the bridegroom of Bathsheeba ends his fast and returns to normal life.

Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate food.” He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept;

for I said, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon (2 Sam 11:21-24).

In this way, Mark is able to rework the story of David fasting to fit it into his messiah myth. The sense of the story seems to be that David must learn to be obedient to God if he is to prevail as king.

### NEW ORDER OF THE AGES

### MARK 2:21-22

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.

These metaphors are justly famous. The image of trying to repair the old with makeshift solutions is quite vivid. The unshrunk patch will shrink when the garment is washed and tear the cloth even more. The fermenting wine will expand and burst the hard, inflexible old wineskins. In this interpretive context, the meaning is quite clear. David is not to blame for his institutional innovations. They are essential to building a kingdom, something never seen in Israel before. Like the Articles of Confederation in the United States, the Age of Judges could not simply be repaired. A New Order of the Ages, a *novus ordo seclorum*, must be created. A new constitution for Israel is required. After all, David is a privileged character. He cannot be bound by the old order. This is the meaning of Mark's metaphors.

### RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

### MARK 2:23-28

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Mark here is alluding to a crucial event in the liturgical history of Israel, hence this incident occurs on the "Sabbath." David made Jerusalem the center of Israelite worship. He is to "Go up and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Sam 24:18). "David built there an altar to the

LORD, and offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being" (2 Sam 24:25). David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and placed it on the threshing floor.

David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD (2 Sam 6:12-17).

The threshing floor, purchased from Araunah, suggests the grainfields where the grain first is reaped and then threshed on the threshing floor. This is why Mark has the disciples pluck grain, which the Pharisees criticize as reaping on the Sabbath. He then has David defend himself by citing his own example in eating the bread of the presence. Commentators are troubled by the fact that it was not Abiathar, but Ahimelech, his father, who was the priest (1 Sam 21:2). Meier remarks:

This Marcan Jesus is not only an ignoramus but a completely inept debater, who foolishly challenges Scripture experts to a public contest over the proper reading of a specific text—only to prove immediately to both his disciples and his opponents how ignorant he is of the text that he himself has put forward for discussion.<sup>24</sup>

That Mark himself is not an ignoramus is clear when we realize that Abiathar was the priest when the event to which Mark is alluding occurred, a cryptic clue which "Scripture experts" of today overlook. "Abiathar came up, and Zadok also, with all the Levites, carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, until the people had all passed out of the city" (2 Sam 15:24).

In a questionable decision motivated by a desire for inclusive language, the NRSV has unfortunately obscured an important point with its choice of "humankind." The same term, *anthrōpos*, a masculine noun, is used throughout the passage. The original RSV is much clearer. "And he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.'" This contains a cryptic ambiguity. The term "Son of man" is basically a poetic term for human being. This can be seen in Psalm 8:4 "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (RSV) Man and son of man mean the same thing in this parallel construction. Hence, if the Sabbath is made for man, then man is the master, and the

Sabbath is the servant. Therefore, man, or the "son of man" is the Lord, or master, of the Sabbath. What appears to be a saying about the messianic "Son of Man" simply may be an aphorism about the importance of humanizing the Sabbath laws, a continual theme in Mark. It really does not mean that Jesus, or even David, has the authority to repeal Sabbath laws.<sup>25</sup> With this moral, Mark ends Phase Two, the reign of David, the closing phase of the Bible Cycle. Mark now will move on to a later time, when the vision of a Golden Age of Israel is rekindled.

## NOTES

1. For other examples, see Ps 3:5; 30:5; 90:14; 92:2a; 119:147; 143:8.
2. See also Sirach 46:13; 11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup> 28 (Ps 151A).
3. Lev. R. 17:3; 21:2; Num. R. 7:5; Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 127; Midrash Samuel 21.109. Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity I (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 99–100.
4. Louis Ginzberg, *Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther*, vol. 4 of *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1942), 87.
5. Num 12:1-15, Num. R. 7:5.
6. b Ar 16a.
7. C. H. Cave, "The Leper: Mark 1.40–45," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979):246–247; Elisa Estévez, "Significado de  $\sigma\lambda\alpha\gamma\chi\iota\zeta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  en el NT," *Estudios Bíblicos* 48 (1990): 514–518; Bart Ehrman, "Did Jesus Get Angry or Agonize?" *Bible Review* 21 (2005): 16–26.
8. B. Mazar, "The Military Elite of King David," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 311.
9. Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 441 (New York: Clark, 2006).
10. Leon J. Wood, *Israel's United Monarchy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 250.
11. Moshe Weinfeld, "Tithes," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnick, 22 vols., 2d ed. (Detroit: Thompson Gale, 2007), 19:738.
12. Weinfeld, "Tithes," 19:738.
13. Ovid, *Meta*. 5.572ff; Pausanias, *Descr. Greece* 5.7.3; Strabo, *Geog.* 6.2.4; Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.694ff.
14. Daniel Gavron, "Would King David Have Approved?" *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2, no. 2 (1995):2.  
<http://www.pil.org/details.php?id=653> (accessed March 29, 2010).
15. Benjamin Mazar, "King David's Scribe and the High Officialdom of the United Monarchy of Israel," in *The Early Biblical Period: Historical Studies*, ed. S. Ahituv and B. A. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 130.
16. Gavron, "David," 3.
17. S. Yeivin, "Social, Religious and Cultural Trends in Jerusalem under the Davidic Dynasty," *Vetus Testamentum* 3 (1953):149–50.
18. Carl S. Ehrlich, "Cherethites and Pelethites," in *Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 107; Mazar, "Military Elite," 311, 319–20.

19. Baruch Halpern, "David," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnick, 22 vols., 2d ed. (Detroit: Thompson Gale, 2007), 5:449.

20. Martin Sicker, *The Rise and Fall of the Ancient Israelite States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 140.

21. Wood, *Monarchy*, 178.

22. Wood, *Monarchy*, 179.

23. Weinfeld, "Tithes," 19:738.

24. John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus and the Plucking of the Grain on the Sabbath," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004): 579.

25. "Since *Son of Man* could simply mean a person and not Jesus or the judge at the end of time ..., it is possible that this saying originally meant that a person is *lord even of the Sabbath* in the sense that he or she is to enjoy the Sabbath and is not constricted by the Sabbath (*b. Yoma* 85b). Later, however, this saying was interpreted to mean that Jesus had authority to revoke the rules of Sabbath rest." Lawrence M. Wills, "Mark 2.27-28," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65.



## *Chapter Three*

# The Teacher of Righteousness Arises

*They deem him their worst enemy who tells them the truth.*

*Plato. The Republic*

In this Chapter we will examine Phase Three in Mark's Gospel. This is the opening phase of the Dead Sea Cycle, which describes in allegorical terms the life of the Essenic community at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea, metaphorically referred to by Mark as the "Sea of Galilee." What has gone before is only background from the distant past. Mark now begins his account of contemporary history. The whole dreary past of divided kingdom, exile to Babylon, and return to Judea does not concern him. His focus is on the two centuries leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to Rome. This cycle opens with the rise of the Teacher of Righteousness, the mysterious figure described in the Dead Sea Scrolls as the founder, or reorganizer, of the Qumran community.

### THE BETHEL BRIDGE      MARK 3:1-6

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Mark now brings us down to the second century B.C. He does this by bridging the gap of several centuries with a story which reflects the conflict between piety and politics both in the time following the reign of David and this later time. Mark has Jesus appear in a synagogue, always the symbolic scene of worship. The healing of the man with the withered hand recalls the encounter between a

person known simply as a "Man of God," who confronts Jeroboam, the northern Israelite king, who built a pagan altar and golden calf at Bethel.

While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the LORD (1 Kings 13:1).

When the king heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him!" But the hand that he stretched out against him withered so that he could not draw it back to himself (1 Kings 13:4).

The king said to the man of God, "Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, so that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the LORD; and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as it was before (1 Kings 13:6).

Some eight centuries later, the Jewish religion was under threat from the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes,<sup>1</sup> who attempted to impose the pagan Greek religion on the Jews. A family of priests known as the Hasmoneans led the fight for independence and succeeded in establishing and governing a Jewish state. The father of the family, Mattathias, began the revolt when he slew a Jew who was prepared to sacrifice to Zeus, making Mattathias a latter-day Man of God. He and his sons fled to the hills. "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" (1 Macc 1:27) A crisis then ensued when the Syrians attacked the Jews on the Sabbath. The Jews, faithful to their law, refused to fight on the day of rest and were slaughtered.<sup>2</sup> Mattathias, however, encouraged his followers to defend themselves, even on the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> Hence, Mattathias, alias "Jesus," asks rhetorically, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4)

The Hasmoneans, however, appointed themselves high priests and rulers, although they were not of the correct priestly lineage for the high priesthood and not of Davidic lineage, the ancestry of kings. Their political ambition was seen by pious Jews as corrupting true religion. A man referred to in the Dead Sea Scrolls simply as the "Teacher of Righteousness" arose to confront the reigning Hasmonean high priest. Mark depicts him as another latter-day Man of God. A book known as the Damascus Document, considered one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, describes the onset of his ministry.

For when they were unfaithful and forsook Him, He hid His face from Israel and His Sanctuary and delivered them up to the sword. But remembering the Covenant of the forefathers, He left a remnant to Israel and did not deliver it up to be destroyed. In the age of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after He had given them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, He visited them, and He caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron to inherit His Land and to prosper on the good things of His earth. And they perceived their

iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men, yet for twenty years they were like blind men groping for the way.<sup>4</sup>

The "age of wrath" refers to the Seleucid era in Palestine, beginning approximately 197 B.C., 390 years after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.<sup>5</sup> After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire had been divided between two of his generals—Ptolemy, who ruled from Egypt, and Seleucus, who governed Syria. The Jews had fared well under Ptolemaic rule, but the age of wrath began when Syria took Palestine away from Egyptian rule.

The Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanes tried to impose paganism by force, even to the point of setting up a pagan altar in the Temple. This was described in Daniel as the "Abomination of Desolation" or desolating sacrilege (Dan 9:27). It is also what is referred to in the Damascus Document as delivering them up to the sword. As a result of the adoption of Greek culture, known as Hellenization, by many of the Jews, and their abandonment of the Jewish for a pagan religion, even before the forced conversion, a group known as the *Hasidim* or Hasideans, which means the "pious" or "pietists," resisted the new ways and sought to preserve traditional Jewish culture and religion. This is the remnant referred to in the Damascus Document as a new planting. The Hasideans originally supported the Hasmoneans, the family which led the revolt against pagan Syria under Judas Maccabeus, one of the sons of Mattathias.

Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law (1 Macc 2:42).

Those of the Jews who are called Hasideans, whose leader is Judas Maccabeus, are keeping up war and stirring up sedition, and will not let the kingdom attain tranquility (2 Macc 14:6).

However, in 152 B.C., one of the Hasmonean brothers, named Jonathan, was appointed high priest, although he lacked the hereditary privilege of holding that office. He was not a Zadokite and was appointed by a foreign king. That is what the author of the Damascus Document means in saying "they perceived their iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men." Their guilt lay in supporting the Hasmoneans.

It was at this time, after Jonathan is appointed high priest by the Syrian king, Alexander Balas, that Josephus first refers to the three Jewish parties or sects: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.<sup>6</sup> A plausible view is that the extreme Hasideans, who rejected Hasmonean rule, became the Essenes, who "dropped out" and took up their abode in the wilderness on the shores of the Dead Sea. The moderate Hasmoneans, who were willing to accept Hasmonean rule, became the Pharisees.<sup>7</sup> The bitterness displayed against them in the Scrolls is typical of the opinion of extremists against moderates. One is reminded of the Communists in the 1930s who condemned the Social Democrats as "Social Fascists." The Damascus Document says that these early Essenes groped their way

for twenty years, ending approximately 132 B.C., during the reign of the Hasmonean high priest, John Hyrcanus.<sup>8</sup>

The Damascus Document continues:

And God observed their deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and He raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart. And he made known to the latter generations that which God had done to the latter generation, the congregation of traitors, to those who departed from the way.<sup>9</sup>

Confirmation that the Teacher of Righteousness arose during the reign of John Hyrcanus is found in the following lines:

This was the time of which it is written, *Like a stubborn heifer thus was Israel stubborn* (Hos. iv.16), when the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the waters of lies. He caused them to wander in a pathless wilderness, laying low the everlasting heights, abolishing the ways of righteousness and removing the boundary which the forefathers had marked out their inheritance, that he might call down on them the curses of His Covenant and deliver them up to the avenging sword of the Covenant.<sup>10</sup>

This is a rather straightforward allusion to the expansionist campaign of John Hyrcanus. He annexed territory to Judea, literally "removing the boundary," something forbidden in the Torah. "You must not move your neighbor's boundary marker, set up by former generations, on the property that will be allotted to you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess" (Deut 19:14). To the south of Judea lay Idumea. Hyrcanus led a military expedition across the Negev Desert, the "pathless wilderness," to annex Idumea and forcibly convert the Idumeans to Judaism.<sup>11</sup> The statement, "laying low the everlasting heights," may refer to leveling or "flattening" the hill on which the lower city was built under Hasmonean rule. "They then took off part of the height of Acra, and reduced it to be of less elevation than it was before, that the temple might be superior to it."<sup>12</sup> Hyrcanus abolished "the ways of righteousness" by rejecting the Pharisees and going over to the Sadducees.<sup>13</sup> Although the Essenes, too, disliked the Pharisees, they were at least Hasideans. The Sadducees were not.

There was opposition to the military adventurism, which was motivated by political and economic ambition and undermined the ethnic and spiritual purity of Israel by adding non-Jewish territory. This theme is repeated elsewhere. The "priest who governs over the Many" recites a prayer before expelling a recalcitrant member. He blesses God for founding the nations separated by borders. "And you established frontiers for us, and you curse those who cross them."<sup>14</sup>

The Commentary on Habakkuk refers to "[a] Wicked Priest who was called by the name of truth when he first arose":

But when he ruled over Israel his heart became proud, and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches. He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the

peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself. And he lived in the ways of abominations amidst every unclean defilement.<sup>15</sup>

It is not surprising that a resistance leader would arise at this time. Josephus describes an event which may be significant. A man named Eleazar, a Pharisee, insisted that John Hyrcanus abdicate the high priesthood and limit himself to civil government. He accused Hyrcanus of being ineligible for the high priesthood, because his mother had been captured under Antiochus Epiphanes and presumably defiled. A similar story is told in the Talmud, where the man is named Judah.<sup>16</sup> Conceivably, this story could be about the man known in the Scrolls as the Teacher of Righteousness. This encounter may be the one described in the Commentary on Habakkuk, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>17</sup> The verse being interpreted says, "O traitors, why do you stare and stay silent when the wicked swallows up on more righteous than he?" (Hab 1:13b). The commentator states:

Interpreted, this concerns the House of Absalom and the members of its council who were silent at the time of the chastisement of the Teacher of Righteousness and gave him no help against the Liar who flouted the Law in the midst of their whole [congregation].<sup>18</sup>

Josephus describes Hyrcanus and the Pharisees discussing punishment of the troublemaker.<sup>19</sup> "Their turning against a fellow Hasid was like the treachery of Absalom who rebelled against his father, and their silence was like Absalom's silence before he slew his brother (II Sam. 13:22)."<sup>20</sup> This compares with "The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mark 3:6). The term "Herodians" probably refers to supporters of the Herod dynasty,<sup>21</sup> which in this context would by analogy represent the supporters of the Hasmoneans.

## BESIDE THE SEA

## MARK 3:7-12

Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

The Teacher's opposition to John Hyrcanus as high priest would explain why he would withdraw to the shores of the Dead Sea where the early Essenes were encamped. There he would find fertile soil for his opposition to the Hasmonean high priesthood. He proceeded to reorganize this dissident group around his own charismatic leadership. That is why "Jesus" withdraws to the shores of the "Sea of Galilee" (Mark 3:7). By casting the Teacher in the role of Jesus, Mark is say-

ing that he is the savior figure for his age, that God saved Israel through the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness.

Mark says that a great multitude came out to "Jesus." He specifies the locations from which they came: Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. These place names refer to a series of battles fought by John Hyrcanus. When he bribed the Syrian king, Antiochus Sidetes, to give up the siege of Jerusalem, Hyrcanus took over the city.<sup>22</sup> As pointed out, he conquered Idumea.<sup>23</sup> He conquered Mcdaba and Samea, beyond the Jordan.<sup>24</sup> Finally, he conquered the cities of Shechem and Samaria,<sup>25</sup> which Mark refers to as Tyre and Sidon. The reason stemmed from the Jews' rejection of the Samaritan claim to be Israelites and their claim to be Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon. They are referred to as the "Sidonians" of Shechem.<sup>26</sup> The Tyrians, like the Samaritans, are bitter enemies of the Jews.<sup>27</sup>

The large number of dissidents on the shores of the Dead Sea quite possibly prompted the Teacher to have a small building constructed so that the crowds "would not crush him." The word translated "boat," *plouarion*, really means "small boat." It has a diminutive ending. This small building, or "boat," is described as Phase Ia by Roland DeVaux, who excavated the ruins at Qumran.<sup>28</sup> The date of construction is consistent with the time of John Hyrcanus.<sup>29</sup> The Markan cures which the Teacher is said to work refer to healing from sin, as the Thanksgiving Hymn says, "a healing to those of them who repent."<sup>30</sup>

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE

## MARK 3:13-19A

He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out 2s. So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

The Twelve clearly are intended to represent the twelve tribes of Israel and signify that the Community of God is the only true Israel. They appear to be based on the princes of the twelve tribes.<sup>31</sup> The Twelve are referred to in the Community Rule, sometimes called the Manual of Discipline.

In the Council of the Community there shall be twelve men and three Priests, perfectly versed in all that is revealed of the Law, whose works shall be truth, righteousness, justice, loving-kindness and humility. They shall preserve the faith in the Land with steadfastness and meekness and shall atone for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction. They shall walk with all men according to the standard of truth and the rule of the time.<sup>32</sup>

Note that the Twelve in Mark are said to "have authority to cast out demons." As always in Mark, demons refer to false gods, *i.e.*, false doctrines or those, such as Gentiles, who adhere to false religion. As the Rule says, "They shall preserve the faith in the Land" and "atone for sin." Granted, Mark refers only to the twelve laymen and not to the three priests.<sup>33</sup> I suspect Mark was not a priest.

Mark lists the names of the Twelve. He appears to mean something special by that. The names may suggest figures who fought against the Gentiles, *i.e.*, demons, from the beginning of the Essenic community until the end. He seems also to be following the format of Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons, the eponymous heroes of the twelve tribes, found in Gen 49:1-28. The first apostle is Simon, quite possibly an allusion to Simon Maccabee, acclaimed as leader of Israel. "Fight our battles, and all that you say to us we will do" (1 Macc 13:9). Simon gained independence in 142 B.C. and "the Gentiles were put out of the country" (1 Macc 12:36). He was recognized by an assembly of the Jews as high priest, commander, and ruler, until a "until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (1 Macc 14:41). Simon's appointment facilitated efforts to resolve the knotty problem of whether a Hasmonean could even be high priest. That may be why Simon is put in the place of Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, who forfeited his birth right (Gen 49:3-4). The surname Peter, "Rock," may be ironic or may refer to Simon's conquest of Beth Zur, "House of Rock" (1 Macc 11:65).

Mark then mentions two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. In the blessings of Jacob, the next two brothers are named together as a pair.

Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company — for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstring oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel (Gen 49:5-7).

This is an allusion to their slaughter of the men of Shechem for the rape of their sister, Dinah (Gen 34:25-9).<sup>34</sup> Mark may be thinking of two brothers, Judah Aristobulus and Alexander Jannaeus, who were known for their cruelty. Judah was the first Hasmonean to crown himself king. He had his mother starved to death in prison for opposing his rule and ordered his brother Antigonus killed out of jealousy. Judah conquered Iturea and forced the inhabitants to convert to Judaism.<sup>35</sup> Alexander Jannaeus succeeded his brother, who had imprisoned him. His real name was Jonathan, which corresponds to the second brother, John. He was almost constantly engaged in wars of conquest and added to the territory of the kingdom. His subjects revolted and Jannaeus slew 50,000.<sup>36</sup> He had 800 Pharisees crucified while the throats of their wives and children were cut in front of them.<sup>37</sup> The Commentary on Nahum, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, calls him the "Lion of Wrath."<sup>38</sup> The surname, Boanerges or "Sons of Thunder," may refer to the violent character of the two brothers who, like Simeon and Levi, killed men in their wrath.

They may be the two brothers referred to in the Scrolls as "instruments of violence" who "shed blood like water upon the ramparts of the daughter of Sion and in the precincts of Jerusalem."<sup>39</sup> Judah Aristobulus and Alexander Jannaeus were the sons of John Hyrcanus, or Zebedee, who likewise waged wars of conquest. They are indeed sons of their father.<sup>40</sup> Shechem, as with the sons of Jacob, was the scene of battle by both Hyrcanus and Jannaeus.<sup>41</sup> Just as Simeon and Levi tricked the Shechemites into being circumcised to become like the Israelites (Simeon and Levi attacked them while they were recovering from their surgery), Hyrcanus and Aristobulus forced the Idumeans and Itureans to be circumcised.<sup>42</sup> James and John, furthermore, are sometimes compared to Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus, god of thunder.<sup>43</sup> The second brother, known in Latin as Pollux, in Greek was known as *Polydeukēs*, "much sweet wine."<sup>44</sup> Josephus describes Jannaeus as a heavy drinker,<sup>45</sup> perhaps of sweet wine.

Andrew, which comes from the Greek word for "man," may refer to Alexander, which means "man's defender," the son of Aristobulus II, who was beheaded on the orders of Pompey.<sup>46</sup>

Philip may be Philippion, who brought Antigonus, the young Hasmonean prince, to his father to serve as guardian. He married one of the princesses and was killed by his father.<sup>47</sup>

Bartholomew may be taken to mean the "Son of Ptolemy," the name of the man who assassinated Simon Maccabee. "Son of" suggests a latter-day assassin. This would fit Malichus who assassinated Antipater, pro-Roman father of Herod the Great, in 43 B.C. Both assassinations took place at a banquet.<sup>48</sup>

Matthew must be Mattathias Antigonus, the last Hasmonean king, who fought Herod for the throne and was beheaded by the Romans, who supported Herod, in 37 B.C.<sup>49</sup>

Thomas: On the death of Herod, a revolt broke out, which was put down by Varus, Roman governor of Syria. The last holdouts were 10,000 rebels in Idumea, the land of the Edomites, descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob.<sup>50</sup> The name "Thomas" is from Aramaic *te'oma*, which means "twin."

James, son of Alphaeus, refers to Judah the Galilean, the son of Hezekiah, to whom Josephus refers as an "arch robber," meaning a leading rebel.<sup>51</sup> Mark compares him to Alphaeus, a name which Mark has previously used (2:14) to refer to David's military commander, Joab. Judah, the leading son of Jacob, or James, here is called by his patronymic. Judah the Galilean led a revolt when Herod died.

Thaddaeus is a variation on Theudas, a false messiah who was beheaded by the Roman Procurator Fadus in 46 A.D.<sup>52</sup>

Simon the Cananaean, or Zealot, is Simon, the son of Judah the Galilean, who was crucified by the Procurator, Tiberius Alexander, successor of Fadus.<sup>53</sup>

Judas Iscariot: One explanation of the surname Iscariot is *sicarius*, the name given to terrorists, literally "dagger men," who concealed a dagger, "*sica*," under their robes and assassinated Jews suspected of being collaborators with Rome.<sup>54</sup> They were active when Festus was procurator, 58-62 A.D.<sup>55</sup> Judas



simply means Jew. So Mark is saying that the *sicarius* Jew betrayed Israel's cause.

## THE COMMUNITY OF GOD      MARK 3:19B-27

Then he went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered."

Mark now describes the conflicts which this dissident community has engendered. This counterculture is at odds with Jewish society in general. Opposition is only to be expected. The first conflict is with the Teacher's own friends and family.<sup>56</sup> They have heard about the crowds of people he has gathered together to live out in the wilderness, something akin to a hippie commune in Death Valley in our time. Naturally, his people are concerned and come to get him. They think he is out of his mind. They probably plan to "deprogram" him. In the Thanksgiving Hymns, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were either written by the Teacher or from his point of view, laments this lack of understanding. The alienation is clear.

They have banished me from my land like a bird from its nest;  
All my friends and brethren are driven far from me and hold me for a broken vessel.<sup>57</sup>

But I have been [iniquity to] those who contend with me,  
Dispute and quarrelling to my friends,  
Wrath to the members of my Covenant  
And murmuring and protest to all my companions.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the notoriety, *i.e.*, what his family has heard, comes from inside sources.

[All who have ea]ten my bread have lifted their heel against me, and all those joined to my Council have mocked me with wicked lips. The members of my [Covenant] have rebelled and have murmured round about me; they have gone as talebearers before the children of mischief concerning the mystery which Thou hast hidden in me.<sup>59</sup>

Next, he is confronted by the authorities. This encounter is described in the Commentary on Habakkuk. The verse from the prophet being interpreted is "Woe to him who causes his neighbors to drink; who pours out his venom to

make them drunk that he may gaze on their feasts" (Hab 2:15). The commentator says:

Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest who pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to the house of his exile that he might confuse him with his venomous fury. And at the time appointed for rest, for the Day of Atonement, he appeared before them to confuse them, and to cause them to stumble on the Day of Fasting, their Sabbath of repose.<sup>60</sup>

The term Wicked Priest, in Hebrew, *kohen ha-rasha*, is a pun on *kohen ha-rosh*, Head Priest, that is, the reigning Hasmonean high priest.<sup>61</sup> Mark described the High Priest and his retinue as the "scribes who came down from Jerusalem." He has come down to the shores of the Dead Sea to confront the Teacher, who, in effect, is a rival High Priest. He claims the dissident leader, the superior of this monastery of heretics, is Beelzebul,<sup>62</sup> which means "Lord of the Dwelling."<sup>63</sup> The word *zebul* refers particularly to God's dwelling, in heaven or the Temple.<sup>64</sup> The Qumran Community is a rival Temple. It is a "House of Holiness for Israel" and a "Most Holy Dwelling for Aaron,"<sup>65</sup> a "temple of man," *miqdash adam*.<sup>66</sup> Beelzebul is also a name for the devil. Hence, he is accusing the Teacher of being the "Lord of the Demons' Dwelling." He also accuses the Teacher of casting out demons by the "ruler" or "prince"<sup>67</sup> of demons, possibly an allusion to the Prince of the Congregation, a lay leader, who may be his second in command.<sup>68</sup>

It is significant, furthermore, that the Teacher is celebrating the Day of Atonement. This could not be the same Day of Atonement the official High Priest celebrated, because on that day he entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple and made atonement for Israel. Clearly, the Teacher was celebrating his own Day of Atonement. This is because the Teacher had a different calendar. The official Jewish calendar is based on the sun and the moon. The Teacher has a purely solar calendar with 364 days.<sup>69</sup> This has the advantage of being divisible by seven, so that every day of the year falls on the same day of the week every year. This sectarian calendar meant the Essenes were out of sync with the rest of the Jewish world. That is why the High Priest could come down to Qumran when his opposite number was celebrating his own sacred holiday, in an attempt to confuse them.<sup>70</sup> A letter on Essenic law, possibly sent to Janneus as a criticism of his policy, refers to the 364-day calendar.<sup>71</sup> This may be the law which he sent the Wicked Priest "who spies on the just person and tries [to kill him.]"<sup>72</sup> We know how Janneus reacted to anyone who opposed his observance of holy days. On the Feast of Tabernacles, Janneus poured the water libation on his feet instead of the altar, as Pharisaic custom required. The crowd threw citrons at him, and he retaliated by having 6,000 slain.<sup>73</sup> Obviously, Janneus did not take kindly to criticism. His response to the Teacher's disagreement as to when to observe the Day of Atonement is fairly predictable.

The Teacher, as Jesus, calls his followers aside and speaks to them in "parables," *i.e.*, in esoteric terms. What he says is extremely revealing. "How can Satan cast out Satan?" he asks. This is because Hebrew letters have numerical

value. Any word can have a hidden numerical meaning. This is known as *gematria*. The Talmud explains:

On the Day of Atonement Satan is powerless to oppose (Israel's plea for forgiveness). The letters of *Ha-Satan* (the Satan) have the numerical value of three hundred and sixty-four days of the year he has power to oppose, but on the Day of Atonement he has not that power.<sup>74</sup>

The implication is clear. If the Teacher has only 364 days in his calendar, then he must be celebrating Satan's holiday. This is how the Wicked Priest tries to confuse them. "According to the mysteries of sin, They change the works of God by their transgression."<sup>75</sup> "Mysteries of sin" means mysteries that are sinful, not that sin is mysterious, or as Gaster translates it, "blasphemous mystic lore."<sup>76</sup> The High Priest is using the Teacher's own brand of esoteric interpretation against him.

The Wicked High Priest who persecuted the Teacher of Righteousness on his Day of Atonement is very likely Alexander Janneus, the Lion of Wrath.<sup>77</sup> His persecution of the Teacher is consistent with his persecution of other Jews, principally the Pharisees. He was the first Jewish ruler to persecute his own people. He reigned from 103–76 B.C. Immediately after describing the persecution of the Teacher of Righteousness on the Day of Atonement, the commentator refers to the Priest who "has walked on paths of drunkenness to slake his thirst."<sup>78</sup> This fits Janneus, who drank himself to death.<sup>79</sup> If the Teacher is indeed contending with Janneus, his comments about a kingdom divided take on an added meaning. Following the death of Janneus, his wife, Salome Alexandra, reigned as queen from 76–67 B.C. Upon her death, a civil war broke out between her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. The Roman general, Pompey, intervened in 63 B.C., marched on Jerusalem, entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple, defiling it with his pagan presence, and the Kingdom of Judea came to an end.<sup>80</sup> Hence, the Teacher, in the person of Jesus, declares that the Hasmonean house would be divided between the warring brothers, and the Judean Kingdom would fall. The Wicked Priest sought to divide and conquer the Teacher's household. Instead, it was his own regime which would collapse. This is referred to in the Commentary on Habakkuk which interprets Hab 2:8, "Since you pillaged many countries the rest of the peoples will pillage you," as follows: "Its interpretation concerns the last priests of Jerusalem, who will accumulate riches and their loot will fall into the hands of the army of the Kittim."<sup>81</sup>

The "last priests of Jerusalem" are the two brothers; the Kittim are the Romans. The older brother, Hyrcanus II, had served as High Priest during his mother's reign. When she died, Aristobulus II revolted against his brother to keep him from becoming king. In the end he was executed in Rome.<sup>82</sup> He may be the "Priest who rebelled" referred to in the Commentary on Habakkuk.<sup>83</sup> The name Aristobulus in Greek means "noble counsel." This may be translated into Hebrew as *Etzah Ha-Tzedek*, the numerical value of which is—as one might suspect—364, the Satanic number. That is why the Teacher says that "if Satan

has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come." The Wicked Priest had attempted to "enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man." In the Thanksgiving Hymns the teacher says, "Truly, I am bound with untearable ropes and with unbreakable chains."<sup>84</sup>

It is surprising that commentators fail to recognize the reference to a house and kingdom divided, which will both fall. The split between the rival brothers which led to the end of the Judean kingdom was a turning point in Jewish history. Josephus describes the importance eloquently.

Now the occasions of this misery which came upon Jerusalem were Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, by raising a sedition one against the other; for now we lost our liberty, and became subject to the Romans, and were deprived of that country which we had gained by our arms from the Syrians, and were compelled to restore it to the Syrians. Moreover, the Romans exacted of us, in a little time, above ten thousand talents; and the royal authority, which was a dignity formerly bestowed on those that were high priests, by the right of their family, became the property of private men.<sup>85</sup>

The fall of the Hasmonean dynasty would have readily come to mind to anyone hearing this story in the First Century.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH      MARK 3:28–30

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

The Dead Sea Scrolls do teach that sins will be forgiven.

As Thou hast said by the hand of Moses, Thou forgives transgression, iniquity, and sin, and pardonest rebellion and unfaithfulness.<sup>86</sup>

For the sake of Thy glory Thou has purified man of sin that he may be made holy for Thee, with no abominable uncleanness and no guilty wickedness.<sup>87</sup>

By your forgiveness you will open my hope, in my distress you will comfort me, for I have leaned on your compassion.<sup>88</sup>

You are someone who forgives those who turn away from sin and someone who punishes the depravity of the wicked.<sup>89</sup>

Thou wilt raise up survivors among Thy people and a remnant within Thine inheritance. Thou wilt purify and cleanse them of their sin for all their deeds are in Thy truth. Thou wilt judge them in Thy great loving-kindness and in the multitude of Thy mercies and in the abundance of Thy pardon, teaching them

according to Thy word: and Thou wilt establish them in Thy Council according to the uprightness of Thy truth.<sup>90</sup>

Its interpretation concerns all observing the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will free from punishment on account of their deeds and of their loyalty to the Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>91</sup>

Forgiveness for sin, it is clear, can be found only within the Essenic community. This is because the Teacher of Righteousness was believed to be divinely inspired to interpret scripture. Anyone who disagreed with him, therefore, was denying God. "And I, Thy servant, I know by the spirit which Thou has given to me [that Thy words are truth], and that all Thy works are righteousness, and that Thou wilt not take back Thy word."<sup>92</sup>

The inspiration of the Teacher and his Community is repeatedly attributed to the Holy Spirit.<sup>93</sup>

And I, the Instructor, have known you, my God, through the spirit which you gave to me, and I have listened loyally to your wonderful secret through your holy spirit.<sup>94</sup>

You have spread your holy spirit upon your servant.<sup>95</sup>

And with certain truth you have supported me, You have delighted me with your holy spirit.<sup>96</sup>

And I, your servant, have known thanks to the spirit you have placed in me [...] and all your deeds are just, and you do not go back on your word.<sup>97</sup>

And myself, your servant, you have favoured me with the spirit of knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

To be strengthened by the spirit of holiness, to adhere to the truth of your covenant, to serve you in truth, with a perfect heart, to love your [will].<sup>99</sup>

I have appeased your face by the spirit which you have given me, to lavish your favour on your servant for[ever,] to purify me with your holy spirit, to approach your will according to the extent of your kindnesses.<sup>100</sup>

I give you thanks, Lord, because you have sustained me with your strength, you have spread your holy spirit over me so that I will not stumble, you have fortified me against the wars of wickedness, and in all their calamities you have not discouraged (me) from your covenant.<sup>101</sup>

And with certain truth you have supported me, You have delighted me with your holy spirit.<sup>102</sup>

For you have poured your holy spirit upon us, to fill us with your blessings, so that we would look for you in our anguish,[and whis]per in the grief of your reproach.<sup>103</sup>

These things we know because you have favoured us with a [holy] spirit.<sup>104</sup>

Clearly, anyone who disrespects the source of inspiration as an evil spirit, rather than the holy spirit, has committed a sin against the source of truth which can never be forgiven.

And also they defile his holy spirit, for with blasphemous tongue they have opened their mouth against the statutes of God's covenant, saying: <<they are unfounded>>. They speak abomination against them.<sup>105</sup>

And whoever complains against the foundation of the Community they shall expel and he will never return.<sup>106</sup>

This is the usual attitude of the true believer toward his critics. In this case it is the Teacher of Righteous, "Jesus," who defends the legitimacy of his inspired wisdom against the Wicked Priest, "the scribes who came down from Jerusalem."<sup>107</sup> Only by joining the Community and submitting to its doctrine can sins be forgiven. In the Middle Ages the formulation ran, "Outside the Church, there is no salvation."

## THE FAMILY OF FAITH

## MARK 3:31-35

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

To outsiders, the Essenic Community would be a "cult," to use a modern term. Cults typically seek to replace conventional social institutions with their own communal norms. People are encouraged to leave their birth families and join a "family of faith." This idea is found in the Scrolls.

For my mother did not know me, and my father abandoned me to you. Because you are father to all the sons of your truth.<sup>108</sup>

Thou hast made me a father to the sons of grace, and as a foster-father to men of marvel.<sup>109</sup>

Whether it is God or the Teacher who is thought of as the father of this cult family, it clearly has replaced the member's birth family. The members of the Community are now the members of one's true family.

This brings the opening phase of the Dead Sea Cycle to a close. The foundations of the Community have been laid. In the closing phase, the secret teachings of the Community are revealed to insiders. This is the subject of the next chapter of this book. The phase described in this chapter is the third in a series

which emphasizes a Call to Service; each phase is characterized by a call story. In the first phase, it is the call of the Four, representing the tribes mustered to conquer Canaan. In the second, we find the call of Levi, the civil servants who supported David. In this third phase, it was the call of the Twelve, the inner circle of the Essenes whose names recalled heroes in the struggle against pagan rule. In the next phase, the subject of the following chapter, Mark begins a new series which is concerned with Spreading the Word.

## NOTES

1. The phrase which NRSV translates "Come forward," *Egeire eis to meson*, literally means, "Stand up in the middle." This may suggest the incident where the Roman consul, Popilius Laenas drew a circle around Antiochus and told him not to step out until he had answered the Senate's demand that he not attack Alexandria. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 14.12.

2. 1 Macc 2:32-38; 2 Macc 6:11; 15:1-5; Ant. 12.6.2 (274-5); cf. Ant 14.4.2 (63).

3. 1 Macc 2:39-41; Ant. 12.6.2 (275-77).

4. CD 1.3-10, Vermes.

5. Ernst Vogt, "Bemerkungen über das Jahr der Eroberung Jerusalems," *Biblica* 56 (1975): 223-30, favors 586, although 587 is possible. The disagreement is in part due to a dispute whether the Biblical year began in autumn or spring. A possible date for the fall of Jerusalem is July 29, 587 B.C. Alger F. Johns, "The Military Strategy of Sabbath Attacks on the Jews," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 485. Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1958), 191, favors 587. Elias Auerbach, "Wann Eroberte Nebukadnezar Jerusalem?" *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961): 128-136, argues for 586. Ormond Edwards, "The Year of Jerusalem's Destruction. 2 Addaru 597 B.C. Reinterpreted," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104 (1992): 101-06, based on a calendrical analysis, favors 586. The Battle of Panion, in which Seleucid rule over Palestine was assured, is variously dated from 200 to 197.

6. High priest, *Ant.* 13.2.2 (45); Essenes, *Ant.* 13.5.9 (171-2).

7. William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshet of Habakkuk*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series No. 24 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 97; "The Wicked Priest, the Man of Lies, and the Righteous Teacher: The Problem of Identity," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 73, no. 1 (July 1982): 24.

8. Scholars disagree on how to interpret the history of the Essenes as cryptically described in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The views expressed here are my own; however, I believe my analysis is generally in line with mainstream scholarship. Many scholars begin counting the twenty-year period from the end of the 390-year period. There is nothing in the passage that requires this connection, however.

9. CD 1:10-13, Vermes.

10. CD 1:13-18, Vermes.

11. *Ant.* 13.9.1 (257).

12. *Ant.* 13.6.7 (215); *War* 5.4.1 (139). Although Josephus attributed this to Simon, there is some reason to think it may have occurred under John Hyrcanus. Julius Wellhausen *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904), 272.

13. *Ant.* 13.10.6 (293-8).

14. 4QD<sup>b</sup> Frag. 18, 5.12-13.

15. 1QpHab 8.8–13. The Talmud similarly makes this statement of John Hyrcanus (b Ber 29a).

16. *Ant.* 13.10.5 (290-2); Kid 66a. See Millar Burrow, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Gramercy, 1986), 172–3.

17. Brownlee, *Midrash Pesher*, 95–7; “The Historical Allusions of the Dead Sea Habakkuk Midrash,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 126 (April 1952): 17; Brownlee, “Wicked Priest,” 23–4.

18. 1QpHab 5.9–12, Vermes.

19. *Ant.* 13.10.6 (293–6).

20. Brownlee, “Wicked Priest,” 23.

21. W. J. Bennett, Jr., “The Herodians of Mark’s Gospel,” *Novum Testamentum* 17, no. 1 (1975): 9–14.

22. *Ant.* 13.8.3 (248); *War* 1.2.5 (61).

23. *Ant.* 13.9.1 (257).

24. *Ant.* 13.9.1 (255); *War* 1.2.6 (63).

25. *Ant.* 13.9.1 (255); 13.10.2 (275ff.); *War* 1.2.6 (63); 1.2.7 (64–5).

26. *Ant.* 11.8.6 (344); 12.5.5 (258, 262).

27. *Ag. Ap.* 1.13 (70).

28. R. De Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1959 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 4.

29. De Vaux, *Archeology*, 5.

30. 1QH 10.9.

31. W. Horbury, “The Twelve and the Phylarchs,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 503–27.

32. 1QS 8.1–4.

33. It has been debated whether the phrase should be interpreted inclusively, *i.e.*, twelve men including three priests, or exclusively, *i.e.*, twelve men and in addition three priests. This issue appears to be resolved by 4Q265 which replaces “twelve men and three priests,” with “fift[een men].” Frag. 7, Vermes.

34. To early interpreters, “the very conjunction of the names of Simeon and Levi in this ‘blessing’ was understood to mean that its subject was the violent cooperation of these two brothers in the Shechem incident.” James Kugel, “The Story of Dinah in the *Testament of Levi*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (1992): 14.

35. *Ant.* 13.11 (301ff).

36. *Ant.* 13.13.5 (376).

37. *Ant.* 13.14.2(380).

38. 4QpNah (4Q169).

39. 4QTest 25, 29–30. Brownlee, “Wicked Priest,” 12–3. The same term, *kelei chamas*, “instruments of violence,” is found in Gen 49:5 and 4QTest 25.

40. Brownlee, “Wicked Priest,” 14–5.

41. *Ant.* 13.14.1 (377).

42. Gen 34:22–25; *Ant.* 13.9.1 (257–8); 13.11.3 (318–9).

43. Collins, *Mark*, 220.

44. “Dioscuri.” *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Myth*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1996.

45. *Ant.* 13.15.5 (398).

46. *Ant.* 14.7.4 (125), *War* 1.8.7 (175); 1.9.2 (185).

47. *Ant.* 14.7.4 (126); *War* 1.9.2 (185–6).

48. 1 Macc 16:11–17; *Ant.* 13.7.4 (228); *Ant.* 14.11.4 (280–1).

49. *Ant.* 15.1.2 (9).



50. War 2.5.3 (76).

51. War 2.4.1 (56).

52. Ant. 20.5.1 (97). Cf. Acts 5:36. War 2.5.3 (76).

53. Ant. 20.5.2 (102).

54. Boring, *Mark*, 103.

55. Ant. 20.8.10 (186-7).

56. The Greek *hoi par autou* really means "those on his side." It has the broader sense of "friends and family" or his "people."

57. IQH 12.9. Note the similarity of "broken vessel" to our term "crackpot."

58. IQH 13.22-3.

59. IQH 13.23-5, Vermes.

60. IQpHab 11.4-9, Vermes.

61. Brownlee, *Midrash Peshar*, 49; "Wicked Priest," 9.

62. Lloyd Gaston, "Beelzebul," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962): 247-255.

63. This is made explicit in Matt 10:25, "If they have called the master of the house (*oikodespotēn*) Beelzebul...."

64. W. E. M. Aitken, "Beelzebul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31 (1912): 34-53;

Lloyd Gaston, "Beelzebul," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962): 247-255; E. C. B. MacLaurin, "Beelzeboul," *Novum Testamentum* 20, no. 2 (1978): 156-60.

65. IQS 8.5, 8-9, Vermes.

66. 4Q Flor 1.6. Devorah Diman, "4QFlorilegium and the Idea of the Community as Temple," *Hellenica et Judaica* (1986): 165-89; Jacqueline C.R. de Roo, "David's Deeds in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6, no. 1 (March 1999): 50.

67. KJV "prince of the devils."

68. Prince of the Congregation is used in some contexts to refer to a messianic figure. However, in IQSb (1Q28b) 5.20, "The Master shall bless the Prince of the Congregation...and shall renew for him the covenant of the Community," may suggest that the lay leader of the Community is blessed as Prince of the Congregation, in anticipation of the messianic age, at the annual covenant renewal ceremony. In the War Scroll "the prince of the whole congregation" is the head of the twelve "princes of God" who are the tribal commanders (IQM 3.3, 5.1-2). Possibly the Prince of the Congregation was the head of the Twelve in the Community Rule.

69. Jub 6:29-38.

70. Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls and Second Temple Sources," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6, no. 2 (July 1999): 184-91.

71. 4QMMT 2.

72. 4QpPs<sup>a</sup> 4.8-9.

73. Ant. 13.13.5 (372-3). Josephus does not name the festival or refer to the libation. Those details are provided by the Talmud, Suk. 48b and Yoma 26b.

74. Yoma 20a.

75. IQH 13.36.

76. Theodore H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scripture*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1976): 166.

77. Brownlee, *Midrash Peshar*, 97, 195.

78. IQpHab 12.13-4.

79. Ant. 13.15.5 (398).

80. Ant. 13.16.1 (407) - 14.4.5 (79).

81. IQ pHab 9.5-7.

82. Ant. 14.6.1 (92) - 14.7.4 (125).

83. IQ pHab 8.15.

84. IQH 13.36-7.

85. *Ant.* 14.4.5 (77).

86. IQH 4.12, Vermes.

87. IQH 19.10-11, Vermes.

88. IQH 19.32.

89. IQH 6.24.

90. IQH 14.8-19, Vermes.

91. IQpHab 8.1-3.

92. IQH 5.24-5, Vermes.

93. Werner Foerster, "Der heilige Geist im Spätjudentum," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1960/62): 117-34.

94. IQH 20.11-12.

95. IQH 4.26.

96. IQH 17.32.

97. IQH 5.24-5.

98. IQH 6.25.

99. IQH 8.15.

100. IQH 9.19-20.

101. IQH 15.7.

102. IQH 17.32.

103. 4Q504, Words of the Luminaries, 5.15-7.

104. 4Q504, Words of the Luminaries, Fr. 4, 2.5-6.

105. CD 5.11-3.

106. IQS 7.19.

107. Josephus says that the Essenes revere the name of their "lawgiver," *nomothetēs* (War 2.8.9 [145]). In Ps 83:7 LXX *nomothetōn* translates Hebrew *moreh*, "teacher." Hence, this may refer to the Teacher of Righteousness rather than Moses. It is significant, therefore, the anyone who defames the name is subject to death. Gösta Lindeskog, "Die Essenerfrage in Geschichte und Gegenwart," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 1 (1962): 101.

108. IQH 17.35.

109. IQH 15.20-1, Vermes.

## *Chapter Four*

# Mystery of the Kingdom Revealed

*I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.*

*Psalm 78:2*

Having overcome his opponents, the Teacher now begins to teach. This is the closing phase of the Dead Sea Cycle. Here Mark refers not to events but to stages of development in the spiritual life of the Essenes during the settled period of their existence. This was their Golden Age, when they were free to flourish under the Teacher's guidance. His unique approach to revelation forms the basis of their communal life.

### EARS TO HEAR      MARK 4:1-9

Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Now he can begin to teach beside the sea, not the Sea of Galilee, but the Dead Sea. Large crowds gather, because resistance to the oppressive rule of the Wicked High Priest, Alexander Janneus, has radicalized many people, including Pharisees, the moderate Hasideans, who now realize the Essenes were right in oppos-

ing the Hasmonians. This is reflected in the Qumran ruins, which demonstrate a tremendous expansion during Phase 1b, which occurred during the reign of Alexander Janneus. This is why Mark now refers to the boat, no longer as the diminutive *plouarion*, but as a large boat, a *plouon*. The Teacher, in the person of "Jesus," begins to instruct his followers about his esoteric interpretation of scripture. Mark represents this by teaching in "parables," short stories with a hidden meaning. He tells them the parable of the sower, which he will shortly explain. If they have ears to hear, they will understand.

## DARK SAYINGS OF OLD      MARK 4:10-12

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

Commentators are troubled by Mark's "parable theory," believing that Jesus would want to bring the message of salvation to everyone. The mystery is easy to understand once we realize that Mark is depicting the Teacher of Righteousness as a new Isaiah.

And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." (Isa 6:9-10).<sup>1</sup>

What is translated "secret" by NRSV is the Greek word *mysterion*, from which we get "mystery." This is a much better translation, because a mystery is not just a secret but a secret concealed from outsiders and revealed only to insiders. In the ancient world, there were many so-called "mystery cults" in which a *mystes*, or initiate, was taught the "mysteries" or secret knowledge of the cult.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for mystery, *raz*,<sup>3</sup> appears frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>4</sup> often from the standpoint of the Teacher.

You have opened within me knowledge of the mystery of your wisdom, the source of your power.<sup>5</sup>

From the spring of his justice is my judgment and from the wonderful mystery is the light in my heart. My eyes have observed what always is, wisdom that has been hidden from mankind, knowledge and understanding (hidden) from the sons of man.<sup>6</sup> Beyond you there is no-one to oppose your counsel, to understand one of your holy thoughts, to gaze into the abyss of your mysteries.<sup>7</sup>

These things I know through your knowledge, for you opened my ears to wondrous mysteries.<sup>8</sup>

Through me you have enlightened the face of the Many, you have increased them, even making them uncountable, for you have shown me your wondrous mysteries.<sup>9</sup>

I give you [thanks, Lord,] because you have taught me your truth, you have made me know your wonderful mysteries.<sup>10</sup>

For in the mystery of your wisdom you have rebuked me, you have hidden the truth a while, [your favour, until] the ordained time.<sup>11</sup>

For you have taught me the basis of your truth, you have instructed me in your wonderful works.<sup>12</sup>

Be blessed, Lord, because you have given your servant the insight of knowledge to understand your wonders.<sup>13</sup>

Bless the one who does amazing wonders, and shows the might of his hand sealing up the mysteries and revealing hidden things.<sup>14</sup>

Blessed be you, my God, who opens the heart of your servant to knowledge!<sup>15</sup>

Philo says that the Essenes study by means of allegory.<sup>16</sup> A commentary on scripture at Qumran, such as the Commentary on Habakkuk which we have discussed, is known as a *peshet*, an application of prophecy to later times. A commentary quotes a verse from the book being interpreted, and then interprets the verse by beginning with the words *peshro al*, "interpreted, this refers to," or more literally, "its interpretation to." This usage is taken from the Book of Daniel, where, for example, Nebuchadnezzar receives a vision of the mystery, *raz*, and then Daniel explains the interpretation, *peshet*, of the *raz*. As Daniel tells the king, "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Dan 2:28). The mystery, the *raz*, was revealed to the prophet, such as Habakkuk; the *peshet* was revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness.

And God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen to the last generation, but he did not let him know the end of the age. And for what he says: <<So that the one who reads it/may run/>>. Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets.<sup>17</sup>

So, too, Amos says, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

You have taught all knowledge and all that exists is so by your will. Beyond you there is no-one to oppose your counsel, to understand one of your holy thoughts, to gaze into the abyss of your mysteries, to fathom all your marvels, or the strength of your might.<sup>18</sup>

In Mark, the Teacher of Righteousness initiates his disciples into the hidden truths which he has uncovered in sacred scripture. As Mark puts it, to them has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God. The insiders will receive:

a spirit of knowledge in all the plans of action, of enthusiasm for the decrees of justice, of holy plans with firm purpose, of generous compassion with all the sons of truth, of magnificent purity which detests all unclean idols, of careful behavior in wisdom concerning everything, of concealment concerning the truth of the mysteries of knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Note that concealing the "truth of the mysteries of knowledge" is one of the duties of membership.

These are the foundations of the spirit of the sons of truth (in) the world.<sup>20</sup>

To those whom God has selected he has given them as everlasting possession; until they inherit them in the lot of the holy ones.<sup>21</sup>

For those on the outside, those who have not been initiated into the mysteries at Qumran, there is no knowledge and no salvation.

For they are not included in his covenant since they have neither sought nor examined his decrees in order to learn the hidden matters in which they err by their own fault and because they treated revealed matters with disrespect.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas observes: "Correct knowledge—limited, special, esoteric knowledge—is presumed a necessary precursor to election and, by extension, to salvation."<sup>23</sup>

The commentaries on scripture found in the Dead Sea Scrolls interpret the Bible in an esoteric fashion so as to reveal its hidden meaning for the times in which they lived.

The sect regarded itself as an eschatological community, distinguished from other groups not only by its particular way of practicing the Law, but by its consciousness of being the chosen community of the "last days." Hence they looked upon all events in the life of their community in the light of realized prophetic predictions, as part of a predestined messianic scheme of things.<sup>24</sup>

These commentaries, or *pesharim*, are themselves so esoteric that scholars must write commentaries on the commentaries to explain them, resulting in competing conclusions. After all, outsiders were to be kept in the dark. Of the Instructor, *maskil*, it is said:

He shall not rebuke the men of the Pit nor dispute with them.

He shall conceal the teaching of the Law from men of injustice, but shall impart true knowledge and righteous judgement to those who have chosen the Way. He shall guide them all in knowledge according to the spirit of each and according to the rule of the age, and shall thus instruct them in the mysteries of

marvelous truth, so that in the midst of the men of the Community they may walk perfectly together in all that has been revealed to them.<sup>25</sup>

And they do not know the future mystery, or understand ancient matters. And they do not know what is going to happen to them; and they will not save their souls from the future mystery.<sup>26</sup>

You have not seen the eternal mysteries, and knowledge you have not understood.<sup>27</sup>

The mystery of the kingdom of God refers to "the divinely willed way in which the rule of God will manifest itself and come to fulfillment" at the end time.<sup>28</sup> This is the message of the prophets which the Teacher has revealed. The Commentary on Habakkuk condemns the traitors who "do not [believe in the words of the] Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God," and those who "will not believe when they hear all that is going [to happen to] the final generation, from the mouth of the Priest whom God has placed wi[thin the Community,] to foretell the fulfillment of all the words of his servants, the prophets, [by] means of whom God has declared all that is going to happen to his people [Israel]."<sup>29</sup>

For from the source of his knowledge he has disclosed his light, and my eyes have observed his wonders, and the light of my heart the mystery of the future and of what it is for always.<sup>30</sup>

God, in the mysteries of his knowledge and in the wisdom of his glory, has determined an end to the existence of deceit and on the occasion of his visitation he will obliterate it for ever. Meanwhile, truth shall rise up forever in the world which as been defiled in paths of wickedness during the dominion of deceit until the time appointed for judgment.<sup>31</sup>

To the twelve in the inner circle and other members around them, the mystery is revealed.

In this way the upright will understand knowledge of the Most High, and the wisdom of the sons of heaven will teach those of perfect behavior. For these are those selected by God for an everlasting covenant and to them shall belong all the glory of Adam.<sup>32</sup>

## A PARABLE ABOUT PARABLES

## MARK 4:13-20

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come

in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

"Do you not understand this parable?" the Teacher asks rhetorically. That is because the parable of the sower is an allegory about interpreting scripture allegorically. If one cannot even understand this allegory on allegory, how will he be able to interpret anything allegorically? He obviously has no talent for it.

The sower is apparently the Teacher of Righteousness himself. He is a "discerning interpreter of wonderful mysteries."<sup>33</sup> One translation even describes him as a "wise sower of secret wonders."<sup>34</sup> The role of the Teacher is "To put to the test [all the men of] truth, to refine those who love learning."<sup>35</sup>

The Teacher proceeds to explain the difficulties of recruiting members who are able to interpret scripture correctly. Some are so ill-suited to the task that they immediately fail. He blames this on Satan. Others at first are receptive, but when they are subjected to persecution, as they were at the hands of the Wicked Priest, they desert the cause. Still others are unable to endure the harsh living conditions on the shores of the Dead Sea and the strict discipline in the Community. Worldly concerns, such as wealth, are too much temptation, and they, too, leave the Community. The "cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things" which "choke the word" resemble the three nets which one of the Scrolls says catch the unwary, "The first is fornication; the second, wealth; the third, defilement of the temple."<sup>36</sup> They produce no Bible interpretation. Finally, there are those who do endure, respond to his teachings and are productive of esoteric interpretations. In fact, it proliferates. The Qumran Community is essentially a Bible mill. The raw material of scripture is processed to produce esoteric interpretations, their unique brand of theology. "They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients, and choose out of them what is most for the advantage of their soul and body."<sup>37</sup>

This process is foreshadowed in the apocryphal book of Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus.

How different the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High! He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies; he preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables; he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs and is at home with the obscurities of parables (Sir 38:34b–39:3).

The role of the instructor is stated in the Community Rule as follows:

He should lead them with knowledge and in this way teach them the mysteries of wonder and truth in the midst of the men of the community, so that they walk perfectly, one with another, in all that has been revealed to them.<sup>38</sup>

Thomas describes the following of the Yahad, or Essene community:



The nature of the esoteric knowledge of the Yahad was manifold. On the one hand, true knowledge was considered to be "revealed" in some fashion or another. Members of the community were actively involved in the derivation of new forms of understanding and insight—they were interpreters of revelation, and, for them, it appears that to interpret correctly was itself a way of generating newly revealed knowledge. In other words, revelation, for them, could come in many forms, and they understood themselves to be in the business of "receiving" new revelations through study and interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

In the following parables, Mark will describe how the Community goes about the work of esoteric interpretation.

Additionally there is the strong theme of esoteric wisdom in the Qumran Scrolls, of knowledge rooted in the reception of, reflection upon, and integration of specially revealed information about human nature, creation, cosmic structures, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

### BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL      MARK 4:21-23

He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Mark now describes the Essenes' study habits. The Scrolls say that among every ten men there will always be someone studying scripture. In fact, the Bible mill operates around the clock in shifts.

And in the place in which the Ten assemble there shall 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 each night of the year in order to read the book, explain the regulation, and bless together.<sup>41</sup>

That is why the lamp must be brought in. They cannot very well study in the dark. The word which NRSV translates "bushel basket," *modios*, is simply a measure, more like half a bushel, a peck, and there is no reason that it would have to be a basket.<sup>42</sup> The parallel passage in Luke 8:16-18 calls it a "jar," *skeuei*, a dish, or vessel, or container of some type, possibly one of the jars used at Qumran to store the scrolls. Here we should think of something like a tub. Mark says that the lamp is not to be put under a tub in order to extinguish it for the night. This is a good way to put out an olive oil lamp. The smelly, sooty smoke will be caught inside the tub and not pollute the air.<sup>43</sup> A tightly woven basket probably would work as well. Mark also says not to put the lamp under a bed, where it could cast a glow as a night light.<sup>44</sup> Ancient beds were built high on legs like a table; no danger of igniting the bed clothes. Instead, Mark says, the lamp should be put up on a lampstand so that the monks could see to study scripture all night. As it says in the Psalms, "their delight is in the law of the

LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night" (Ps 1:1). The Essenes took this literally, and for good reason. "This extraordinary injunction to study the Law twenty-four hours a day, each day of the year, is comprehensible only against the eschatological background."<sup>45</sup>

This is because "the past must be re-enacted in the eschatological period." Before crossing the Jordan, God told Joshua that in order to conquer Canaan he must obey this commandment:

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful (Josh 1:8).

That is what the Essenes were doing by burning the midnight oil.

### PAYING ATTENTION      MARK 4:24-25

And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

The Essenes were very orderly in the way they conducted their discussions. They sat in rows according to their rank in the Community, and the lower ranking members waited their turn to speak. No one was to interrupt another. They were, as Mark says, to pay attention to what they were hearing.

This is the Rule for the session of the Many. Each one by his rank: the priests will sit down first, the elders next and the remainder of all the people will sit down in order of rank. And following the same system they shall be questioned with regard to the judgment, the counsel and any matter referred to the Many, so that each can impart his wisdom to the council of the Community. No-one should talk during the speech of his fellow before his brother has finished speaking. And neither should he speak before one whose rank is listed before his own. Whoever is questioned should speak in his turn. And in the session of the Many no-one should utter anything without the consent of the Many.<sup>46</sup>

Anyone who interrupts his fellow while he is speaking is punished for ten days.<sup>47</sup>

And whoever retorts to his fellow with stubbornness and speaks with brusqueness, ruining the footing he has with him, defying the authority of his fellow who is enrolled ahead of him, he has taken the law into his own hands; he will be punished for a year.<sup>48</sup>

They sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order. Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads it, and another of the men of the greatest experi-

ence comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatical modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was.<sup>49</sup>

Nor is there ever any clamor or disturbance to pollute their house, but they give every one leave to speak in their turn.<sup>50</sup>

Measuring one another fairly also figures prominently.

And they shall be recorded in the Rule, each one before his fellow, according to his insight and his deeds, in such a way that each one obeys his fellow, junior under senior. And their spirit and their deeds must be tested, year after year, in order to upgrade each one to the extent of his insight and the perfection of his path, or to demote him according to his failings. Each should reproach his fellow in truth, in meekness and in compassionate love for the man.<sup>51</sup>

### GROWING ON ITS OWN      MARK 4:26-29

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

Mark repeats the metaphor of seed. No one knows how the process of growth works. As the monks go through their life cycle, working and studying scripture, the interpretation they are laboring to complete continues. One day, it will be ready to harvest. Hakukkuk says, "For the vision has an appointed time, it will have an end and not fail" (Hab 2:3). "Its interpretation: the final age will be extended and go beyond all that the prophets say, because the mysteries of God are wonderful."<sup>52</sup> "Though it might delay, wait for it; it definitely has to come and will not delay" (Hab 2:3).<sup>53</sup>

Its interpretation concerns the men of truth, those who observe the Law, whose hands will not desert the service of truth when the final age is extended beyond them, because all the ages of God will come at the right time, as he established for them in the mysteries of his prudence.<sup>54</sup>

### THE TINIEST SEED      MARK 4:30-32

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Mark has described how the Community operates. First, productive members must be recruited; then they must study night and day and listen carefully until the task of interpretation is completed. From this tiny Community, of about two hundred monks, the Kingdom of God will grow.<sup>55</sup> A similar image is found in the Scrolls.

[Their root] will sprout like a flower [of the field] for ever, to make a shoot grow in branches of the everlasting plantation so that it covers all the world with its shade, [and its tip reaches] up to the skies, and its roots down to the abyss. All the streams of Eden [will make] its branches [grow] and it will be [a huge tree without] limits; the glory of the wood will be over the whole world, endless and [deep] as down to Sheol [its roots].<sup>56</sup>

### THE INSIDE SOURCE      MARK 4:33-34

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Mark concludes his description of the Essenic system by reiterating the esoteric character of the Teacher's instruction. To those on the inside, he explained what he meant. "For you have taught them the basis of your truth, and have instructed them in your wonderful mysteries."<sup>57</sup>

### THE SEISMIC STORM      MARK 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

This idyllic period in the life of the Dead Sea Community came to an abrupt end in 31 B.C. when a devastating earthquake struck Judea. Josephus describes the destruction:

And then it was also that there was an earthquake in Judea, such a one as had not happened at any other time, and which earthquake brought a great destruction upon the cattle in that country. About ten thousand men also perished by the fall of houses; but the army, which lodged in the field, received no damage by this sad accident.<sup>58</sup>

Mark refers to the earthquake as a storm at sea. A clue to this is that the parallel passage in Matthew calls it a *seismos*, "earthquake."<sup>59</sup> It is easy to see why the earthquake would suggest a windstorm on the Dead Sea as the quaking caused huge waves to form on the water as in a storm. The pools of water in the monastic boat<sup>60</sup> itself would overflow and threaten to "swamp" it. Other boats, namely, the outbuildings at Ein Feshka a mile away, also were shaken up in the quake. This imagery already was found in the Scrolls. Mark has adapted it to describe the earthquake.

[I am] like a sailor in a ship in the raging sea, its waves and torrents roar over me, a whirlwind [without a] lull for taking breath, without tracks which direct the path over the surface of the sea.<sup>61</sup>

[All] arrogant men mutter against me like the mighty din of turbulent water; [all] their thoughts are devilish schemes.<sup>62</sup>

The Teacher is described as asleep in the boat. Most probably, he was deceased by this time.<sup>63</sup> The Essenes would then be left without their beloved Teacher to guide them at this tragic time, when the very foundations of their Community were shattered. Note that the disciples address Jesus as "Teacher." It is as if the Teacher did not care that they were perishing. Fortunately, his successor, who may be the figure known as the Interpreter of the Law,<sup>64</sup> arose to guide them as the newest Jesus figure. They should not be afraid, but should have faith. It is as if the new leader could overcome the quake itself, and its aftermath. The Essenes, after all, believed that heaven and earth will listen to or obey God's messiah.<sup>65</sup> The image is Biblical: "You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves" (Ps 65:7).

This brings the Dead Sea Cycle to a close. The foundations laid down by the rise of the Teacher of Righteousness have now come to fruition in the settled life of the community. This phase is also the first in a series dealing with Spreading the Word. It began with the sower sowing the word. Mark will now move on to the next cycle in his epic of salvation. There will be an outreach beyond the narrow confines of Qumran.

## NOTES

1. See also Isa 44:18; Jer 5:21; Ezek 3:27.

2. See generally G. Bornkamm, "μυστήριον, μύεω." in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 802-28.

3. Collins, *Mark*, 247-9, who correctly translates *mysterion* as mystery, also recognizes that this term is equivalent to *raz* as used in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Samuel I. Thomas, *The "Mysteries" of Qumran; Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Early Judaism and Its Literature 25 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 4, recognizes the relationship but cautions against a ready equivalence, 15.

4. "The word  $\tau$  occurs at least 140 times in at least twenty-eight different non-biblical compositions, including all of the major sectarian texts and many of the otherwise well-attested compositions." Thomas, "Mysteries," 129.

5. IQH 20.13.

6. IQS 11.5-6.

7. IQS 11.18-9.

8. IQH 9.21.

9. IQH 12.27.

10. IQH 15.26-7.

11. IQH 17.23-4.

12. IQH 19.4.

13. IQH 19.27-8.

14. IQH\* Frag. 7, 1.18-19.

15. IQS 11.15.

16. *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, 80ff. B. J. Roberts, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Essenes," *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956-7): 60-2, maintains that the "*peshet* is still fulfillment rather than allegorical interpretation." However, allegory, from *allegorein*, means "to say something else." The *peshet* certainly says something other than what the text interpreted appears to say.

17. IQpHab 7.1-6.

18. IQS 11.17-19.

19. IQS 4.4-6, *Study Edition*.

20. IQS 4.6, *Study Edition*.

21. IQS 11.7.

22. IQS 5.11-2.

23. Thomas, "Mysteries," 67.

24. N. Wieder, "The 'Law-Interpreter' of the Sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Second Moses," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (1953): 171.

25. IQS 9.16-20.

26. IQ Myst 3-4.

27. 4Q Myst, Frag. 3.

28. Collins, *Mark*, 249.

29. IQpHab 2.1-10.

30. IQS 11.3-4.

31. IQS 4.18-20.

32. IQS 4.22-23.

33. IQH 10.13, Vermes. The word translated, *melits*, is used of the interpreter through whom Joseph spoke, presumably in Egyptian, to his brothers, who did not recognize him or realize he understood their Hebrew. It is related to *melitsah*, an enigmatic saying.

34. IQH 10.13. "The translation 'like a wise shower [*sic*] of secret wonders' is an attempt to get the flavor of the Hebrew poetry. 'melits' is not used alone, but in a construct chain with 'da'at' and I think that what the Hebrew text tries to say is that the protagonist has been put as someone who helps the elected to understand the wonderful mysteries pouring knowledge (upon then). In The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition, where the translation is facing the original Hebrew, and requires a more literal translation, I have translated the expression: 'like a knowledgeable mediator of secret wonders,' using 'mediator' which is a good equivalent of 'melits.' In the latest edition on DJD, the translation by Carol Newsom reads: 'an expert interpreter of wonderful mysteries.' (on this edition

the text is X 15)." Personal correspondence from Florentino García Martínez, June 18, 2011. Used by permission.

35. 1QH 10.14.

36. CD 4.17. Hans Kosmala, "The Three Nets of Belial: A Study in the Terminology of Qumran and the New Testament," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 4 (1965): 109-11, following the suggestion of Jean Carmignac.

37. *War* 2.8.6 (136).

38. 1QS 9.18-19, *Study Edition*.

39. Thomas, "Mysteries," 44.

40. Thomas, "Mysteries," 45.

41. 1QS 6.6-8.

42. Gerhard Schneider, "Das Bildwort von der Lampe: zur Traditions-geschichte eines Jesus-Wortes," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 61 (1970): 189-90, n. 29.

43. "Das Überstülpen des Scheffels über das Lämpchen erfolgt also, um das Licht auszulöschen." Joachim Jeremias, "Die Lampe unter dem Scheffel," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 39 (1940): 237-40. Jeremias cites Talmudic passages which allow this method of extinguishing the lamp without violating Sabbath laws. He argues that the practical advantages support everyday use. Guelich, *Mark*, 229, does not find this convincing, but fails to refute it.

44. Boring, *Mark*, 135, acknowledges that the lamp could be put out under a bowl, but "there seems to be no reason to place a lamp under a bed." He does not consider doing so as a night light. Gundry, *Mark*, 214, thinks that putting the lamp under the "peck-measure" is not meant to extinguish it but to hide it because putting under the bed would not extinguish it.

45. Wieder, "Law-Interpreter," 173.

46. 1QS 6.8-11.

47. 1QS 7.11-12.

48. 1QS 6.25-27.

49. *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 12.81-82.

50. *War* 2.8.5 (132).

51. 1QS 5.23-25.

52. 1QpHab 7.

53. Marcus, *Mark* 1-8,328, notes that "This description is similar to what is described in several Jewish apocalyptic texts," giving citations.

54. 1QpHab 7.10-14.

55. De Vaux, *Archeology*, 86, estimates a population of 200 based on the graveyard. G. Theissen, "'Wir haben alles verlass' (Mc. X 28) *Nachfolge und soziale Entwurzelung in der jüdisch-palästinischen Gesellschaft des 1. Jahrhunderts n.Ch.*," *Novum Testamentum* 19, n.3 (1977): 174, puts the number at 150.

56. 1QH 14.15-17.

57. 1QH 19.9-10.

58. *Ant.* 15.5.2 (121-2).

59. *seismos megas egeneto en tē thalassē*, "a great earthquake arose in the sea" (Matt 8:24).

60. Boring, *Mark*, 145, notes the boat as a symbol of the church. See also Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 29; Justin, *I Apology* 55; Origen, *On Matthew*, Homily 6; Tertullian, *On Baptism* 12; Clement of Alexandria, *Salvation of the Rich Man* 34.3.

61. 1QH 14.23-4.

62. 1QH 10.16.

63. The Damascus Documents refers to "the day of the gathering in of the unique teacher" (CD 20.13-4).

64. CD 6.7; 7.18-9.

65. 4Q521.



## Chapter Five

# Exile to the Land of Damascus

*I know how men in exile feed on dreams of hope.*

*Aeschylus. Agamemnon*

Having established the Essenic community at Qumran, Mark now discusses a missionary outreach which will bring Essenic theology to a wider audience. In the opening phase of the Outreach Cycle, Mark will describe their encounter with pagan culture. Following the earthquake which destroyed the settlement at Qumran, the Essenes were forced to live elsewhere. Mark now describes the time of their exile.

### THE LAND OF DAMASCUS      MARK 5:1

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

In 1896 British Rabbi Solomon Schechter discovered a wealth of medieval documents in the *genizah*, or storeroom, attached to a synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. Among the documents was a book known as the *Damascus Document*, so-called because it refers to an "exile to the land of Damascus." Fragments of this document were found at Qumran. The book found by Schechter was a medieval copy of this ancient document, which is, therefore, considered one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We already have seen how the Damascus Document describes the rise of the Teacher of Righteousness, and we will now examine this exile.

From Mark's placement of this episode, it appears that the exile to the land of Damascus followed the earthquake of 31 B.C., the "Seismic Storm" as he described it. That the exile to the land of Damascus did, indeed, occur at this time is supported by references in the Damascus Document itself. The exile is said to occur "at the time of desolation of the land" and that "the land was ravaged,"<sup>1</sup> a rather straightforward description of the devastating earthquake described by Josephus. It is also a time when "removers of the bound who led Isra-

el astray,"<sup>2</sup> a reference to Herod's expansionist campaign against the Arab kingdom of Nabatea, which was going on when the earthquake struck. The author of the Damascus Document apparently attributes this natural calamity to the wrath of God at those who "preached rebellion against the commandments of God."<sup>3</sup> The exile is also mentioned in the context of a discussion of the prohibition against a prince marrying more than one wife.<sup>4</sup> None of the Hasmoneans married more than once. Herod, however, had ten wives, one after another. This serial polygamy is what is condemned in the Damascus Document. Also, the prohibition on marrying a nephew (Lev 18:13), is extended to the marriage of nieces.<sup>5</sup> Herod, of course, married his niece. Hence, it seems likely that the exile to the land of Damascus occurred during the reign of Herod. This was the view taken by Charles Fritsch, an early scroll scholar at Princeton.

The only possible time that this mass movement from Qumran could have taken place was during the reign of Herod the Great, when, according to the present interpretation of the archeological evidence, the site was abandoned. Both textual and archeological evidence therefore seem to point to the conclusion that the Damascus migration of the Essene Community at Qumran took place during the reign of Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.).<sup>6</sup>

Although many scholars think the Damascus Document refers to the exile *to* Qumran, it seems more likely that it was an exile *from* Qumran. The Damascus Document says clearly that they "left the land of Judah and lived in the land of Damascus."<sup>7</sup> Qumran, of course, is in the land of Judah. The Essenes must have left Judea and gone elsewhere. There is no reason to think that the "land of Judah" means the land of conventional Judaism. There is also no reason to think that they went to the city of Damascus, either. The text plainly says the "land of Damascus," which, on the other hand, need not mean Syria. What is needed is a land in some way associated with Damascus.

Mark says that "Jesus" crosses the sea, which we understand to be the Dead Sea, not the Sea of Galilee, to the "country of the Gerasenes." Gerasa was a city located in the region across the Jordan River, northeast of Qumran. This would be a plausible place for the Essenes to migrate to. The Damascus Document itself says that "those who remained steadfast escaped to the land of the north."<sup>8</sup> This is followed by a reference to Damascus.<sup>9</sup> Gerasa was one of the cities of the Decapolis, a group of ten cities, which were heavily influenced by Greek culture.<sup>10</sup> Although farther to the north than the other cities, Damascus was listed as one of the cities of the Decapolis by Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy.<sup>11</sup> The author of the Damascus document wanted to call this the land of Damascus in order to take advantage of the prophecy in Amos. "I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD," (Amos 5:27). He reads "beyond Damascus" as "to Damascus", then interprets it loosely as the "land of Damascus," and thereby explains the exile to the Decapolis as divinely ordained.<sup>12</sup>

Mark may be playing with words in choosing "country of the Gerasenes" to refer to this region. The name Gerasa, modern day Jerash, may be related to the

Hebrew word *garesh*, to drive out, expel, said of Pharaoh driving out the Israelites (Exod 6:1) and the Israelites driving out the Canaanites (Exod 34:11).<sup>13</sup> Hence, Mark may be thinking of the exiles from Qumran driven out of Judea. He also may be playing on *ger*, which means sojourner, or resident alien.

The alien [*ger*] who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God (Lev 19:34).

Here it is the Essenes who were the alien sojourners. This term also came to mean proselyte, a convert to Judaism, and that may be what Mark is thinking of as well, as we shall see. Finally, Gerasa was one city in the Decapolis which the Romans did not give to Herod the Great, and the Essenes may have settled there to escape him. For any or all of these reasons, Mark's "country of the Gerasesnes" may be the "land of Damascus."<sup>14</sup>

Who, then, is "Jesus?" The Damascus Document identifies the leader of the Essenes in exile as the "Interpreter of the Law." Based on an Old Testament prophecy (Num 21:18), "the converts of Israel, who left the land of Judah and lived in the land of Damascus" are led by the "staff" by which they dug the well of the law. "And the staff is the interpreter of the law."<sup>15</sup> Quoting another verse, "A star moves out of Jacob, and a scepter arises out of Israel" (Num 24:13), the author concludes that "the star is the Interpreter of the law, who will come to Damascus."<sup>16</sup> His second in command also is identified. "The scepter is the prince of the whole congregation."<sup>17</sup> This is the title we saw previously implied in "prince of demons" (Mark 3:22).

## A LEGION OF DEMONS

## MARK 5:2-13

And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

What is remarkable here is that unclean is heaped upon unclean. This is first of all Gentile territory, and hence inherently unclean (Ezra 9:11). The man is possessed by an unclean spirit and dwells among the ritually unclean tombs, contaminated by death (Num 19:10b-22). The unclean spirits are sent into the unclean swine and are destroyed (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). Clearly, Jesus is depicted as overcoming what is ritually unclean. The scene recalls Isaiah's description of people "who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh" (Isa 65:4). The unclean spirit which possesses the man is "Legion" because "we are many," a clear allusion to Roman polytheism. Here, as elsewhere in Mark, demons are false gods. "What have you to do with me," echoes the devil gods of Canaan in Mark 1:24, whom Joshua confronted. The Decapolis was ethnically semitic, albeit with an overlay of Greco-Roman culture. Gerasa was conquered by Alexander Jannaeus<sup>18</sup> and remained a Hasmonean city until taken by Pompey. It had a large Jewish population. The Gerasene demoniac may represent pagans or apostate Jews. Either way, a legion of false gods possessed him. The title, "Son of the Most High God," reflected the pagan belief in Zeus as the most high god, and meant that Jesus was a "son of Zeus."<sup>19</sup> The exorcism of the demoniac very likely represents a conversion by the Essenes of pagans or paganized Jews or both. The Community Rule, which governed life at Qumran, listed three classes of members: priests, levites, and Israelites. The Damascus Document adds a fourth class: proselytes.<sup>20</sup> Hence, in this unclean, pagan region, the exiled Essenes may well have added converts as members.

## LEFT BEHIND      MARK 5:14-20

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

We may perhaps conclude from this that the converts were not allowed to return with the Essenes to Qumran. If the members were to live under the Community Rule when they returned to the settlement, there would be no room for the *ger*, proselyte. Epiphanius, writing in the Fourth Century, says of the "Ossene" sect that, "Even today there are still remnants of it in Nabataea, which is also called Peraea near Moabitis..."<sup>21</sup> It is interesting, also, to find later references to this region in connection with Jewish Christianity. Legend has it that Christians fled Jerusalem before the Roman siege and took refuge in Pella. The Jewish Christian sects known as Ebionites and Nazarenes were found in this area.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps

the remnants of the Essenic mission developed into what came to be known as Jewish Christianity.

The Damascus Document describes a liberalized version of the Community Rule. Josephus refers to "another order of Essenes" which allows marriage for the purpose of procreation, as specified in the Damascus Document for those who "reside in the camps."<sup>23</sup> Instead of holding property in common, the members donate two days wages a month to be used for charitable purposes.<sup>24</sup> Slavery is not prohibited. The Document refers to members living in "camps," in groups of ten headed by a priest, and organized into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.<sup>25</sup> A reasonable analysis is that the Damascus Document represents a mode of community living better adapted to life in the mixed cultural region of the Decapolis away from the monastic isolation of the Qumran settlement. Perhaps those left behind continued to live under this rule of life and recruited others, "proclaiming in the Decapolis." This liberalized rule would later provide the basis for a missionary outreach movement in Judea, as well shall see.

## THE RETURN FROM EXILE      MARK 5:21

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

The return of the Essenes from their Exile to the Land of Damascus can be dated to sometime shortly after the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.<sup>26</sup> They repaired the damage caused by the earthquake decades before, reoccupied the settlement at Qumran, and resumed their former lifestyle. It is clear that the earthquake alone, Mark's "seismic storm," could not account for their 30-year absence. The most likely reason for the Herodian hiatus was Herod.

From what we know of Herod's character and actions, we may be sure that he had little sympathy with the moral principles and messianic hopes of the Essenic group that lived a few miles from his luxurious palace in Jericho. Their strict disciplinary life and high standards of conduct must have been a constant rebuke to his ungovernable passion and sensuality.<sup>27</sup>

Herod was an Idumean by birth, not a Jew. Only the forced conversion of the Idumeans by John Hyrcanus a century before made Herod even superficially an adherent of the Jewish religion. He held power as a client king of Rome and supported pagan culture. He was hated by the Pharisees, who were not as extreme even in their pietism as the Essenes. It seems inconceivable that the Essenes would find favor with him or he with them. However, Josephus does report that an Essene had predicted that Herod would be king while he was still a child and that as a result, he honored the Essenes.<sup>28</sup> This story appears legendary

and an attempt on the part of Josephus to depict the Essenes in a favorable light to the Romans, who supported Herod. The Damascus Document condemns "those who despised the covenant {of God} and the pact which they established in the land of Damascus" and "the men of war who turned back with the man of lies."<sup>29</sup> These may be the Essenes who supported Herod.

After describing Herod's death, Josephus gives what is hardly a eulogy: "A man he was of great barbarity towards all men equally, and a slave to his passions; but above the consideration of what was right."<sup>30</sup> Mark dramatizes the pitiful condition of Israel after years of Herod's tyrannical reign. He borrows an image from the same chapter of Amos used in the Damascus Document to refer to the exile. "Fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel; forsaken on her land, with no one to raise her up" (Amos 5:2). This is the little daughter of the synagogue leader, representative of established authority, who is close to death. "Jesus," the true cause of Israel's salvation, depicted as accompanying the return of the Essenes from exile, is called upon to save her.

## THE DAUGHTER OF JERUSALEM      MARK 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Mark describes Jerusalem, as a daughter with a similar fate.<sup>31</sup> This image appears in the prophets.

The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes" (Isa 62:11).

They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken" (Isa 62:12).

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Should aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! (Zech 9:9).<sup>32</sup>

Mark depicts her as suffering from abnormal menstruation, which makes her ritually unclean (Lev 15:25-30).<sup>33</sup> Isaiah likewise depicts a bloody image when "once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed

the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning" (Isa 4:4). Clearly, Jerusalem has been defiled by Herod's bloody reign of terror. He killed the remaining members of the Hasmonean family who could rival him, as well as 45 members of the Sanhedrin who supported them. Although Herod married a Hasmonean, Mariamne, he had her executed for adultery. He also killed her mother and their two sons, as well as a son by another wife. The emperor quipped that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son.<sup>34</sup> Herod ordered leading citizens to be killed when he died, so that the nation would not celebrate. Truly, with the death of Herod, and in a spiritual sense, with the return of Essenic Judaism, it may be said to Jerusalem, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

### MAIDEN OF ISRAEL      MARK 5:35-43

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

"Fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel; forsaken on her land, with no one to raise her up," Amos (5:2) lamented. Now, with the return of Essenic salvation in the person of "Jesus," the maiden Israel will arise. "Do not fear, only believe," he assures them. Mark has sandwiched in the story of the healing of the woman with the bloody issue for dramatic effect. Here, as with the woman, keeping the faith during Herod's evil reign has saved them. Now salvation, or "Jesus," urges the father not to fear but to believe that Israel will now be restored. She sleeps the sleep of death, and may be awakened.

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken (Ps 13:3-4).

Since this is the daughter of the synagogue ruler, who represents worship, her revival may further represent the end of the defiled cult under Herod.

The exile to the land of Damascus and the return to the land of Judah forms the opening phase of the Outreach Cycle. It represents the break with the isolation of Qumran and the beginning of an extension of Essenic influence and the salvation movement in general to the people of Israel. In the closing phase we will see how this is carried to fruition.

## NOTES

1. CD 5.20-1, Vermes.

2. CD 5:20, Vermes.

3. CD 5.20, Vermes.

4. CD 5.1-2; Deut 17:17.

5. CD 5:9-11.

6. Charles T. Fritsch, "Herod the Great and the Qumran Community," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 no 3 (1955): 179.

7. CD 6.5.

8. CD 7.13.

9. CD 7.15.

10. Although often referred to as a "league," there is no evidence that the cities were politically organized. S. Thomas Parker, "The Decapolis Reviewed," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 437-41. Mark himself refers to it as a "region" (Mk 7:31). Although originally ten cities, which is what "deccapolis" means, the list grew over time, although the name remained the same.

11. *N.H.* 5.16.74; *Geog.* 5.14, 22.

12. CD 7.14-5.

13. Lawrence M. Wills, "Mark 2.27-28," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69; Bargil Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem: Jesus and Jewish Christianity in Light of Archaeological Discoveries* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 150; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 342.

14. Pixner, *Paths*, 163-65, identifies hiding places in the Copper Scroll in the area of the Jarmuk River, which "corresponds with the 'land of Damascus.'"

15. CD 6.3-7.

16. CD 7.18-20.

17. CD 7.20.

18. *War* 1.4.8 (104).

19. Collins, *Mark*, 268; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Roman," *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 85-100. "Most High," as Gundry observes, "reflects the polytheism of the demoniac and of the pagan territory in which the story takes place." *Mark*, 250. Guelich notes that in the Septuagint the phrase is usually found in a Gentile context. Gen 14:18-20; Num 24:16; Isa 14:14; Dan 3:26, 42. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary 34A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 279. "Hipsistos was a term in use, vague enough to suit any god treated as the supreme being" and "Jewish and Christian writers put it in the mouths of non-Israelites who recognized their God." Colin Roberts, Theodore C. Skeat, Arthur Darby Nock, "The Guild of Zeus Hipsistos," *Harvard Theological Review* 29 (1936): 66.

20. CD 14.4.

21. *Haer.* 19.2.1; 53.1.1.



22. Eusebius, *Hist.* 3.5.3; Epiphanius, *Mens.* 15; *Haer.* 29.7.7–8, 30.2.7.

23. *War* 2.8.12 (160). The account continues at 161. CD 7.6–7.

24. CD 14.12–16.

25. CD 12.22–13.3.

26. De Vaux, *Archeology*, 20–36; Magness, *Archaeology*, 56–58. Her revised chronology, 66–8, which excludes a 30-year abandonment, is not more convincing.

27. Fritsch, "Herod," 179.

28. *Ant.* 15.10.5 (373–9).

29. CD 20.11–15.

30. *Ant.* 17.8.1 (191).

31. Odil Hannes Steck, "Zion als Gelände und Gestalt: Überlegungen zur Wahrnehmung Jerusalems als Stadt und Frau im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 86 (1989): 269–70.

32. See also Isa 10:32; 16:1.

33. Marla J. Selvidge, "Mark 5:25–34 and Leviticus 15:19–20: A Reaction to Restrictive Purity Regulations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 619–23. Although the law of Leviticus seems quite straightforward in this regard, Collins, *Mark*, 283–4, argues that the woman would not be socially isolated, although she concedes that "it is likely that some Jews at the time would have considered her ritually impure; for example, the members of the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls."

34. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4.11.

## *Chapter Six*

# An Appeal to the People

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.*

*Isaiah 9:2*

This is the closing phase of the Outreach Cycle and the final phase in Spreading the Word. Having been shaken out of their separatist isolation by their exile to the Land of Damascus and developing their liberalized rule to deal with a diverse environment, the Essenes will now be part of a salvation movement which brings the message of renewal to a broader audience. This popularization will take various forms. Mark first describes the revolution that broke out following the death of Herod the Great.

### A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR      MARK 6:1-6

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

This story recalls Joshua as "Jesus" casting out the demons of pagan worship in Mark 1:21-8. Here, too, he teaches in the synagogue. Here, too, people are amazed at his teaching. Their reaction, however, was completely different. The role of "Jesus" is now played by a man known to history as Judah the Galilean,

who now, in the power vacuum following Herod's death, attempts to lead a popular revolt.

In Sepphoris also, a city of Galilee, there was one Judas (the son of that arch robber Hezekias, who formerly overran the country, and had been subdued by king Herod); this man got no small multitude together, and broke open the place where the royal armor was laid up, and armed those about him, and attacked those that were so earnest to gain the dominion.<sup>1</sup>

There was also Judas, the son of that Ezekias who had been head of the robbers; which Ezekias was a very strong man, and had with great difficulty been caught by Herod. This Judas having gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character about Sepphoris in Galilee, and made an assault upon the palace [there], and seized upon all the weapons that were laid up in it, and with them armed every one of those that were with him, and carried away what money was left there; and he became terrible to all men, by tearing and rending those that came near him: and all this in order to raise himself, and out of an ambitious desire of the royal dignity; and he hoped to obtain that as the reward, not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries.<sup>2</sup>

It is this Judah the Galilean who, in the person of Jesus, returns to his home country (not necessarily "hometown"),<sup>3</sup> Galilee, and attempts to rally the people, with but little success. He was only able to work a few minor military miracles, or "deeds of power," and was amazed at the lack of faith of the local people in his leadership. He was truly a "prophet without honor."<sup>4</sup> He is called a "carpenter" or "craftsman," *tekton*, which in Aramaic, *nagger*, was used to mean a "scholar" or "learned man."<sup>5</sup> He then went around the villages teaching his revolutionary ideology.

This is believed to be the same Judah who revolted ten years later, after Archelaus, Herod's son, was deposed and Judea became a Roman province. Coponius was appointed procurator and conducted a census for the purpose of taxation.

Under his administration it was that a certain Galilean, whose name was Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt; and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords. This man was a teacher of a peculiar sect of his own, and was not at all like the rest of those their leaders.<sup>6</sup>

Josephus again refers to Judah, "that was called the Galilean (who was a very cunning sophister, and had formerly reproached the Jews under Cyrenius, that after God they were subject to the Romans)."<sup>7</sup> Cyrenius, or Quirinius, was governor of Syria. Judah, along with a Pharisee named Sadduc, "became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty."<sup>8</sup> We read about him also in the Book of Acts. "Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of

the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered" (Acts 5:37).

After describing the three main Jewish sects, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, Josephus says,

But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord.<sup>9</sup>

This "Fourth Philosophy" Josephus blames for leading to the later disastrous war with Rome, the main subject of Mark's messiah myth.<sup>10</sup>

## MISSION TO THE MASSES

## MARK 6:7-13

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Having returned from the Land of Damascus where they developed their liberalized rule, more suited to life in society, the Essenes now embark on their own missionary outreach, not a military mission like Judah the Galilean, but an attempt to bring their message of renewal to the people at large. Mark describes how they sent out missionaries to recruit new members, who would live throughout the country and support the community at Qumran. In Christian terms, they would be called associates or tertiaries or confraters. Unlike the "professed monks" at Qumran, who were celibate ascetics, these associate members lived a more secular lifestyle, including marriage, and contributed two days wages monthly rather than holding goods in common. Josephus gives us the following account of the Essenes, immediately after describing Judah the Galilean:

They have no certain city but many of them dwell in every city; and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go into such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and to provide garments and other necessaries for them.<sup>11</sup>

Note that Josephus makes a point of saying the Essenes "have no certain city" but "dwell in every city." He seems to be correcting a misconception that the Essene community is limited to the settlement at Qumran, which is understandable if this popular recruitment was a new development in their history. Philo also says that the Essenes live in "many cities of Judaea and many villages."<sup>12</sup> While we cannot point to a specific place in the Scrolls where a missionary outreach movement is mentioned, it stands to reason that if there were Essenes in every city of Judea, there must have been some kind of recruitment effort to accomplish that. That is what Mark is describing.

They shook off the dust of their feet, a practice of the Jews when returning from unclean Gentile territory, because to the Essenes those who would not accept their lifestyle were no better than pagans. The missionaries cast out many demons of false religion and healed many of their spiritual infirmity.

### THE DEATH OF JOHN                      MARK 6:14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Josephus describes the death of John in more realistic, political terms. He first attributes Herod's defeat in battle "as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the *Baptist*; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one

another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism."<sup>13</sup> Josephus makes clear that it was the potential for popular revolution which led to John's death.

Now, when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure against him.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, Mark describes John's death, in his own creative terms, to show the dangers of revolutionary renewal. An appeal to the people to repent and reform ultimately threatens those in authority. Mark constructs his tale of court intrigue from several sources. He sees John as a latter-day Elijah, who was opposed by Ahab, the king, and his queen Jezebel. She tries to kill him (1 Kgs 18:13; 19:1-2). The dancing princess is derived from Esther (1:3, 19; 2:12-8; 9:25). A rabbinical commentary on Esther has a head served up on a platter.<sup>15</sup> Mark's account of John's death and that of Josephus are not necessarily inconsistent. As Lane notes, "John's proclamation of the unlawfulness of Herod's adulterous union could be interpreted as a call to insurrection which threatened the tetrarch from within his province."<sup>16</sup>

Mark began his Gospel with John baptizing in the wilderness in the time frame of the Gospel itself, *i.e.*, in present time. John was alone; there was no Jesus with him. Mark then morphed John into Moses when he takes us on a trip back in time to the Exodus. Mark next progressed chronologically through centuries of history and has brought us again to present time, the time in which the events of the Gospel supposedly are taking place, the pivot point in the narrative where the timelines cross. This is when both John and Jesus should be active. Here we would expect Jesus to emerge in stark relief. We could then see how Mark viewed Jesus. If he had Jesus work a miracle, he would be primarily a wonderworker; if he had Jesus teach, he would be a teacher, and so forth. Instead, Jesus disappears from the scene entirely, and we again have a story of John alone. Mark lets John be John, but does not let Jesus be Jesus. Mark uses John as the pivotal figure in his messiah myth, not Jesus. It is hard to escape the conclusion that for Mark, John was an historical character, while Jesus is simply a literary device that Mark uses to represent savior figures before and after John. As we continue with the story, Jesus will reemerge to represent subsequent events in the history of salvation.

The death of John marks the end of the John Period, framed by stories of his baptizing and his death. This is also the Pre-War Period, before the Great Revolt against Rome. All of this in past time. The next two periods, two thirds of

Mark's Gospel, will allegorize events after the time in which the Gospel is set, and will depict the travail of the war years. John's fate as a messenger of salvation will foreshadow the fate of salvation itself, that is, of "Jesus." This phase of Mark's Gospel closes the Outreach Cycle. The change in outlook of the Essenes which occurred as a result of their Exile to the Land of Damascus, carries over into their Mission to the Masses. The popularization of their movement was related to the efforts of John likewise to bring the message of salvation to the people, with the price he paid for it. Along with Judah the Galilean, they were attempting to appeal to the people. This phase of the Gospel also brings the series on Spreading the Word to a close. Beginning with the Teacher of Righteousness expounding the mysteries of the kingdom, through the exile and return, through the attempts at popularization in this phase, Mark has told us how important it is to explain a spiritual message in terms people can understand. At first the message was limited to insiders, but over the course of time, it was brought to a wider audience. That is the point Mark is making.

## NOTES

1. *War* 2.4.1 (56).
2. *War* 17.10.5 (271-2).
3. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 788-9.
4. The saying is proverbial. Dio Chrys. 30 [47].
5. Vermes, *Jesus*, 21.
6. *War* 2.8.1 (118).
7. *War* 2.17.8 (433); *Ant.* 20.5.2 (102). In another passage, Josephus refers to Judah as "a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala." *War* 18.1.1 (4). Either Josephus is including Gaulonitis, today's Golan Heights, in a greater Galilee, or he is confusing the Gamala there with the Gamala in Galilee proper.
8. *Ant.* 18.1.1 (4).
9. *Ant.* 18.1.6 (23).
10. *Ant.* 18.1.6 (25).
11. *War* 2.8.4 (124-5). The similarity between the Essenes and the mission in Mark is frequently noted. Collins, *Mark*, 298-9; Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 169..
12. *Apologia pro Judaeis* in Eusebius *Præparatio Evangelica* 8.11.1.
13. *Ant.* 18.5.116-7).
14. *Ant.* 18.5.2 (118-9).
15. Midr. Esther 1:19-21; Boring, *Mark*, 178.
16. Lane, *Mark*, 216.

## *Chapter Seven*

# The Saints Assemble

*Gather my saints together unto me.*

*Psalm 50:5 KJV*

Mark now begins a new period, following the death of John. Episodes in the messiah myth now will refer to events which occurred after John and will extend for several decades after that. Here "Jesus" no longer acts in the shadow of John. He has gained his independence, which will continue until he enters Jerusalem. The first half of this Independence Period is the Assembly Series. Here the saints will assemble not once, but twice. In the opening phase of this cycle, the Gathering in Galilee, the missionaries sent out to spread the word will now return for their annual assembly.

### ASSEMBLY OF THE SAINTS

### MARK 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the



people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

The missionaries, or "apostles," which literally means "those sent out,"<sup>1</sup> report back. Mark gives a picturesque portrait of the associates recruited by the Essenic missionaries, a "great crowd," joining the professed members in a kind of retreat or camp meeting at Qumran, the "boat" in the "deserted place," hurrying to assemble from all the towns where Essenic branches had been founded. The Scrolls refer to a Covenant renewal ceremony which took place every year. The Community Rule describes it:

They shall act in this way year after year, all the days of Belial's dominion. The priests shall enter the Rule foremost, one behind the other, according to their spirits. And the levites shall enter after them. In third place all the people shall enter the Rule, one after another, in thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, so that all the children of Israel may know their standing in God's Community in conformity with the eternal plan.<sup>2</sup>

The Rule of the Congregation or Messianic Rule refers to the "chiefs of the Thousands, [Hundreds,] Fifties, and Tens."<sup>3</sup> This formula is found in the War Scroll<sup>4</sup> and the Temple Scroll.<sup>5</sup> This organization is based on the Bible. "Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundred, fifties, and tens" (Exod 18:25).<sup>6</sup>

The Damascus Document also describes the order as being organized along these lines:

And this is the rule of the assembly [of the ca]mps. Those who walk in them, in the time of wickedness until there arises the messiah of Aaron and Israel, they shall be ten in number as a minimum to (form) thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.<sup>7</sup>

Collins draws the following conclusion: "This passage suggests that the eschatological community, living already in the last days, was to be organized in groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens while they were awaiting the messiah(s)."<sup>8</sup> Joel Marcus also observes that this exodus ordering implies "that the communal life of the sect foreshadows the life of the new age."<sup>9</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Mark has the people sit down in "hundreds and fifties." That is the way the Essenes were organized and the way they assembled. They sat in *symposia*, dinner parties, arranged in rows like *prasiai*, garden plots. The "green grass" in the "deserted place" or wilderness in the context of Qumran is not hard to identify. South of the Qumran plateau is a broad expanse of green grass watered by numerous small springs and the oasis at Ain Feshka a mile away.<sup>10</sup> This is the only vegetation in this otherwise desolate locale. If thousands of members returned to the mother house, what would be more natural than to have them sit down in order on the green grass? Both Philo and Josephus estimate the number of Essenes at more than 4,000,<sup>11</sup> which is consistent with the 5,000 who assem-

ble here. The missionary outreach apparently has succeeded in recruiting thousands of members, who live throughout the country, most likely under the less stringent rule of the Damascus Document.

The difficulty of provisioning thousands of men in the wilderness, no doubt, is reflected in Mark's miraculous feeding. Thousands of loaves of bread and thousands of dried fish would have to be prepared to feed these thousand of associates assembled at Qumran every year. The dilemma recalls Moses asking how he would feed the people in the wilderness (Num 11:13, 22). They are nourished by manna from heaven (Exod 16:4, 12). Mark imaginatively depicts this as a miraculous feeding modeled on Elisha's miraculous feeding of a hundred people (2 Kings 4:42-4) and Elijah's increase in the meal and oil (1 Kings 17:8-16). As the Psalmist said, "He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant" (Ps 111:5).

The annual assembly was held at Pentecost, which, according to the Essene calendar, fell on Sunday, the fifteenth day of the third month. The first month was in Spring, so that Pentecost came in early Summer. "The sons of Levi and the men of the camps will meet in the third month."<sup>12</sup> The theological basis is found in the Book of Jubilees, which states that "it has been ordained and written on the heavenly tablets that they should celebrate the festival of weeks during this month—once a year—to renew the covenant each and every year" (Jub 6:17-18). The feast of Pentecost had been celebrated in heaven from the time of creation. The Israelites had forgotten it until God renewed it at Mt. Sinai.<sup>13</sup> VanderKam concludes that "the Qumran fellowship and other groups in the wider Essene movement renewed the covenant on the same holiday as the one to which *Jubilees* assigns the great biblical covenants."<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the disciples mention 200 denarii as the price of feeding the multitude. A denarius was the going rate for a day of labor (Matt 20:2, 9, 13). According to the Essenic calendar, there were 200 working days between Rosh HaShana, the New Year's celebration in the Fall, and Pentecost in Summer.<sup>15</sup> This is Mark's way of giving us a calendar clue for the date of the "miraculous" feeding.<sup>16</sup>

Immediately following the Rule of the Assembly of the Camps, the Damascus Document provides for their instruction:

And this is the rule of the Inspector of the camp. He shall instruct the Many in the deeds of God, and shall teach them his mighty marvels, and recount to them the eternal events with their solutions. He shall have pity on them like a father on his sons, and will heal all the strays (?) like a shepherd his flock.<sup>17</sup>

Collins remarks cogently: "The similarities between this passage and the context of the feeding of the crowd in Mark 6 are striking. Like the Inspector, Jesus teaches the crowd (v. 34c) and has pity on them (v. 34b)."<sup>18</sup> "Jesus," who thus represents the Inspector Over All the Camps, the head of the Essenic Order, teaches them "many things" about the course of events. This is the first assembly of the Essenes, in early summer of the year 67, after the beginning of the war

with Rome in late summer of the previous year. At this time the Jews were successful in their military operations. Hence, the upbeat tone of this episode. Mark, however, may be expressing skepticism about the leadership of the Jewish provisional government. "The phrase 'sheep without a shepherd' means, according to Old Testament usage, not a congregation without a leader, but 'an army without a general, a nation without a national leader.'"<sup>19</sup> Hence, the reference to "sheep without a shepherd," which recalls Ezekiel's criticism of Israel's leaders.

Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? (Ezek 34:2)

You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord GOD (Ezek 34:31).

The Inspector, "Jesus," looks up into the heavens in search of signs of inspiration. The five loaves may suggest the five known planets, the two fish the two luminaries, sun and moon. The Horoscope Scroll<sup>20</sup> shows the Essenes' interest in astrology. Josephus describes the Essenes' ability to foretell the future,<sup>21</sup> in this case, the outcome of the war. The War Scroll describes an apocalyptic war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.<sup>22</sup> In the final battle, the Sons of Light are victorious, righteousness vindicated. This, no doubt, is the sermon topic for the day. The reference to twelve baskets of leftovers is interesting. It may suggest the ill-starred fate of the Twelfth Legion, which was sent to quell the rebellion. After first besieging Jerusalem, the commander, Cestius Gallus, Governor of Syria, inexplicably retreated from the city, was cut off at that pass at Beth-Horan and was defeated.<sup>23</sup> This was seen, of course, as a good omen for the successful outcome of the war. Unfortunately for the Jews, it was not to be.

## RITE OF PASSAGE                      MARK 6:45-52

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Josephus tells us how the Essenes observed the predawn morning:

And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary; for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which

they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising.<sup>24</sup>

Following a year as a postulant, whose only contact was with the Inspector, during which time he demonstrated his willingness to live according to their lifestyle, the new novice "takes part in the purer waters of sanctification."<sup>25</sup> Although the Essenes practiced ritual immersion twice a day before their meal in common, there was something distinctive about this first immersion. "What distinguished the initiatory immersion from those of the community's daily life was the ceremonial aspect as the initiatory immersions were witnessed and acknowledged by the entire community."<sup>26</sup> Among the Scrolls is a Baptismal Liturgy.<sup>27</sup> "Liturgies are effective means of promoting a shared understanding of group membership."<sup>28</sup> This initiatory immersion, or baptism, was part of the covenant renewal ceremony at Pentecost for which the multitude had assembled. That is why it follows the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark, after the crowd has been dismissed.

The Qumran complex contains a number of immersion pools. Special prominence may be attached to stepped pool, or baptistry, surrounded by a settlement basin where the aqueduct enters the complex.<sup>29</sup> This basin allowed silt to settle out so that pure water could be skimmed off the top and poured into the baptistry, the "purer waters" Josephus spoke of. "Concerning purification with water," the Damascus Document says, "No-one should bathe in water which is dirty."<sup>30</sup> This would make an appropriate place to initiate new members. Mark depicts the neophyte disciples waiting in the monastic boat, struggling with their understandable anxiety, while the Inspector, or "Jesus," prays. He crosses over the footbridge to the baptistry.<sup>31</sup> In his white robe in the early morning light, he looks like a ghost walking on the water. Their anxiety died down like the wind.

## THE GARDEN OF ASSEMBLY      MARK 6:53-56

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Mark may be using the term Gennesaret as a play on the Hebrew *gan atseret*, garden of assembly. The term *Atseret* itself was used to mean Pentecost.<sup>32</sup> It is also the term used in the scrolls for the council of full members.<sup>33</sup> Adjacent to the settling basin in which the baptistry is located is a courtyard where a large crowd could gather.<sup>34</sup> This may be Mark's "garden of assembly." It would make a good vantage point for the members of the community to observe the baptismal ceremony. Here people are depicted as healed of their spiritual infirmities by the Essenes' ministry. This brings the opening phase of the Gathering in

Galilee to an end. Next Mark will explore the conflict between the lifestyle of the Essenes with that of the rival Pharisees.

## NOTES

1. The Greek word for "send out" is *apostellein*.
2. IQS 2.19–23.
3. IQSa (=IQ28a) 1.27–2.1; 1:14–15, Vermes.
4. IQM 4.1ff; 4Q491, Frags. 1–3 = M<sup>a</sup>.
5. 11QT 57.1–5.
6. See also Num 31:14.
7. CD 12.22–13.2.
8. Collins, *Mark*, 325.
9. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 409.
10. De Vaux, *Archeology*, 60.
11. *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 12.75; *Ant.* 18.1.5 (20).
12. 4QD<sup>b-c</sup> Frag. 18, 5.16–7; 4QD<sup>f</sup> Frag. 11, 2.11.
13. James C. VanderKam, "Covenant and Pentecost," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 241–2.
14. VanderKam, "Covenant," 244.
15. Omit as non-working days: Sabbaths, quarter days, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, omer waiving. Working days by month: 7<sup>th</sup> 27, 8<sup>th</sup> 25, 9<sup>th</sup> 27, 10<sup>th</sup> 26, 11<sup>th</sup> 25, 12<sup>th</sup> 27, 1<sup>st</sup> 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> 24, 3<sup>rd</sup> 12 = 200.
16. NIV "eight months of a man's wages." Although the months are numbered beginning in Spring, New Year's is celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. Hence, Pentecost in the third month will, indeed, fall eight months later.
17. CD 13.7–9.
18. Collins, *Mark*, 325.
19. Hugh Montefiore, "Revolt in the Desert?" *New Testament Studies* 8 (1960/62): 136.
20. 4Q Horoscope = 4Q Cryptic = 4Q186.
21. *War* 2.8.12 (159).
22. IQM = IQ33.
23. *War* 2.18.11 (510); 2.19.7–9 (540–555).
24. *War* 2.8.5 (128). The same thing is found in Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.16.
25. *War* 2.8.7 (138) *katharōterōn tōn pros hagneian hydatōn metalambanei*. Whiston fails to translate *katharōterōn*, which means "purer" or "cleaner."
26. Stephen J. Pfann, "The Essene Yearly Renewal Ceremony and the Baptism of Repentance," in D. Parry and E. Ulrichs, ed., *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 336–52.
27. 4Q414.
28. Jutta Jokranta, "An Experiment on *Idem* Identity in the Qumran Movement," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 16 (2009): 325.
29. DeVaux, *Archeology*, plate XXXIX, loci 138, 137, 132.
30. CD 10.10–11.
31. DeVaux, *Archeology*, 9, refers to a "gangway linking it to the main courtyard, 135."

32. Bent Noack, "The Day of Pentecost in Jubilees, Qumran, and Acts," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 1 (1962): 77. Josephus used the equivalent Aramaic term *Asartha*. Ant. 3.10.6 (252).

33. See, e.g., IQS 1.8, 10. *Atsarat el*, council of God; IQS 3.2 *atsarat yahad*, council of the community.

34. DeVaux, *Archeology*, 9; Plate XXXIX, locus 135.

## *Chapter Eight*

# Sectarian Strife

*In strife who inquires whether stratagem or courage was used?  
Virgil*

In this closing phase of the Gathering in Galilee cycle, Mark dramatizes the conflict between the Essenes and their more moderate, or compromising, brother Pietists. The debate with the Pharisees centers on two issues, ritual washing and toilet habits. This reflects the gifts which were given to postulants when they first joined the Essenes.

But now if any one hath a mind to come over to their sect, he is not immediately admitted, but he is prescribed the same method of living which they use for a year, while he continues excluded; and they give him also a small hatchet, and the fore-mentioned girdle, and the white garment.<sup>1</sup>

The hatchet is used to dig a latrine; the "girdle," or loin cloth, is worn when performing a ritual immersion. Mark has "Jesus" contrast the Essenes' rigor with the Pharisees' temporizing.

### SEEKING AFTER SMOOTH THINGS

### MARK 7:1-8

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human

precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

In the Scrolls the Pharisees are referred to as the "seekers after smooth things,"<sup>2</sup> *khalaqot*, a play on words because a similar sounding phrase in Hebrew means "interpreters of traditions," or *halachot*, which Mark calls the "tradition of the elders."<sup>3</sup> "Smooth things" implies false interpretations of Torah. "And they, teachers of lies and seers of falsehood, have schemed against me a devilish scheme, to exchange the Law engraved on my heart by Thee for the smooth things (which they speak) to Thy people."<sup>4</sup>

According to Pharisaic doctrine, there was an Oral Law which was transmitted to Moses along with the Written Law, the Torah.<sup>5</sup> This Oral Law was handed down through the generations of scholars and had equal authority with the Scripture. "Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue."<sup>6</sup> The Essenes rejected this. They had their own source of enlightenment, namely, the esoteric interpretation of Scripture taught to them by the Teacher of Righteousness, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret the words of the prophets.

Both the Essenes and the Pharisees, as we have seen, were descended from the Hasideans, or Pietists, who resisted pagan culture. The Essenes were the extremists, who refused to compromise. The Pharisees, by contrast, were willing to "work within the system," to use a Sixties' expression. Part of pietistic belief was that the ritual practices of the priests in the Temple should be extended to the laity, and to priests who were not serving in the Temple.<sup>7</sup> Moses commanded that the priests wash in a bronze basin before carrying out their priestly duties (Exod 30:17-21; 40:30-33). Hence, ritual washing became a part of Hasidean life.<sup>8</sup> The Essenes, as Josephus tells us, took a full ritual bath before each meal.

[W]hen they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own, into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter; while they go, after a pure manner, into the dining-room, as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down; upon which the baker lays them loaves in order; the cook also brings a single plate of one sort of food, and sets it before every one of them....they return home to supper, after the same manner.<sup>9</sup>

The Damascus Document makes it clear that a full-body immersion was required. "Concerning purification with water. No-one should bathe in water...which is less than the amount which covers a man."<sup>10</sup> The Pharisees, by contrast, washed only their hands before eating.<sup>11</sup>

Mark is prompted to make this observation by the fact that each Essene was given a loincloth when he joined as a postulant, a period of one year in which to prove he could lead a ritually pure life. The garment was worn when the postulant took his ritual bath. Mark is cryptically criticizing the Pharisees for reducing



the ritual to "thoroughly washing their hands." The Greek phrase is obscure. It uses the word *pygmē*, which means something like "fist-wise." To what that refers is unclear. It may mean that they only washed their hands up to their knuckles or wrists, *i.e.*, their "fists."<sup>12</sup> An alternate interpretation would be that they poured water into cupped hands.<sup>13</sup> In any event, the Pharisees did not perform a full ritual immersion, as did the more pious Essenes.

## AN OFFERING TO GOD

## MARK 7:9-13

Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)—then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."

Here Mark criticizes the Pharisees for sanctioning injustice, *i.e.*, failing to support one's aged parents, by declaring one's wealth an offering to God, and hence, unavailable for their support.<sup>14</sup> This is more than a condemnation of elder neglect, however. The Hebrew word referred to, *corban*, like any Hebrew word, has a numerical value based on the numbers represented by the letters. What is interesting here is that the numerical value of *corban* is 352. As we have seen, the Essenes observed a solar calendar with 364 days. The standard Jewish calendar, however, is based on the phases of the moon which define the months. In ancient times, the beginning of the months, the new moon, was determined by observation. When a thin crescent was seen at sunset, the new month had begun. However, there were problems in observing the new moon. The sky could be overcast, etc. This required the Sandedrin, as a central authority, to declare when the new moon had occurred, based on the testimony of witnesses and other practical or theoretical considerations. A month could be either 29 days or 30 days in length. The rule was that there could be no fewer than four full months and no more than eight. This meant that the shortest possible year was 352 days. That, of course, is the value of *corban*. While the year was normally 354 days in length, and by Essenic doctrine, came in ten days too soon, in some years the difference could be even greater. This reference to *corban*, therefore, appears to be a somewhat cryptic criticism of the Pharisaic calendar system, which the Essenes regarded as a human invention contrary to God's law. Mark might also be giving us a calendar clue. Perhaps the year 67, in which this part of the Gospel allegorically is set, had only 352 days. Unfortunately, we lack the official records of the Sanhedrin's calendar committee and do not know.

## WHAT COMES OUT      MARK 7:14-23

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

This has been called the "Parable of Digestion."<sup>15</sup> Marcus observes that "the imagery in our verse suggests excretion, especially in view of the reference to latrines in the previous verse."<sup>16</sup> The second gift which Josephus says the new postulant received was a hatchet. De Vaux found what appears to be one of these hatchets at Qumran.<sup>17</sup> Josephus describes clearly how the hatchet was used. He first observes how strictly the Essenes observe the Sabbath—so strict, in fact, that they will not even have a bowel movement. He then describes their usual toilet habits.

Nay, on other days they dig a small pit, a foot deep, with a paddle (which kind of hatchet is given them when they are first admitted among them); and covering themselves round with their garment, that they may not affront the Divine rays of light, they ease themselves into that pit, after which they put the earth that was dug out again into the pit; and even this they do only in the more lonely places, which they choose out for this purpose; and although this easement of the body be natural, yet it is a rule with them to wash themselves after it, as if it were a defilement to them.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, "the things that come out are what defile." As Price notes, "what comes out may exit via a different orifice than it entered."<sup>19</sup> It was what came out of the body which especially concerned them, so far as purity was concerned. The logic of this is somewhat obscured in modern translations which treat the phrase *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*, "cleansing all meats," not as part of the quotation from Jesus but as an editorial comment by Mark—" (Thus he declared all foods clean)." Note that NRSV even puts it in parentheses. The KJV more accurately states: "purging all meats." The reason for the revision is that older translation were based on a text which read *katharizon*, "cleansing, purging," with a short "o," an omicron, which makes the participle neuter. It was thought, then, that it was the neuter process of digestion which cleansed the food from the bowel. More recent discoveries of what are considered better manuscripts have instead a long "o," an omega, which makes the participle masculine rather than neuter and means that the word refers back to some masculine noun. Somewhat arbitrarily, the translators relate this back to Jesus, even though the word "Jesus,"

*lēsous*, has not appeared since the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6:30, and even the pronoun "he," *autos*, doesn't appear anywhere in this passage. Instead, it is the implied subject of the verb *legei*, "says," which is taken as an antecedent.<sup>20</sup> This seems somewhat strained and appears to be dictated by the desire to portray Jesus as "declaring all food clean," *i.e.*, repealing the kosher code, as though something as momentous as that could be expressed so offhandedly.

The more natural reading, which follows the usual rules of Greek syntax, is to take the masculine participle, *katharizōn*, as referring not to the unnamed speaker, but to the next preceding masculine noun, *aphedrōn*, which means "sewer" or "latrine," *i.e.*, the pit in which the waste is deposited, the very reason for the hatchet.<sup>21</sup> The sense then is that the latrine cleanses the waste products from the bowel.<sup>22</sup> Vermes suggests that the word "food" means "excrement" and that an Aramaic euphemism for latrine is *dukha*, "the place," which might be a play on *dekha*, "to be clean." Hence, Jesus is saying "it does not enter into his heart but into his stomach, and so passes out into 'the place' where all excrement 'is purged away'."<sup>23</sup> What "Jesus" is talking about, in other words, is toilet habits, not keeping kosher.

Mark proceeds to enumerate evils which come out of a person. Again, a similar litany of vices also is found in the Community Rule. After listing the virtues which come from "the counsels of the spirit for the sons of truth in the world," the Rule then continues:

However, to the spirit of deceit belong greed, frailty of hands in the service of justice, irreverence, deceit, pride and haughtiness of heart, dishonesty, trickery, cruelty, much insincerity, impatience, much insanity, impudent enthusiasm, appalling acts performed in a lustful passion, filthy paths for indecent purposes, blasphemous tongue, blindness of eyes, hardness of hearing, stiffness of neck, hardness of heart in order to walk in all the paths of darkness and evil cunning.<sup>24</sup>

This, too, is part of Mark's Essenic message.

What is curious about these discussions is that Mark is depicting Jesus as a moderate Messiah who appears to oppose ritualistic practices, the opposite of the Essenic attitude. It is possible that Mark is simply obscuring the hidden meaning beneath a misleading surface story. It is also possible that Mark intends to exert a liberalizing influence on his readership. Mark wrote after the Essenic era had come to an end. Perhaps he is promoting a reformed agenda. This, of course, is part of the broader question of what effect Mark intended for his story of Jesus, in and of itself, apart from its allegorical interpretation, to have.

## A DEMON DAUGHTER      MARK 7:24-30

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a

Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Commentators are puzzled by the strange circumambulations of Jesus.<sup>25</sup> This is easy to understand when we realize that what Mark really is referring to is Roman troop movements, and that sometimes the place names have a symbolic significance. In late June 67 A.D., Vespasian, Roman commander in Palestine, advances on the Samaritan stronghold on Mt. Gerizim at Shechem.<sup>26</sup> As we saw previously, Mark uses the name of Tyre and Sidon to refer to Shechem and Samaria (Mark 3:8). The Roman captain, Cerealis, urged the Samaritans to surrender. When they refused, 11,600 were slain. Mark constructs a picturesque episode in his messiah myth out of this occurrence.

The demon which possesses the girl, a contrast with "maiden Israel" (Amos 5:2), the daughter of Jairus, is the Samaritan cult, which Mark regards as a false religion. The woman is depicted as a pagan Phoenician, a "Sidonian of Shechem."<sup>27</sup> This label had prevented the destruction of the Samaritans by the Syrians. It would not work with the Romans. Again, Mark depicts "Jesus" as a moderate messiah, who will allow the dogs to eat the crumbs. The Jewish loathing for the Samaritans was proverbial. They are said to be "not even a people" and "foolish people."<sup>28</sup> The Samaritans are specifically referred to as dogs.<sup>29</sup> The real message is that God has saved Israel by driving out the demonic Samaritan religion at the hands of the Romans.

## A ZEALOT STOUGE      MARK 7:31–37

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Jesus continues his roundabout journey. He goes to the Decapolis because Vespasian sends his son Titus to Scythopolis, which, though on the western side, was counted a city of the Decapolis and lay near Tiberias, in September, 67 A.D.<sup>30</sup> About that same time occurred something which Josephus, ever the aristocrat, found shocking. The Zealots, one of the rebel factions, undertook to name

a new high priest, not by selecting an eligible candidate from one of the high priestly families, but by casting lots. Josephus calls it "a cunning contrivance to seize the government," and to see how far their power extended.<sup>31</sup> He describes the ill-fated outcome.

By fortune the lot so fell as to demonstrate their iniquity after the plainest manner, for it fell upon one whose name was Phannias, the son of Samuel, of the village Aphtha. He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not well know what the high priesthood was, such a mere rustic was he! Yet did they hale this man, without his own consent, out of the country, as if they were acting a play upon the stage, and adorned him with a counterfeit face; they also put upon him the sacred garments, and upon every occasion instructed him what he was to do.<sup>32</sup>

He was, in other words, a Zealot stooge. Mark calls him a deaf mute; he did not know what to say or do. The Zealot told him how to play his part. Thus does "Jesus" heal him, so that he may say and do what the Zealots tell him. "Ephphatha," he says. "Be opened." Here Mark uses the Aramaic as a pun. The word *ephphatha* is a play on the new high priest's hometown of Aphtha.

Apparently, Mark approves of this popularization of the high priestly office. Josephus does not. "This horrid piece of wickedness was sport and pastime with them, but occasioned the other priests, who at a distance saw their law made a jest of, to shed tears, and sorely lament the dissolution of such a sacred dignity."<sup>33</sup> This brings the Gathering Cycle to a close. Mark will now transition to the downfall of Israel.

## NOTES

1. *War* 2.8.7 (137).
2. 4QpNahum=4Q169 1.6-7; see *War* 1.4.6.
3. Brownless, "Wicked Priest," 29; A. I. Baumgarten, "The Pharisaic *Paradosis*," *Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 1 (1987): 71. García Martínez renders it "those looking for easy interpretations."
4. 1QH 12.9-10, Vermes.
5. m Aboth 1.1.
6. Collins, *Mark*, 347.
7. Collins, *Mark*, 345.
8. Collins, *Mark*, 348. "This detail in Mark 7:4 recalls the Essene practice of immersing before eating."
9. *War* 2.8.2 (129, 132).
10. CD 10.10-11.
11. B Shab. 62b; b Hull. 106b; b Sot. 4b.
12. P. R. Weiss, "A Note on ΠΥΓΜΗΙ," *New Testament Studies* (1956-7): 233-36; Martin Hengel, "Mc 7 ἡ πυγμῆ: Die Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Lösung," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1969): 182-98; Boring, *Mark*, 199. Collins, *Mark*, 347, takes it to mean "up to the elbow."
13. James G. Crossley, "Halaka and Mark 7.3: 'with the hand in the shape of a fist,'" *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011): 57-68.

14. M Ned. 5:6; Guelich, *Mark*, 369-70.
15. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 457.
16. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 455.
17. R. De Vaux, "Une Hachette Essénienne?" *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959): 399-407.
18. *War* 2.8.9 (148-9). They also had strict rules for building covered latrines outside the city. 11QT 46.13-16; 4Q491, frags. 1-3=M<sup>a</sup>.
19. Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003), 262.
20. Collins, *Mark*, 341 note q, and 356, follows Origen and Chrysostom in this regard, as does Lane, *Mark*, 253. Gundry, *Mark*, 367-8 defends it.
21. Boring, *Mark*, 198, mistakenly states that "there is no nominative singular masculine word" to which the participle could refer. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 455, objects that the participle "is in the wrong case to agree with 'latrine,'" *i.e.*, nominative rather than accusative. Bruce, however, considers whether it may be a "nominative absolute...giving the sense: evacuation purges the body from all matter it cannot assimilate." Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1897), 389.
22. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934): 188-9.
23. Vermes, *Jesus*, 29; Hendriksen, *Mark*, 281-2, rejects this view.
24. 1QS 4.8-11.
25. See the diagram in Hendriksen, *Mark*, 295.
26. *War* 3.7.32 (307-15).
27. *Ant.* 11.8.6 (344).
28. Sirach 50:25-6.
29. Lachs, *Commentary*, 139; Gen. R. 81.3.
30. *War* 3.9.7 (446).
31. *War* 4.3.7 (153-4).
32. *War* 4.3.8 (155-6).
33. *War* 4.3.8 (157).

## Chapter Nine

# Last Stand of the Essenes

*Faith is believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe.*

*Voltaire*

Mark now begins a cycle on Keeping the Faith. The opening phase is concerned with the end of the Essenic community. This climaxes Part One, The Rise.

SWAN SONG

MARK 8:1-10

In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

One of the hackneyed truisms of New Testament scholarship is that the feeding of the 4,000 is a "doublet" of the feeding of the 5,000.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Mark was not intelligent enough to recognize that these were two versions of the same story and unimaginatively pasted both into his Gospel. The truth is otherwise. Mark depicts two miraculous feedings because he is referring to two separate events which follow the same pattern. The Essenes, of course, held their sacred assembly every year at Pentecost. Mark is describing the last two assemblies,

which occurred during the war years. The first was held in 67 A.D.; the second in 68A.D. At the first assembly, the mood was optimistic. After all, the Jews were winning. At the second assembly, pessimism prevailed. The Jews were losing, and would continue to lose until they were defeated. For the Essenes, the end came sooner. Many commentators see a difference in cultural context in the two feedings: the first Jewish, the second Gentile. These distinctions seem overly subtle. If there is any validity to the divergent settings, however, that would be consistent with the fact that the Jews were dominant in the war at the first assembly, while the Romans were prevailing when the second and last assembly was held.

The reduction in number from 5,000 to 4,000 may reflect losses from the war. Some members had been killed, others were unable to attend due to the war situation, and still others had lost faith. Indeed, the loss of faith is the dominant theme. "Jesus," the head of the Essenic order, attempts to reassure them. The seven loaves and seven baskets of scraps may suggest the seven battles described in the War Scroll, in which the war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness would culminate in the final victory of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> Immediately after the miraculous feeding, "Jesus" goes to Dalmanutha, an otherwise unknown locale. The first syllable, "dal," may come from *migdal*, the Hebrew word for "tower."<sup>3</sup> Taking refuge in the fortified watchtower in the Qumran settlement would be only natural.

## A SIGN FROM HEAVEN      MARK 8:11-13

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

The Pharisees conveniently reappear, again for the purpose of allowing Mark to make a point. Josephus describes a number of "sign prophets" who attempted to deceive the people with such portents, or "signs from heaven."<sup>4</sup> In the years leading up to the war, "impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of god."<sup>5</sup> "Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year."<sup>6</sup> On the Feast of Unleavened Bread, late at night,

[s]o great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour.<sup>7</sup>

At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.<sup>8</sup>



He also describes how the heavy eastern gate of the Temple "was seen to be opened of its own accord," which the people took to be "a very happy prodigy," while the "men of learning" said it was a sign that the gate was opened for their enemies to enter, and "that this signal foreshadowed the desolation that was coming upon them."<sup>9</sup> The same, or similar, story was interpreted by the Rabbis to foreshadow the destruction of the Temple.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion, "Chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities."<sup>11</sup> When the priests were celebrating Pentecost, "[t]hey felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence.'"<sup>12</sup>

During the war with Rome, with the Romans besieging the Temple, a "false prophet" promised to produce "signs of salvation" to encourage the defenders to fight back.<sup>13</sup> Some of the "sign prophets" attempted to produce a sign from heaven which supported their messianic claims and foreshadowed their ultimate victory.<sup>14</sup> "The Jewish Sign Prophets heralded, and by their attempted 'signs' sought to activate God's eschatological salvation."<sup>15</sup>

Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words.<sup>16</sup>

Theudas proved a false prophet. Not only did the Jordan not miraculously part, Theudas and many of his followers were slain by the Romans.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said further, that he would show them from hence how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down.<sup>18</sup>

Another false prophet. Hundreds of his followers were slain, though he himself escaped.<sup>19</sup> This is what Mark is warning of. "This generation" lacks faith in the ultimate triumph of Israel and instead insists on some sign from heaven which guarantees them victory. In this they are deluded. The miraculous deliverance granted to their forefathers would not be repeated. There would be no "signs of salvation." Only the Essenes, as shown in the War Scroll, could foresee victory as the ultimate outcome, not the Pharisees with their "signs."

## THE LEAVEN OF DEFEAT

## MARK 8:14-21

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of

the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

Now we are back in the "boat," the Essenic settlement at Qumran. They had neglected to lay in enough supplies to withstand the Roman siege which was fast approaching. They just had "one loaf" of bread. Many were no doubt inclined to give up, to surrender. "Jesus" warns against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. The use of the word "yeast" to translate the Greek *zymē*, is somewhat misleading, since yeast is only one of several leavening agents. The ancient practice was to save a bit of dough from the previous baking, store it, and let it ferment. This was then used to leaven the next batch of dough. If the leaven was tainted, the defect would be perpetuated in loaf after loaf. This may have been the reason for eliminating leavened bread at the annual festival.<sup>20</sup> In any event, leaven was associated with defilement, and so had a negative connotation. "That leaven in the ancient world was a symbol for moral corruption has long been recognized."<sup>21</sup>

Here, in this context, Mark is referring to the corrupting influence of defeatism, and its corollary, collaboration. The Pharisees were only too anxious to make peace with Rome while Herod was a notorious client king and lackey of Rome. The disciples were losing faith. Just a little talk of defeat could corrupt the whole community, just like a little leaven fermenting the whole loaf. Even today, due to its demoralizing effect on the citizenry, governments crack down on defeatist propaganda in wartime. The Essenic disciples have eyes which do not see and ears which do not hear, echoing the stigma attached to outsiders in Mark's parable chapter. They have failed to learn the lessons taught at the last two Essenic assemblies. Had the Twelfth Legion not been defeated, symbolized by the twelve baskets recovered at Pentecost in 67 A.D.? Did the War Scroll not teach that after seven battles, the Jews would be victorious, represented by the seven baskets collected in 68 A.D.? Do the Essenic disciples still not understand that Israel's final victory was divinely ordained? With the Romans fast approaching, they are succumbing to the leaven of defeat.

## SACRED SPITTLE

## MARK 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes

again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

Roland DeVaux, the archeologist who excavated Qumran, determined that the settlement had been destroyed by the Romans in June 68 A.D. This was based on signs of burning in relationship to coins.<sup>22</sup> We learn from Josephus that the Roman army arrived at Jericho on June 3 of that year.<sup>23</sup> Vespasian, the Roman commander, went to see the Dead Sea.<sup>24</sup> Although Josephus does not describe any military operations here, it is believed that the settlement at Qumran was attacked at this time. As Vespasian returned to Caesarea, he got word that Nero was dead.<sup>25</sup> He immediately suspended operations until the political situation in Rome stabilized.<sup>26</sup> We know that Nero committed suicide on June 9, 68. Assuming that the news took approximately two weeks to reach Vespasian, his attack on Qumran likely would have taken place in the first half of June.

The question then is whether the Essenes had just celebrated Pentecost. We know that the Essenes observed Pentecost on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the third month, which always fell on a Sunday. There are two difficulties: when did the Essenic year begin and how was the calendar corrected? It seems likely that a solar calendar would begin the year on or just after the vernal equinox. The Book of Enoch (71:9-3) states that the first day of the year occurs when the sun rises due east and the night and day are of equal length. The Essenic calendar always began on a Wednesday, most likely a Wednesday on or immediately after the vernal equinox on March 20 or 21, which in 68 A.D. would be March 23. That would make a plausible date for the Pentecostal assembly, 75 days later, Sunday, June 5. This would be just at the time that Vespasian was in the vicinity. The other problem is that the 364-day calendar was one and one quarter days too short. After 200 years, the calendar would have regressed 250 days. It is hardly conceivable that the Essenes would accept such disorientation of the seasons. It also seems unlikely that they would have abandoned such a sacred calendar, which set them apart from established Judaism. It seems probable, therefore, that they added a week when necessary to prevent the first day of the year from coming before the equinox, either by observation or calculation. A sundial was found at Qumran which would have allowed the Essenes to determine the date of the equinox. If the first day of the year came too soon, they could just wait a week.<sup>27</sup> Five weeks added over 28 years would have corrected the calendar.

Who, then, is the blind man whom "Jesus," most likely the head of the Essenic community, miraculously heals with his sacred spittle? We do not need to look far. The Roman historian, Suetonius, in his life of the "divine" Vespasian, who would be elected emperor by his troops, describes how Vespasian proved his divinity in Alexandria when he healed a blind man by spitting in his eyes as the god Serapis had instructed.<sup>28</sup> The same story is told by Tacitus and Cassius Dio.<sup>29</sup> This story circulated at the time Mark was writing his Gospel.<sup>30</sup>

Vespasian's healings formed part of the wider Flavian propaganda campaign to legitimate the new claimant to the Imperial throne; to many Jewish ears this

propaganda would have sounded like a usurpation of traditional messianic hopes.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, the blind man was none other than Vespasian himself. Mark has cleverly turned the miracle around. Commentators are sometimes concerned that Jesus was forced to employ a two-stage cure, as if his powers were somehow limited. Translations generally fail to convey the logic of the Greek. Two separate verbs are used, *blepō*, which here means "look at," in the sense of direct one's gaze toward, and *horō*, "see," *i.e.*, visually perceive. The two phrases are connected with *hoti*, "because." Mark is drawing an inference. What the blind man literally says is, "I'm looking at men, because I see them walking around like trees." In other words, he knows he must be looking at men, because he knows trees do not walk. What this really represents is the prolonged negotiations between the leader of the Essenes and the Roman commander. At first Vespasian wants to crucify the defenders as rebels against Rome. Hanging on a tree is a common expression for crucifixion. The Essenic head succeeds in negotiating a surrender that will allow the members to go free. The blind Vespasian finally "saw everything clearly."

This episode brings the first half of Mark's Gospel to a close. It is the end of the Rise. The Essenic era is now completed. The Qumran ruins will be occupied by Roman troops as an outpost. The Essenes will be dispersed. For that reason "Jesus" never again goes near the "Sea of Galilee," which in Mark stands for the Dead Sea, and never again embarks on the monastic boat. Mark now will narrate the Fall. He will describe the events which led to the destruction of Jerusalem. This phase inaugurates the cycle on Keeping the Faith, which bridges the gap between the Rise and the Fall.

## NOTES

1. Boring, *Mark*, 219, refers to "dual versions of the same story." Guelich, *Mark*, 401, observes that "the vast majority of commentators have viewed this story as a 'doublet' of 6:34-44, a variant tradition of the same story."

2. IQM; 4Q491-497.

3. Joachim Jeremias, "Zum Problem des Ur-Markus," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 35 (1936): 280-2.

4. S. V. McCasland, "Portents in Josephus and in the Gospels," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932): 323-35.

5. *Ant.* 20.8.6 (167-8); *War* 2.13.4 (258-60).

6. *War* 6.5.3. (289).

7. *War* 6.5.3. (290).

8. *War* 6.5.3 (292).

9. *War* 6.5.3 (294-6).

10. McCasland, "Portents," 326.

11. *War* 6.5.3 (298-9).

12. *War* 6.5.3. (299-300).

13. *War* 6.5.1 (285–6).

14. Jeffrey Gibson, "Jesus' Refusal to Produce a 'Sign' (Mk 8.11-13)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (1990): 37-66. P. W. Barnett, "The Jewish Sign Prophets—AD 40-70—Their Intentions and Origin," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 679–97.

15. Barnett, "Sign Prophets," 693.

16. *Ant.* 20.5.1 (97).

17. *Ant.* 20.5.1 (98).

18. *Ant.* 20.8.6 (169–70); *War* 2.13.5 (261-3); Acts 21:38.

19. *Ant.* 20.8.6 (171–2).

20. C. Leslie Mitton, "New Wine in Old Wine Skins: IV. Leaven," *The Expository Times* 84 (1972-73): 339–43.

21. Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable; A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 324.

22. DeVaux, *Archaeology*, 37-41. "I consider it certain that Khirbet Qumran was destroyed by the Romans in June 68 of our era."

23. *War* 4.8.1 (449–50). This is based on the common assumption that Daesius here corresponded to June.

24. *War* 4.8.4 (477).

25. *War* 4.9.1 (486).

26. *War* 4.9.2 (491–7).

27. John C. Lefgren and John P. Pratt, "Dead Sea Scrolls May Solve Mystery," *Meridian Magazine* (12 Mar 2003).

28. *Divus Vespasianus* 7.1–2.

29. *Histories* 4.81; *Roman Histories* 65.8.

30. Eric Eve, "Spit in Your Eye: The Blind Man of Bethsaida and the Blind Man of Alexandria," *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008):2.

31. Eve, "Spit," 1.

# **The Rise and Fall of Jesus Christ**

## *Part Two*

### **The Fall**

# Chapter Ten

## Beginning Again

*We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*

*T. S. Eliot*

Mark now begins to chronicle the downfall of Israel. The destruction of Jerusalem will be foretold, not once, but three times. These three "predictions of the passion" will mark the Journey to Jerusalem series which depicts events leading up to the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> In this closing phase of the Faith Cycle, however, he retains, in part, a positive tone. The end of the Essenic era is followed by some promising developments which bode well for the future of Judaism, in spite of the destruction which is to come.

### THE MILITARY MESSIAH

### MARK 8:27-30

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Up until now, Mark has followed a strict chronological order. At this turning point, however, halfway through the story, the cause of salvation begins its decline. Mark backs up a year from the summer of 68 A.D. when Qumran was destroyed, to the summer of 67 A.D., in order to begin a new sequence of events with a new trajectory aiming at the fall of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. The key is Caesarea Philippi, a resort town in the north of the country. A spring which feeds the Jordan River made the locale a sort of spa, frequented by pagan worshippers. Caesarea Philippi was named Paneas after the god Pan,

who represented nature. Herod built a temple to Caesar Augustus near the Grotto of Pan. His son, Phillip, built a city there, which he named Caesarea Philippi, "The Caesar City of Philip."<sup>2</sup>

Vespasian did not make the same mistake that Cestius Gallus had made in directly attacking Jerusalem, where the Jews were strongest. Instead, in May, 67 A.D., he began operations in Galilee, which was the equivalent of Italy as the "soft underbelly" of Europe in World War II.<sup>3</sup> Not until he had taken Galilee would Vespasian conquer Judea. That would leave Jerusalem isolated, and only in the final campaign would he besiege Jerusalem itself. In July or August of 67 A.D., after initially pacifying Galilee, Vespasian took his troops for 20 days rest and recuperation at this inviting vacation destination, Caesarea Philippi. He offered thanks for the victories he had achieved thus far.<sup>4</sup> While there, however, Vespasian got word that two other cities in Galilee, Tiberias and Taricheae, had revolted.<sup>5</sup> He then embarked on the second Galilean campaign. This was to have dire consequences for the fate of Jerusalem. As we shall see, the campaign which began when Vespasian was at Caesarea Philippi would drive Jewish rebels to seek refuge in Jerusalem, which in turn would create fateful discord in the capital city and doom it to destruction. This is why the Journey to Jerusalem, beginning at Caesarea Philippi, is characterized by predictions of doom and lectures on the need for unity—lessons which, in retrospect, the Jews would have done well to heed. The failure of the Jews to form a united front doomed any chance to sue for peace on favorable terms they might have had. That is Mark's theme on the road to the disastrous siege of Jerusalem. It parallels the march of the Roman army itself.<sup>6</sup>

The two principal protagonists in the Jewish civil war were John of Gischala and Simon bar Giora. Mark clearly is a supporter of John and a critic of Simon, here called "Peter." Initially, John and Simon were allied. Only later would they be on opposing sides. Mark, therefore, first casts John in the role of "Jesus" and has Simon "Peter" acknowledge him as the "messiah," used more as a military term than a spiritual title. This meant that John was the legitimate commander of Jewish forces whom Simon was willing to follow. Simon is sternly warned not to reveal John's true identity at this point. Only later would John aspire to power. Indeed, the status of John among the rebel factions and the question of where his true loyalties lay would become a hot topic in the months to come.<sup>7</sup>

There were two important consequences of Vespasian's second Galilean campaign, which, as we noted, began at Caesarea Philippi. First, John escaped from Gischala, the last city in Galilee to be taken, by tricking Titus, the son of Vespasian, into not attacking on the Sabbath. John fled to Jerusalem, accompanied by his Galilean forces. There he stirred up war fever among inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> Second, rebels from northwest Judea also took refuge in the City.<sup>9</sup> There they joined up with the Zealots, a small rebel party. The Zealots now accused the aristocratic provisional government of losing the north and of plotting to sue for peace on terms favorable to the preservation of their own power and property. The Zealots were right about that. Ananas, former high priest and head of the



provisional government, sent ambassadors to Vespasian to invite him to take the city.<sup>10</sup> An issue developed over John of Gischala's position, *i.e.*, whether he continued to support the government under whom he had served or whether he sided with the Zealot rabble rousers. He was forced to take an oath of loyalty to the government while meeting secretly with the Zealots in the temple and revealing the government's plans.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the question, "Who do people say that I am?" Who, indeed?

## ISRAEL'S BETRAYAL      MARK 8:31-33

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly.

These treasonous aristocrats were "the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes" whom Mark, along with John and the Zealots, sees as betraying the true cause of Israel's salvation, or "Jesus." This Mark describes as the first prediction, *i.e.*, a foreshadowing, of the passion in Jerusalem, which stands for the impending passion of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Mark assures us, Israel will rise again, which is the meaning of the resurrection. "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hos 6:2).

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, which are revived and clothed with flesh, is a metaphor for the revival of Israel as a nation.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD (Ezek 37:11-14).

Just as God revived Israel when it was exiled to Babylon, he would restore the people who fall victim to Rome, the new Babylon, will be restored by God. The term rendered "mortal" in NRSV actually means "son of man,"<sup>12</sup> which occurs nearly a hundred times in Ezekiel. This may help the reader recognize this passage from Ezekiel as the referent of Mark's allusion.

## THE SATANIC SIMON MARK 8:32-33

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

John was a local leader in Galilee, who was a rival of Josephus, appointed by the provisional government the commander of Jewish forces in Galilee. Simon bar Giora, on the other hand, drew his strength from the south. He first came to prominence in the defeat of Cestius Gallus and the Twelfth Legion.<sup>13</sup> The surname, bar Giora, means "son of the proselyte" in Aramaic and shows that Simon was not a native Israelite. He would, therefore, have traditionally have had no claim to power. However, according to Josephus, Simon was superior to John "in strength of body and courage" and drew his support from a cross-section of society. His followers obeyed him as if he were a king.<sup>14</sup> That he was a marginal Jew with a radical social agenda is seen in the fact that he freed the slaves in violation of the Law of Moses which recognized a limited form of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

Mark depicts the conflict between John and Simon as a dramatic, or possibly melodramatic, confrontation. Simon rejects the need for suffering. To Mark, he is nothing but a self-seeking adventurer, dedicated not to Israel's salvation but to his own aggrandizement. Josephus says that Simon joined the rebels at Masada, a fortress seized from the Romans, "but he, affecting to tyrannize, and being fond of greatness, when he had heard of the death of Ananus," the high priestly leader of the provisional government, "left them, and went into the mountainous part of the country."<sup>16</sup> John condemns Simon as "Satan," a Hebrew word which originally meant "adversary," and only later acquired its diabolical connotations.<sup>17</sup> Both meanings come into play here. Simon, in other words, has become John's political adversary. Pointedly, he orders Simon to "get behind me," militarily speaking.<sup>18</sup> Instead, Simon pursues his own materialistic goals, "human things," and refuses to follow John's leadership in pursuit of "divine things." Clearly, Mark is a partisan of John.

## FOLLOW THE LEADER MARK 8:34-9:1

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

Here Mark speaks frankly of the costs of revolution. "Resistance to Roman imperialism even in a non-violent way could easily lead to crucifixion."<sup>19</sup> That is the meaning of taking up one's cross. When the Jews revolted on the death of Herod the Great, 2,000 were crucified for taking part.<sup>20</sup> The two sons of Judah the Galilean, who revolted ten years later, were crucified.<sup>21</sup>

A century before the Romans took over, the Syrians crucified the rebels.<sup>22</sup> Alexander Janneus crucified 800 Pharisees who opposed him.<sup>23</sup> The real carnage by crucifixion, however, occurred during the war with Rome, particularly during the siege of Jerusalem. Hapless rebels who fell into Roman hand "were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city."<sup>24</sup> It was hoped that the gruesome spectacle would encourage Jews to surrender.

So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after another, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies.<sup>25</sup>

That was what it meant to take up one's cross and follow "Jesus," the true cause of Israel's salvation.

## LISTEN TO THE RABBI      MARK 9:2-8

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Here Mark eulogizes the preeminent figure of first century Judaism, Johanan ben Zakkai, who was "the most distinguished scholar of the generation that witnessed the destruction of the Temple."<sup>26</sup> He was known as the "Father of Wisdom"<sup>27</sup> and the "Light of Israel."<sup>28</sup> Johanan is reputed to be the first to bear the title "Rabbi," which only then became a term of address for an ordained teacher.<sup>29</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that "Jesus" for the first time is called "Rabbi." The achievement of Johanan was to found an academy of Jewish learning in the town of Jamnia or Yavneh, which, following the destruction of the Temple, became the center of Judaism. Legend has it that Johanan escaped from Jerusalem, predicted that Vespasian would become emperor, and was rewarded with the right to establish his academy at Jamnia.<sup>30</sup> What really happened is impossible to tell.<sup>31</sup> However, Mark's placement of this story is consistent with events in the

Spring of 68, when the Romans had the City surrounded and the Zealots were preventing anyone from leaving Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> If Johanan belonged to the peace party, he may have escaped from the City, whether hidden in a coffin or not.<sup>33</sup> He may or may not have gotten permission from Vespasian to organize in Jamnia. Suffice it to say that Johanan did succeed in establishing his academy, which became a substitute for the Sandedrin. Certain privileges that had been reserved for Jerusalem and the Temple were transferred to Jamnia. It is said that he mastered all fields of Jewish learning.<sup>34</sup> He foresaw that Rome would conquer Judea.<sup>35</sup> "When Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai died the splendor of wisdom ceased."<sup>36</sup> It is not an exaggeration to say that all of present day Judaism is descended from the work of Johanan ben Zakkai.

Once again Mark paints a picturesque image. Johanan ben Zakkai, in the person of "Jesus," the Rabbi, ascends the mountain, which recalls Mt. Sinai, (Exod 24:15-16), and appears with Moses, who revealed the law, and Elijah, who saved the law. Johanan himself taught that in the days of the messiah, Moses and Elijah would come together as one. He quotes God as saying of the Israelites: "Moses, I swear to you, as you devoted your life to their service in this world, so too in the time to come when I bring Elijah, the prophet, unto them, the two of you shall come together."<sup>37</sup> This reflects the prophecy of Malachi: "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes" (4:4-5).<sup>38</sup> Johanan taught that Elijah would not come to make changes in the Law but to make an end to injustice.<sup>39</sup>

Johanan is transfigured. His face shone like Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exod 34:29-35). The same was said of a wise man. "Wisdom makes one's face shine, and the hardness of one's countenance is changed" (Eccl 8:1). It was said of Rabbi Eliezer, one of Johanan's own disciples, that his face shone like Moses.<sup>40</sup> A voice from heaven declares that Johanan is the Son of God, a title which could simply mean one who enjoyed God's favor. "Listen to him," the voice commands, and the Jews did, and still do.

## SACRED SEIZURE

## MARK 9:14-29

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happen-

ing to him?" And he said, "From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! — All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

With this vivid imagery, Mark presents his critique of religious ritual. He compares the Temple cult, with its elaborate ceremonial, to epileptic convulsions. Epilepsy was considered the "Sacred Disease" by some.<sup>41</sup> It seized its victims as if possessed by a spirit. Falling to the ground, rolling around, foaming at the mouth, meaningless gesticulating — these are the signs which Mark sees as possessing the children of Israel from childhood. The fire suggests burning on the altar, and water recalls the Brazen Sea in which the priests bathed. The unclean spirit, here, as always in Mark, represents false religion, which cannot be driven out by this faithless generation. Following immediately upon the transfiguration of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, this episode cannot help but recall the rabbi's teaching that the destruction of the Temple and the end of the sacrificial system did not mean that Israel was left without a means of atonement. This kind of false religion, he says, can only be driven out by prayer. It was, of course, the principal work of Johanan to replace the Temple cult with prayer. The home and the synagogue took the place of the Temple, which would soon lay in ruins. Prayer replaced bloody sacrifice.

This cycle, Keeping the Faith, which bridges the gap between the Rise and the Fall of Israel, is brought to a close with this phase, representing a new beginning for the Jewish religion. In spite of Mark's Essenic sympathies, he knows their way of life is not the wave of the future. Rabbinic Judaism will survive the destruction of Jerusalem. The Temple cult will not. Thus, Mark begins the story of the Fall on a positive note. This phase inaugurates a new series, the Journey to Jerusalem, in which Mark will warn of the dangers ahead.

## NOTES

1. Collins, *Mark*, 397, recognizes the coherence of the material from 8:27-10:45.
2. *War* 3.10.7 (512-5); Collins, *Mark*, 399-400; Boring, *Mark*, 236-7.
3. The opposite theory, that Vespasian attacked Galilee because it was the seedbed of rebellion, is untenable. There is no evidence of revolutionary activity in Galilee for several decades before the war with Rome.
4. *War* 3.9.7 (443). Collins, *Mark*, 401, notes the connection of Caesarea Phillipi with Vespasian.
5. *War* 3.9.7 (445) ff.

6. Andreas Bedenbender, "Römer, Christen und Dämonen," *Texte und Kontexte: exegetische Zeitschrift* 67, no. 3 (1995): 4.

7. *War* 4.3.13 (208) ff.

8. *War* 4.2.1 (84) – 4.3.2 (128).

9. *War* 4.3.4 (138) – 4.3.5 (146).

10. *War* 4.3.14 (218).

11. *War* 4.3.13 (208-17).

12. *Ben adam*, LXX huie anthrōpou.

13. *War* 2.19.1 (521).

14. *War* 4.9.4 (509-10).

15. *War* 4.9.3 (508).

16. *War* 4.9.3 (508).

17. Collins, *Mark*, 407.

18. Collins, *Mark*, 407, misses the point by translating "Get out of my sight," although she concedes that it "could also be translated 'Get behind me.'" Cranfield, *St Mark*, 280, also rejects the idea that Peter is to follow Jesus. Boring, *Mark*, recognizes that *opisō mou* means "behind me" in Mark 1:17, 8:34. Lane, *Mark*, 295 n. 77 notes the sense is "return to your rank." Even at the narrative level, this command clearly means that Peter should get behind Jesus and not be an adversary. Cf. 1 Macc 2:27 *exelthetō opisō mou*.

19. J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Disciple's Cross," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969-70): 360.

20. *Ant.* 17.10.10 (295); *War* 2.5.2 (75).

21. *Ant.* 20.5.2 (102).

22. *Ant.* 12.5.4 (256).

23. *Ant.* 13.14.2 (380); 4Q169.

24. *War* 5.11.1 (449).

25. *War* 5.11.1 (451).

26. Louis Finkelstein, "The Core of the Sifra: A Temple Textbook for Priests," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 80, nos. 1-2 (July-October, 1989): 24.

27. *Yer. Ned.* 5, 39b.

28. *b Ber.* 28b.

29. Hans Kosmala, "In My Name," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 5 (1966-67): 90.

30. ARNA 4.22-24; ARNB 19; *b. Gittin* 56a-b; *Lam. R.* 1.5, no. 31.

31. Anthony J. Saldarini, "Johanen ben Zakkai's Escape from Jerusalem: Origin and Development of a Rabbinic Story," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 6, no. 2 (1975): 189-204.

32. *War* 4.6.3 (377-9).

33. The fact that the Zealots denied burial to the dead, *War* 4.6.3 (380-1), may lend credence to the story of smuggling Johanen out of the city in a coffin.

34. *B.B.* 134a.

35. *Yoma* 39b.

36. *Sotah* 9.15.

37. *Deut R.* 3.17.

38. I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (New York: KTAV, 1967), 53-54.

39. *Eduy.* 8.7.

40. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, Ch. 2.

41. Gerd Petzke, "Die Historische Frage nach den Wundertaten Jesu; Dargestellt am Beispiel des Exorzismu Mark. IX. 14-29 par," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1975-6): 189-91.

## Chapter Eleven

# A Split in the Ranks

*How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!*

*Ps 133:1*

As a result of Nero's suicide in June of 68, as we have seen, Vespasian suspended operations until the political situation in Rome had stabilized. The Jews, however, failed to make good use of this interruption. The failure of the Jews to form a united front, which led directly to the destruction of Jerusalem, now forms the theme of this phase of Mark's Gospel. In the opening phase of the Cycle on Fellowship of the Faithful, Mark will highlight the conflicts which exist between rival Jewish rebel factions and which will foreshadow the fall of Jerusalem.

### THE REIGN OF TERROR

### MARK 9:30-32

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

The Zealots challenged the provisional government in Jerusalem, blaming it for losing the North and accusing the aristocrats of plotting to make peace with Rome. The Zealots, however, lacked sufficient manpower to successfully challenge the government. Their opportunity came when they summoned the Idumeans to their side.<sup>1</sup> Idumea, as we saw previously, had been conquered and forcibly converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus, two hundred years before.<sup>2</sup> The Zealots opened the gates of the city to them.<sup>3</sup> Josephus describes them as a "most barbarous and bloody nation" and they proceeded to massacre aristocrats, especially members of the high priestly families.<sup>4</sup> With their support, the Zealots were now in a position to carry out a reign of terror against the aristocrats, com-



plete with show trials. They accused aristocrats of treason and even if the defendants were acquitted, the Zealots slew them anyway.<sup>5</sup> This what Mark depicts as betrayal into "hands of men," *i.e.*, human hands.<sup>6</sup> Note that here, unlike the first prediction of the passion of Jerusalem (Mark 8:31), the Son of Man is not "rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes," that is by the Jewish establishment, but is delivered into "the hands of men," here, the Zealots, who were populists and not members of the establishment.<sup>7</sup>

## SERVANT OF ALL      MARK 9:33-37

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Here Mark criticizes the rivalry among rebel leaders. They pursue their personal ambition rather than the common good. They wage a civil war among themselves, rather than unite behind a common leadership to fight the Romans.

If there is anything which distinguishes this (from the Jewish viewpoint) gift of a pause in the War against the Romans, to be sure, it is the complete inability of the revolutionary groups which were centered in Jerusalem and around the Temple, to find a common strategy which held some promise of success. Instead of that, the astonished besieging army was offered the spectacle of an inner-Jewish splintering with a fight literally to the death, which was not even really ended by the resumption of the Roman attack.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the Roman commanders wanted to strike while the Jews were divided. Vespasian was wise enough to reject their counsel.

And now all the rest of the commanders of the Romans deemed this sedition among their enemies to be of great advantage to them, and were very earnest to march to the city, and they urged Vespasian, as their lord and general in all cases, to make haste, and said to him, that "the providence of God is on our side, by setting our enemies at variance against one another; that still the change in such cases may be sudden, and the Jews may quickly be at one again, either because they may be tired out with their civil miseries, or repent them of such doings." But Vespasian replied, that they were greatly mistaken in what they thought fit to be done, as those that, upon the theater, love to make a show of their hands, and of their weapons, but do it at their own hazard, without considering, what was for their advantage, and for their security; for that if they now go and attack the city immediately, they shall but occasion their enemies to unite together, and shall convert their force, now it is in its height, against

themselves. But if they stay a while, they shall have fewer enemies, because they will be consumed in this sedition.

They ought rather "to suffer these Jews to destroy one another."<sup>9</sup>

## THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY      MARK 9:38-41

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. 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."

Here Mark gives a telling rebuke to the partisanship which plagued the Jewish war effort. The Zealots in particular were intolerant of those who did not belong to their party. Josephus even makes an issue of their self-imposed party label, "as if they were zealous in good undertakings, and were not rather zealous in the worst actions, and extravagant in them beyond the example of others."<sup>10</sup> Their reign of terror, as we have seen, foreshadowed the destruction of Jerusalem. No one who is casting out Roman demons in "my name," *i.e.*, in the name of "Jesus," which means "the true cause of Israel's salvation," can be against the rebel cause. He borrows a saying from Cicero addressed to Caesar: "Let that maxim of yours, which won you your victory, hold good. For we have often heard you say that, while we considered all who were not with us as our enemies, you considered all who were not against you your friends."<sup>11</sup> If the Jews had followed Caesar's maxim, they might have had a better chance of success.

## THE VALLEY OF HINNOM      MARK 9:42-50

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

The word which NRSV translates "hell" is Gehenna, from *ge hinnom*, the Valley of Hinnom, which lay to the south and southwest of the city of Jerusalem (Josh 15:8; 18:16). Pagans and apostate Jews had practiced idol worship and sacrificed

their children as burnt offerings there (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31; 19:2-5; 32:35). Josiah, the reforming king of Judah, defiled the valley to prevent that from continuing (2 Kgs 23:10). As a result, "it became the rubbish heap of Jerusalem, pervaded by maggots and the stench of decay, where fire smoldered day and night."<sup>12</sup> Isaiah (66:24) describes it: "And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Mark echoes this verse when he says "their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched." This frightful image came to represent the infernal fate of the damned, *i.e.*, "hell." "This accursed valley is for those who are accursed forever; here will all those be gathered who utter unseemly words against God, and here is the place of their punishment" (En 27:2). Through the poor, Israel is "saved from the punishment of Gehinnom."<sup>13</sup> Mark, however, is using this imagery in a more literal sense. The idea of cutting off one's hand and going into Gehenna is based on the conflict between Simon bar Giora and the Zealots, who captured Simon's wife. Simon retaliated with brutality.

Accordingly, he caught all those that were come out of the city gates, either to gather herbs or sticks, who were unarmed and in years; he then tormented them and destroyed them, out of the immense rage he was in, and was almost ready to taste the very flesh of their dead bodies. He also cut off the hands of a great many, and sent them into the city to astonish his enemies, and in order to make the people fall into a sedition, and desert those that had been the authors of his wife's seizure.<sup>14</sup>

The threat of mutilation worked; the Zealots returned his wife, "when he became a little milder, and left off his perpetual bloodshedding."<sup>15</sup> Later, during the siege, many Jews deserted to the Romans. "So Titus commanded that the hands of many of those that were caught should be cut off, that they might not be thought deserters," and sent them back to the rebel leaders.<sup>16</sup> It stands to reason that many of those who came out of the city gates went into the Valley of Hinnom, *i.e.*, in the infamous Gehenna. Indeed, the Essene Gate led to a path down into Gehenna.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Mark's admonition that the rival factions reconcile their differences and "be at peace with one another."

## ESSENIC SOLIDARITY      MARK 10:1

He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.

Mark now revisits the time in the spring and summer of 68 A.D. which he has previously recounted as the fall of Qumran, when Vespasian campaigned in Judea and beyond the Jordan in Perea.<sup>18</sup> Vespasian's excursion from Jericho to the Dead Sea, as we discussed earlier (Mark 8:1-10), resulted in the destruction of

the Essenic settlement. Now, as he returns to the same timeframe on the descending side of the plotline, leading this time to the destruction of Jerusalem, he celebrates the lifestyle of the Essenes which, in contrast to the dissension among the mainstream Jews, was based on principles of communal solidarity. Had the Jews followed their example, they might have had some prospect of success. Instead, their factional strife destroyed them. Mark emphasizes three sources of social discord which the Essenes succeeded in overcoming: sexual conflict, improper childrearing, and wealth. He will have Jesus deliver sermonettes on these subjects. As Albert Schweitzer said, "The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings."

## MASTERING MONOGAMY      MARK 10:2-12

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Mark recognizes that fighting over females has always been a key cause of social disharmony. The professed members of the Essenic community practiced celibacy.

These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue.

....

They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage, and the succession of mankind thereby continued; but they guard against the lascivious behavior of women, and are persuaded that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man.<sup>19</sup>

....

[They] neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another.<sup>20</sup>

A text known as the Wiles of the Wicked Woman warns the Essenes that she will “sidetrack man into the paths of the pit, and seduce the sons of men with smooth words.”<sup>21</sup>

Pliny the Elder gives this picturesque, and somewhat exaggerated, description of the Essenes:

Lying on the west of Asphaltites, and sufficiently distant to escape its noxious exhalations, are the Esseni, a people that live apart from the world, and marvelous beyond all others throughout the whole earth, for they have no women among them; to sexual desire they are strangers; money they have none; the palm-trees are their only companions. Day after day, however, their numbers are fully recruited by multitudes of strangers that resort to them, driven thither to adopt their usages by the tempests of fortune, and wearied with the miseries of life. Thus it is, that through thousands of ages, incredible to relate, this people eternally prolongs its existence, without a single birth taking place there; so fruitful a source of population to it is that weariness of life which is felt by others.<sup>22</sup>

This lifestyle, however, is for the few. For that reason, Mark emphasizes the strict monogamy of the associates, the marrying Essenes described by Josephus.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, there is another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of human life, which is the prospect of succession; nay, rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail. However, they try their spouses for three years; and if they find that they have their natural purgations thrice, as trials that they are likely to be fruitful, they then actually marry them. But they do not use to accompany with their wives when they are with child, as a demonstration that they do not marry out of regard to pleasure, but for the sake of posterity.<sup>24</sup>

The lifestyle of these associates, as we have seen, is governed by the Damascus Document. They live in “camps.”

And if they reside in the camps in accordance with the rule of the land, and take women and beget children, they shall walk in accordance with the law and according to the regulation of the teachings, according to the rule of the law which says: *Num 30:17* <<Between a man and his wife, and between a father and his son>>.<sup>25</sup>

In a passage very reminiscent of Mark’s, the Damascus Document describes the same ban on divorce and remarriage attributed here to Jesus. “There exists an astonishing degree of agreement”<sup>26</sup> between Mark and the passage in the scroll. It criticizes the opponents of the community who have been “caught in fornication” and one way was:

taking two wives in their lives, even though the principle of creation is *Gen 1:27* <<male and female he created them>>. And the one who went into the ark *Gen 7:9* <<went in two by two into the ark>>. And about the prince it is written: *Deut 17:17* <<He should not multiply wives to himself>>.<sup>27</sup>

The Document goes on to defend David for his polygamy on the grounds that the book of the law was hidden in the ark. This rule is repeated in the Temple Scroll. Of the king it is said:

He is not to have many wives or let his heart go astray after them.

....

He shall not take a wife from among all the daughters of the nations, but instead take for himself a wife from his father's house from his father's family. He shall take no other wife apart from her because only she will be with him all the days of her life. If she dies, he shall take for himself another from his father's house, from his family.<sup>28</sup>

The royal rule was extended to commoners by the Essenes because it represented a higher ideal, rooted in the law of creation, as Jesus explains.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, the intent is to prohibit polygamy, both the serial polygamy of successive divorce and remarriage, and what may be called "parallel" polygamy, multiple wives concurrently. It is not divorce which is prohibited, but remarriage. The logic is simple. The "one flesh union" of marriage can be dissolved only by death, not divorce. A man is still married to his first wife, and if he goes through a sham remarriage, he is merely living in sin with his paramour. Hence, every sex act between them is an act of adultery. The divorce which Moses allowed was merely a concession to human weakness, their "hardness of heart." The higher law of creation must now be observed. This is a hard rule to follow, but Mark sees it as the best way to avoid social conflict. This was a way of life the Essenes found effective, and their example should have been followed by Israel as a whole.

## SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN      MARK 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

In the same passage that Josephus describes the Essenes' view of marriage, he further explains the role of family in their community. "They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons' children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning, and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners."<sup>30</sup>

There is a saying attributed to Francis Xavier, "Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man." Centuries before the Jesuits were founded, the Essenes knew the same thing. By raising a child in the Essenic community, they could impart their way of life without outside competition. This is why Jesus welcomed the little children, who would thereby inherit the kingdom of God. This reflects the decision to raise children, possibly those of the married associates, and teach them how to live as Essenes. No doubt, there was resistance to this development. What group of men who had sworn off marriage and family living would welcome an influx of small children whom they were obliged to raise as their own? This is why the disciples try to stop them from coming. Raising children, however, would become one of the pillars of Essenic solidarity, at least, as Mark sees it. Perhaps Mark himself had been so raised.

## HOLY POVERTY      MARK 10:17-22

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

This is a problem which the Essenes must have encountered many times. Any monastic community will find that potential recruits refuse to join if they must give up their valuable possessions. This is a strong hold which the world has over people. Notice that the man must "give the money to the poor," one of the names the Essenes used of themselves, who lived in what monastics like to call "holy poverty."<sup>31</sup> They form a "community in law and possessions."<sup>32</sup>

All those who submit freely to his truth will convey all their knowledge, their energies, and their riches to the Community of God in order to refine their knowledge in the truth of God's decrees and marshal their energies in accordance with his perfect paths and all their riches in accordance with his just counsel.<sup>33</sup>

"The community at Qumran displays the classic features of other communes, a severe external threat, a strong sense of common identity, and commitment to a common set of beliefs."<sup>34</sup> For Josephus, this is emblematic of their virtue.

It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness; and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them. This

is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all.

....

They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them.<sup>35</sup>

....

These men are despisers of riches, and so very communicative as raises our admiration. Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order, - insomuch that among them all there is no appearance of poverty, or excess of riches, but every one's possessions are intermingled with every other's possessions; and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all the brethren.

....

They also have stewards appointed to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the uses of them all.<sup>36</sup>

Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, also describes their "holy poverty" in his book, significantly entitled *Every Good Man is Free*:

Of these men, some cultivating the earth, and others devoting themselves to those arts which are the result of peace, benefit both themselves and all those who come in contact with them, not storing up treasures of silver and of gold, nor acquiring vast sections of the earth out of a desire for ample revenues, but providing all things which are requisite for the natural purposes of life; for they alone of almost all men having been originally poor and destitute, and that too rather from their own habits and ways of life than from any real deficiency of good fortune, are nevertheless accounted very rich, judging contentment and frugality to be great abundance, as in truth they are.

....

In the first place, then, there is no one who has a house so absolutely his own private property, that it does not in some sense also belong to every one: for besides that they all dwell together in companies, the house is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters; then there is one magazine among them all; their expenses are all in common; their garments belong to them all in common; their food is common, since they all eat in messes; for there is no other people among which you can find a common use of the same house, a common adoption of one mode of living, and a common use of the same table more thoroughly established in fact than among this tribe: and is not this very natural? For whatever they, after having been working during the day, receive for their wages, that they do not retain as their own, but bring it into the common stock, and give any advantage that is to be derived from it to all



who desire to avail themselves of it; and those who are sick are not neglected because they are unable to contribute to the common stock, inasmuch as the tribe have in their public stock a means of supplying their necessities and aiding their weakness, so that from their ample means they support them liberally and abundantly; and they cherish respect for their elders, and honor them and care for them, just as parents are honored and cared for by their lawful children: being supported by them in all abundance both by their personal exertions, and by innumerable contrivances.<sup>37</sup>

In the Community Rule, we read how the wealth is turned over to the community in stages. After a year as a postulant, during which time he does not "share in the possession of the Many," the recruit may be promoted to novice and "his wealth and his belongings will also be included at the hands of the Inspector of the belongings of the Many. And they shall be entered into the ledger in his hand but they shall not use them for the Many." After his second year, the recruit may be admitted as a professed member and "the placing of his possessions in common." If he lies about his possessions, he will be punished.<sup>38</sup> This is what the rich man in Mark's story would not do.

### GREED, NOT NEED      MARK 10:23-27

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Love of riches, Mark wants us to know, if not the root of all evil, is at least a potent fertilizer. Greed, along with ambition, was a source of the discord among the rival rebel factions. Had they followed the ideals of Essenic solidarity, Mark argues, Jerusalem might not have fallen.

Many attempted to flee the doomed city, but were caught and slain by the Zealots for desertion, but, Josephus says, "yet did he who gave them money get clear off, while he only that gave them none was noted a traitor. So the upshot was this, that the rich purchased their flight by money, while none but the poor were slain."<sup>39</sup> Of the rebels, Josephus says "their inclination to plunder was insatiable, as was their zeal in searching the houses of the rich."<sup>40</sup> The reign of terror was carried out not only against the common people,

for the men that were in dignity, and withal were rich, they were carried before the tyrants themselves; some of whom were falsely accused of laying treacherous plots, and so were destroyed; others of them were charged with designs of betraying the city to the Romans; but the readiest way of all was this, to suborn somebody to affirm that they were resolved to desert to the enemy. And he who

was utterly despoiled of what he had by Simon was sent back again to John, as of those who had been already plundered by Jotre, Simon got what remained;

Clearly, their wealth did not always save them. Just as clearly, the rebels were united only in despoiling the rich, not in sharing a community of goods, like the Essenes. Greed, not need, was their watchword. In this, Mark follows the Psalmist: "The righteous will see, and fear, and will laugh at the evildoer, saying, 'See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!'" (Ps 52:6-7) Philo, in discussing the Essene's rejection of slavery as contrary to human brotherhood, notes the corruptive effect of greed:

But in their view this natural relationship of all men to one another has been thrown into disorder by designing covetousness, continually wishing to surpass others in good fortune, and which has therefore engendered alienation instead of affection, and hatred instead of friendship.<sup>41</sup>

According to the *Damascus Document*, wealth is one of the three nets in which "Belial," Satan, catches Israel. The other two are fornication and defiling the Temple.<sup>42</sup> Wealth and fornication are condemned by Jesus in these teachings; cleansing the Temple will come later. "It is the acquisition of wealth by which the Devil entices man away from the right way, the right service of God."<sup>43</sup> The Essenes are to "abstain from wicked wealth which defiles" and "from stealing from the poor of the people."<sup>44</sup> Their opponents are described in unflattering terms.

[They] have defiled themselves in paths of licentiousness, and with wicked wealth, and avenging themselves, and each one bearing resentment against his brother, and each one hating his fellows, and each one despising his blood relatives; they have approached for debauchery and have manipulated with pride for wealth and gain. Each one did what was right in his eyes and each one has chosen the stubbornness of his heart.<sup>45</sup>

This would be a good description of the rebels in Jerusalem, as well.

## REVOLUTIONARY REWARD

## MARK 10:28-31

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

This is the concern of revolutionaries and monastics alike. The Essenes had left everything to join the Community. They could only hope for their reward in the

world to come. The passage in Psalm 37:11, "And the poor shall inherit the land and enjoy peace in plenty," is applied to their own community—"the congregation of the poor who will tolerate the period of distress and will be rescued from all the snare of Belial. Afterwards, all who shall inherit the land will enjoy and grow fat with everything...of the flesh."<sup>46</sup> So, too, the rebels, who had sacrificed to pursue the struggle for the "good news" of Israel's victory over Rome, hoped that the outcome would be in their favor. The message is the same for both: in the end, those who have enjoyed power and privilege in the past will lose in the future, while those who have suffered privation will receive their just reward. This view reflects the Old Testament concept of the "piety of the poor" as developed by the social critique of the prophets. "God makes the cause of the poor his own."<sup>47</sup> This is the Mark's message.

The opening phase of the Fellowship Cycle, with its emphasis on the need for solidarity among the Jewish defenders, has ended. In the closing phase, Mark will criticize those who strive for personal gain and not for the salvation of Israel.

## NOTES

1. *War* 4.4.1 (228–304).
2. *Ant.* 13.9.1 (257–8).
3. *War* 4.4.7 (300).
4. *War* 4.5.1 (310–5).
5. *War* 4.5.3 (326–44).
6. NRSV's use of inclusive language—"human hands"—obscures the play on words, "Son of Man," "hands of men," *huios tou anthrōpou*, *cheiras anthrōpōn*. Boring, *Mark*, 276; Gundry, *Mark*, 503.
7. Gundry, *Mark*, 503, observes that, "'Into hands of men' connotes oppressive and violent treatment," gives a number of scriptural citations to support that contention, and adds that this represents "an advance on mere rejection."
8. Bedenbender, "Römer," 5.
9. *War* 4.6.2 (366–9, 376).
10. *War* 4.3.9 (161).
11. *Lig.* 11, quoted in Cranfield, *St Mark*, 310. The opposite view is found in Matt 12:30; Luke 11:23.
12. Boring, *Mark*, 284. Although widely accepted by commentators, this view has been questioned, though on insufficient grounds. Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (July–September 1992): 328 n. 17.
13. b Bab. Bath. 10a.
14. *War* 4.9.8 (541–2).
15. *War* 4.9.8 (544).
16. *War* 5.11.2 (455).
17. Bargil Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem: Jesus and Jewish Christianity in Light of Archaeological Discoveries* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 208.
18. *War* 4.7.3 (413–8); 4.8.1 (450).
19. *War* 2.8.2 (119, 120).

20. *Ant.* 18.1.5 (21).

21. 4Q184 17.

22. Pliny, NH 5.73 (15).

23. Magen Broshi, "Beware the Wiles of the Wanton Woman: Dead Sea Scroll Fragment Reflects Essene Fear of, and Contempt for, Women," *Biblical Archeology Review* 9, n. 4 (July/August 1983):56, remarks that "the celibate Dead Sea community that lived in Qumran was the extreme faction of the Essenes; there were Essenes who lived in other parts of the country and married."

24. *War* 2.8.13 (160).

25. CD 7.6-7.

26. Paul Winter, "Sadoqite Fragments IV 20, 21 and the Exegesis of Genesis 1 27 in late Judaism," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 68 (1956): 74.

27. CD 4.21-5.2.

28. 11Q19 56.18-19; 57.16-19.

29. Collins, *Mark*, 460-8; Robert W. Herron, Jr., "Mark's Jesus on Divorce: Mark 10:1-12 Reconsidered," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/3 (September 1982): 275-6; Antonio Vargas-Machuca, "Divorcio e indisolubilidad del matrimonio en la Sagrada Escritura," *Estudios Biblicos* 39 (1981): 26-7; James R. Mueller, "Temple Scroll and Gospel Divorce Texts," *Revue de Qumran* 10 (1980): 250-5.

30. *War* 2.8.2 (120).

31. 1QpHab 12.3,6,10; 4QpPs<sup>a</sup> 2.9-12; 1QM 11.9.

32. 1QS 5.2.

33. 1QS 1.11-13.

34. David L. Mealand, "Community of Goods at Qumran," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 31, n. 3 (May/June 1975): 139.

35. *Ant.* 18.1.5 (20-1).

36. *War* 2.8.3 (122-3).

37. *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 12.76, 77, 85-7.

38. 1QS 6.17-25.

39. *War* 4.6.3 (379).

40. *War* 4.9.10 (560).

41. *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 12.79.

42. CD 4.17.

43. Kosmala, "Three Nets," 101.

44. CD 6.15-6.

45. CD 8.5-8.

46. 4QpPs<sup>a</sup> 2.9.

47. H. J. Kauck, "Gütergemeinschaft in der klassischen Antike, in Qumran und im Neuen Testament," *Revue de Qumran* 11 (1982): 58.

## Chapter Twelve

# The Year of the Four Emperors

*In union there is strength.*

*Aesop*

In this closing phase of the Fellowship Cycle, Mark discusses the events of the year 69, the last year before the siege of Jerusalem. Here the conflicts which fomented in the opening phase come to a head. A civil war breaks out among the Jews. Whatever hope they might have had to sue for peace on favorable terms was crushed by their internecine struggles.

FATE SEALED

MARK 10:32-34

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

Here, for the first time, Mark specifically mentions Jerusalem in predicting the passion. Again, for Mark, the passion *in* Jerusalem will stand for the passion *of* Jerusalem. Mark clearly places the blame on the Jewish establishment, *i.e.*, "the chief priests and the scribes," who are, specifically, the religious authorities. It is they who will hand Jesus, *i.e.*, the true cause of Israel's salvation, over to the Gentiles, *i.e.*, the besieging Romans. Jesus is going up to Jerusalem, where his fate is sealed. This, of course, is the route the Romans will take to besiege the city. Vespasian now "marched against those places of Judea which were not yet overthrown."<sup>1</sup> When he had subdued them, "he rode as far as Jerusalem, in which march he took many prisoners, and many captives."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the Roman troops following Vespasian "were amazed" at his success, while the Jewish captives in tow "were afraid," as Mark puts it.

The year 69 A.D. saw the factional strife in Jerusalem come to a head. The chief priests, as Mark insinuates, were partly responsible. Hoping to escape the tyranny of John, as Josephus puts it, as well as the Zealots, they along with the rich conspired to admit Simon into the city in the spring of 69 A.D. Their hopes, however, were in vain.

Accordingly he, in an arrogant manner, granted them his lordly protection, and came into the city, in order to deliver it from the zealots. The people also made joyful acclamations to him, as their savior and their preserver; but when he was come in, with his army, he took care to secure his own authority, and looked upon those that had invited him in to be no less his enemies than those against whom the invitation was intended.<sup>3</sup>

The Zealots now rebelled against John, and seized the inner court of the Temple.<sup>4</sup> The rebels were divided into three camps: the Zealots, under Eleazar, who held the Temple; John of Gischala, in the Lower City, and Simon in the Upper City. A three-way war ensued. The rebels even burned each other's grain supplies, which would prove disastrous during the siege when famine ravaged the City.<sup>5</sup> "And now, as the city was engaged in a war on all sides, from these treacherous crowds of wicked men, the people of the city, between them, were like a great body torn in pieces."<sup>6</sup>

Tacitus describes the sorry spectacle:

There were three generals, three armies: the outermost and largest circuit of the walls was held by Simon, the middle of the city by John, and the temple was guarded by Eleazar. John and Simon were strong in numbers and equipment, Eleazar had the advantage of position: between these three there was constant fighting, treachery, and arson, and a great store of grain was consumed.<sup>7</sup>

Just when the Jews desperately needed to unite if they were to have any hope of success, they were instead engaged in a savage civil war among themselves. This is the final foreshadowing of the fall of Jerusalem.

## BLIND AMBITION      MARK 10:35—40

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Throughout the journey to Jerusalem, the disciples, who represent the rebel leadership, fail to understand the call to serve. Here, their personal ambition comes to the fore. Josephus describes the fate of John and Jacob, the Jewish form of "James," the son of Sosas, leaders of the Idumeans who joined Simon bar Giora.<sup>8</sup> Later, when the Idumeans grew weary of the fighting, they secretly negotiated to surrender. When Simon heard of it, he had the leaders, including James, imprisoned.<sup>9</sup> They are emblematic of the self-seeking revolutionaries who are depicted as coveting the positions of honor on the right hand and left hand of the Messiah when he is enthroned as victor. This is the grandiose expectation of those ambitious, self-seeking revolutionaries who were more concerned with their own aggrandizement than with the salvation of Israel.

The rebel leaders will drink the cup of suffering and be baptized in persecution.

Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering (Isaiah 51:17).

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me (Psalm 69:1-2).<sup>10</sup>

It is the coming in glory which will be denied them.

## LORDING IT OVER      MARK 10:41-45

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Jerusalem is now divided between three warring factions: the Zealots, John of Gischala, and Simon bar Giora. At the same time, Rome is also divided between rival claimants to the throne. "But now sedition and civil war prevailed, not only over Judea, but in Italy also."<sup>11</sup> This is the year 69 A.D., which in Roman history is known as the Year of the Four Emperors.<sup>12</sup> When Nero committed suicide in June 68 A.D., he was succeeded by Galba, Governor of Spain, who marched into Rome at the head of his legions. He proved unpopular as emperor. Galba ruled for seven months when, two weeks into the new year, he was assassinated in the Forum by the Praetorian Guard, which favored Otho, Governor of Portugal.<sup>13</sup> Otho ruled for three months but was opposed by Vitellius, who marched to Rome from Germany. Otho was defeated in battle and committed suicide, hoping to avoid a civil war.<sup>14</sup> Vitellius bankrupted the imperial treasury with extrav-

agant, self-indulgent spending. He assassinated his opponents. Meanwhile, Vespasian was elected emperor by the army in the East in June. He traveled to Alexandria to seize the grain supplies to Rome and left his son Titus to pursue the war in Judea. A civil war ensued in Rome between the forces of Vespasian and Vitellius. The Temple of Jupiter was even burned, as the Temple in Jerusalem would be. In the fighting, Vitellius was killed. Vespasian was recognized as emperor by the Senate and took office on December 21.<sup>15</sup> He was the last of the four emperors to rule that year.

It is, therefore, with great insight that Mark remarks that "among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them." This is an apt description of the Roman civil war which raged at the same time as the civil war in Jerusalem. The Jews, Mark insists, should have been different from the Romans. They should have followed the advice given to Solomon's son, Rehoboam: "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever" (1 Kgs 12:7). The ruler as a servant of his people was a commonplace ideal.<sup>16</sup> Plato, for example, says that "the true ruler does not naturally seek his own advantage but that of the ruled."<sup>17</sup> The Romans fell short even of the ideals of pagan culture.

The idea that the death of martyrs is a ransom is found in the Maccabean war for independence. Mattathias exhorts his sons with the words: "Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors" (1 Macc 2:50). One of the seven martyred sons of a pious mother declares:

"I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation." (2 Macc 7:37-8)

Even in the Talmud we find same idea: "As the Day of Atonement atones, so also does the death of the righteous."<sup>18</sup> Here Mark reflects the idea in Daniel 7:13-14 that the Son of Man represents God's people who are suffering and will ultimately triumph. The man, or "son of man," who is martyred in the war with Rome gives his life as a ransom for the nation. Some die so that others may live.<sup>19</sup>

## THE TENTH LEGION      MARK 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to



him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Jesus enters and then leaves Jericho.<sup>20</sup> This is because Titus ordered the Tenth Legion "to go up by Jericho." They will encamp on the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> Bartimaeus, which can be interpreted to mean the "son of pollution,"<sup>22</sup> represents the legionaries who are the "son" of the pollution of the settlement at Qumran which the Legion inflicted. They are now called to follow Titus to Jerusalem. The blind beggar hears that it is Jesus Nazarene, not "of Nazareth," but, as with Joshua, the one symbolically wearing the crown, or *nēzer*,<sup>23</sup> an allusion to the fact that in the summer of 69 A.D. Titus received the title of "Caesar" and would one day rule as emperor.<sup>24</sup> Bartimaeus addresses him as "son of David" because Titus, as the new conqueror of Jerusalem, is the latter-day David, the original conqueror of Jerusalem. His spiritual blindness is healed by his faith in Titus as leader. Note how this blind man reflects the blind man healed following the feeding of the 4,000, who, as discussed previously, represented Vespasian after he had taken Qumran.

In Mark's view, Israel is unworthy of a messiah, a "son of David," who would save them.<sup>25</sup>

Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David,  
 At the time in the which Thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel Thy  
 servant  
 And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers,  
 And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample (her) down to de-  
 struction (Ps Sol 17:23—5).

For Mark, Titus has become an instrument of divine salvation, a savior or "Jesus" figure. The view that Jerusalem was destroyed by God for its wickedness is an almost inevitable conclusion to draw if one is to believe that the Jews are God's people and that their God rules the world. The destruction of Jerusalem must be part of God's plan. Otherwise, the pagan gods would be in charge and Judaism would be a fraud. This same theology is found in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, which, like Mark's Gospel, were written to explain how Jerusalem could have fallen to imperial Rome.

Several literary units are now completed, leading to a major division in Mark's Gospel. This is the closing phase of the Fellowship Cycle, the Journey to Jerusalem Series, and the Independence, or Pre-Siege War, Period. After this point, the Messiah Myth will allegorize the siege of Jerusalem and its aftermath. Everything until now has led to that climactic event. The City will be destroyed, and the Temple, the very House of the Lord, will fall. Mark has reviewed the history of salvation to prove his point, that God has always saved his people Israel, and will do so again. In spite of the catastrophe to come, God is still in

charge, Mark argues, and the ultimate outcome will be victory in the face of defeat. That is why his readers should keep the faith.

## NOTES

1. *War* 4.9.9 (550).

2. *War* 4.9.9 (551).

3. *War* 4.9.11 (575–6).

4. *War* 5.1.2 (5–7).

5. *War* 5.1.4 (21–6).

6. *War* 5.1.5 (27).

7. *Hist.* 5.12.

8. *War* 4.4.2 (225).

9. *War* 6.8.2 (378–80).

10. Josephus says that the rebel leaders “baptized,” *ebaptisen*, the city, i.e., destroyed it. *War* 4.3.3 (137).

11. *War* 4.9.9 (545).

12. Gwyn Morgan, *69 AD: The Year of the Four Emperors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975); Kenneth Wellesley, *The Long Year A.D. 69* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1975).

13. *War* 4.9.2 (494, 498–500); 4.9.9 (546); Suetonius, *Life of Galba*; Plutarch, *Life of Galba*.

14. *War* 4.9.2 (494–5); 4.9.9 (546–9); Suetonius, *Life of Otho*; Plutarch, *Life of Otho*; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 63; Martial, *Epigrams* 5.32.

15. *War* 4.11.4 (647–58); 4.10.1–6 (585–621); 4.11.1–5 (630–58); Suetonius, *Life of Vitellius*; *Life of Vespasian*; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 64.

16. David Seeley, “Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41–45,” *Novum Testamentum* 35, no. 3 (1993): 234–9.

17. *Republic* 1.347D.

18. pYoma 38b.

19. See the parallels between Mark 10:43–45 and Phil 2:5–11 in Markus, *Mark*, 756. David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 81, argues that *lytron*-words should be understood in terms of “deliverance” or “emancipation.”

20. For a critique of Morton Smith’s theory at this point see Collins, *Mark*, 486–93; Gundry, *Mark*, 603–23.

21. *War* 5.1.6 (42); 5.2.3 (69–70).

22. Collins, *Mark*, 509.

23. See discussion of Mark 1:24 above.

24. Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.3.11; Dio Cassius, *Roman Hist.* 65.1.1.

25. b Sanh. 97a, 98a.

# *Chapter Thirteen*

## **Besieging the City**

*In war, truth is the first casualty.*

*Aeschylus*

The war has finally been brought to the capital. The siege of Jerusalem will begin. The story is set at Passover, because the siege of Jerusalem began at Passover in the year 70. This is the first phase of the North City Cycle which describes the breach in the wall guarding the northern side of the City and the battle that ensues before the Temple itself is attacked. The last third of the Gospel is about the siege and its aftermath. The first three phases represent the Judgment on Jerusalem. Mark will explain why God allows the City and the Temple to be destroyed.

### **BREACH IN THE WALL**

### **MARK 11:1-11**

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Jesus approaches the City by the Mount of Olives, where the Tenth Legion was stationed.<sup>1</sup> He rides into the City on a colt, generally believed to be a donkey rather than a horse. This is based on Zech 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The use of a donkey by Jesus may perhaps be explained by a later Talmudic passage: "Behold, the Son of Man comes 'on the clouds of heaven' and 'lowly and riding an ass.' If they (Israel) are worthy, 'with the clouds of heaven'; if they are not worthy, 'lowly, and riding upon an ass.'"<sup>2</sup> If this idea was current in Mark's day, it would mean that Israel was unworthy to receive the Messiah, and instead is invaded by Titus. The donkey may suggest the Roman battering ram, which bore the head of a ram and could be thought to resemble a donkey.

The hope of deliverance must be abandoned. Isaiah's vision will not come to pass:

The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken" (Isaiah 62:11-12).

Jerusalem is indeed a city which has been forsaken. The Lord will not "suddenly come to his temple" (Mal 3:1). The Romans built banks against the city in order to bring the siege engines, including the battering ram, up to the city wall. They cut down trees for timber and left the suburbs naked.<sup>3</sup> Mark uses the metaphor of the people spreading their cloaks and leafy branches to form a red carpet for the coming king, which recalls the people who spread their cloaks and proclaimed, "Jehu is king" (2 Kgs 9:13). Alas, it is a Roman king who comes; the only kingdom of David coming is that of Titus as the latter-day David, the conqueror of Jerusalem. There will be no triumphant entry as when Maccabees expelled the heathen from the citadel (1 Macc 13:51). The hymn which the people sing, "Hosanna," "Save now!" was used to greet the pilgrims at a festival. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD," or "Blessed in the name of the LORD is the one who comes." (Ps 118:26, fn. d NRSV). Here Mark seems to echo the hymn to another Titus, surnamed Flamininus, who conquered Greece: "hail, Titus our saviour!"<sup>4</sup> After reconnoitering the Temple, he withdraws from the City. This may have been prompted by the fact that after breaching the outer or first wall, Titus took the second, or middle, wall but was beaten back and had to retake it.<sup>5</sup>

## THE BARREN FIG TREE      MARK 11:15-17

On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

This story has been a problem for commentators. How can Jesus curse a tree for not bearing fruit if it was not in season? The usual approach is to treat it as a metaphor for fruitless Israel, or Jerusalem, or the Jewish leadership. This, of course, is what Mark was referring to. "Jesus expected to find fruit on the fig tree because he was expecting the messianic age to begin; for in the messianic age, figs — together with all other products of nature — would always be in season."<sup>6</sup>

The prophecy that "The fig tree puts forth its figs" (Cant 2:13) was interpreted as a promise of a second deliverance from bondage. "The New Exodus would occur, as the first had done, in springtime, and would be signaled by the blossom of the fig-tree."<sup>7</sup>

Hence, the evil omen. "The fruitless fig tree, be it in season or out of season, offers an ominous sign that judgment is drawing near."<sup>8</sup> It is not the season for figs, because the Messianic Age is not about to dawn. Instead, the time of destruction has come.

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved (Hosea 9:10).

Jeremiah (8:13) also declares: "When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered...."<sup>9</sup> We find the same image in Micah (7:1-2a):

Woe is me! For I have become like one who, after the summer fruit has been gathered, after the vintage has been gleaned, finds no cluster to eat; there is no first-ripe fig for which I hunger. The faithful have disappeared from the land, and there is no one left who is upright;

In Judges (9:7-15), we find the Parable of the Trees in which the fig tree refuses to stop producing its fruit to rule over the tree. Instead, it is the bramble which will rule.

Mark uses this prophetic imagery to pronounce his judgment on Jerusalem. It is unfaithful and no longer bears fruit. It is not the time for spiritual fruit. "Like the prophets of Israel, Jesus pronounces God's judgment on the unfruitful tree."<sup>10</sup>

It [the fig] figures predominantly in the prophetic books and very often in passages with an *eschatological* import. Common to these passages are the twin motifs of *blessing* and *judgement*. The blossoming of the fig-tree and *its giving of its fruits* is a descriptive element in passages which depict Yahweh's visiting his people with *blessing*, while *the withering of the fig-tree*, the destruction or withholding of its fruit, figures in imagery describing *Yahweh's judgement* upon his people or their enemies.<sup>11</sup>

The Temple is the epitome of the corruption. "Its spiritual authority is a sham and its pretense to uniting man and God fruitless."<sup>12</sup> The figs are above all the leaders of Israel.<sup>13</sup> "Jesus' curse on the fig tree, therefore, may be seen as a symbolic judgment on Israel."<sup>14</sup>

To desire the first-ripe fig is a metaphorical way of searching for the righteous! God wishes the righteous, on their journeys, to have fresh fruit. The righteous may search for figs, and may be searched for as figs. If the righteous do not bear 'fruit' they will be made barren; the fruit trees of the wicked will be made to dry up.<sup>15</sup>

The relevance of this parable to the impending destruction is obvious.

Who could doubt, then, the extraordinary impact that Jesus' cursing of the fig-tree would have produced upon the Markan reader, schooled to recognize symbolism wherever it occurred? Who could doubt that a *solemn judgement* upon the nation was here being proclaimed; and in this context *a judgement directed against a corrupt Temple cultus*? The nation could expect no peace, prosperity or security<sup>16</sup>.

## CLEANING HOUSE      MARK 11:15-19

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "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 robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

In this vignette, Mark critiques the Temple cult, drawing on the Essenic history of opposition to the Temple hierarchy and the belief that their community was the true Temple, a Temple made of men. The Temple leadership, "the chief priests and the scribes," would naturally feel threatened by this judgment, especially if it enjoyed popular appeal, and would seek a way to kill "Jesus," the true cause of Israel's salvation.

As a result of Herod's rebuilding of the Temple, the business in sacrificial doves and changing money to pay the Temple tax was moved from the Mt. of Olives into the Temple portico.<sup>17</sup> Although some saw this as a public marketplace, the prophet Ezekiel and the Essenes saw even the outer court as sacred.<sup>18</sup> In the Messianic age, "the LORD will become king over all the earth" and "there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day" (Zech 14:9,21).

The prophets held an idealized vision of the Gentiles converting to Judaism and worshipping the Jewish God in the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa 56:6-7).

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will (Jer 3:17).

The reality instead is that the Romans have come to destroy the Temple, not worship in it. The Son of Man, to whom "dominion and glory and kingship" was to be given, "that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Dan 7:14), will not appear. For Mark, this is the result of the failure of the Temple leadership to uphold its true ideals.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." (Jer 7:3-4)

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!" — only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? (Jer 7:9-11)

Making the Temple a "den of robbers," as often noted by commentators,<sup>20</sup> is a clear reference in Mark to the fact that rebels, whom Josephus regularly calls *lēstai*, "robbers" or "bandits" or "brigands,"<sup>21</sup> did occupy the Temple during the war with Rome.<sup>22</sup> The Zealots made it their stronghold.<sup>23</sup> "Hence the Marcan antinomy 'house of prayer for all peoples/den of brigands' reflects the revolutionary situation in a remarkable way."<sup>24</sup> This is what Mark is alluding to now as the Romans prepare to attack the Temple. He has applied the prophets to the current military situation. Josephus, who wrote under imperial patronage, lauds the Roman respect for the Temple and contrasts it with the actions of the rebels

who “walk about in the midst of the holy places, at the very time when their hands are still warm with the slaughter of their own countrymen.”<sup>25</sup>

[T]here was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, and their own hand should pollute the temple of God. Now while these zealots did not [quite] disbelieve these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment.<sup>26</sup>

Mark, then, along with Josephus, places blame for the destruction of the Temple not only on the Temple hierarchy but on the violent revolutionaries who had polluted it with their bloody rampage.

## THE POWER OF PRAYER MARK 11:20–25

In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus answered them, “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.”

Here the conclusion to cursing the fig tree is drawn. After saying that the Israelites were “Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season,” Hosea (9:10, 16), declares, “Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit.” Of the wicked it is said, “Their roots dry up beneath, and their branches wither above” (Job 18:16). “Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it prosper? Will he not pull up its roots, cause its fruit to rot and wither, its fresh sprouting leaves to fade? No strong arm or mighty army will be needed to pull it from its roots” (Ezek 17:9). Collins states: “These examples suggest that the audiences of Mark would have understood the withering of the fig tree as representing a loss of power on the part of the leaders of the people.”<sup>27</sup>

Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their officials are rebels. Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will kill the cherished offspring of their womb. Because they have not listened to him, my God will reject them; they shall become wanderers among the nations (Hosea 9:15b-17).

Here in the words of Hosea the prophet we find the key ingredients: Israel as a fig tree whose root is dried up and will no longer bear fruit. This is Mark’s judgment on Jerusalem. “I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,” as Hosea (2:12a) says.



Somewhat surprisingly, this observation is immediately followed by a lesson on the power of prayer. The connection is easy to see once we realize that what Mark is repudiating is the Temple hierarchy and the cult upon which its power is based. Jesus is addressed as "rabbi," which recalls the role of Jesus as Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai in the Transfiguration story and the following story of the healing of the demon-possessed boy (Mark 9:2–29). The temple cult can be driven out only by prayer, as Johanan taught. Faith and the power of prayer could uproot a mountain and throw it into the sea, quite possibly the Dead Sea, which can be seen from the Mount of Olives. Although the mountain in question could be the Mount of Olives itself, which had messianic associations, it seems more likely that it was the Temple Mount which Mark had in mind. The Temple Mount was about to be taken by the Romans. Prayer, not sacrifice, would have saved the day. The failure of the warring rebel factions to forgive, of course, weakened their resistance.

The opening phase of the siege is concluded. In the closing phase of this cycle, Mark will discuss the true authority upon which Jewish leadership should be based.

## NOTES

1. *War* 5.1.6 (42); 5.2.3 (69–70).
2. TB San 98a. This passage is attributed to Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, ca. 250 A.D. Nineham, *St. Mark*, 292.
3. *War* 5.6.2 (262–64).
4. Plutarch, *Titus Flamininus*, 16.4.
5. *War* 5.7.2 (302); 5.8.1 (331)–5.8.2 (347).
6. Richard H. Hiers, "Not the Season for Figs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 395.
7. Telford, *Barren Temple*, 23, 135, 160; Shir R. 2.13.
8. J. Bradley Chance, "The Cursing of the Temple and the Tearing of the Veil in the Gospel of Mark," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 271.
9. See also Jer 5:17; 11:16; 29:17.
10. Boring, *Mark*, 319; Telford, *Barren Temple*, 135–36.
11. Telford, *Barren Temple*, 161–62.
12. William Rodgers Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and Its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (JSNTSupp 1) (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 261
13. Collins, *Mark*, 534.
14. Lynn Allan Losie, "The Cursing of the Fig Tree: Tradition Criticism of a Markan Pericope (Mark 11:12–14, 20–25)," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 7 (1977): 7.
15. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Figtrees in the New Testament," *Heythrop Journal* 14 (1973): 257.
16. Telford, *Barren Temple*, 163.
17. Collins, *Mark*, 527–8; Lane, *Mark*, 404; Lawrence D. Sporty, "The Location of the Holy House of Herod's Temple: Evidence from the Pre-Destruction Period," *Biblical Archeologist* 53 (Dec. 1990): 202.

18. Collins, *Mark*, 528; Ezekiel 40-48; 11Q19 40.5-6.

19. Isa 2:1-4; 55:5; 60:3; 49:6; 51:4-5; Jer 3:17; 16:19-21; Zech 8:20-3; Mic 4:1-2; 7:16-7; Zeph 3:9-10

20. Collins, *Mark*, 523; Boring, *Mark*, 323; Lane, *Mark*, 407; Werner Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 61. Contra, Gundry, *Mark*, 645.

21. "The λησται described by Josephus are almost always those who are engaged in guerrilla warfare against Rome prior to the fall of Jerusalem." George Wesley Buchanan, "Mark 11.15-19: Brigands in the Temple," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 30 (1959):

173. "Hence, the label, 'brigand,' apparently was not confined to highwaymen, but was also applied to *guerrilla warriors* by those who wished to refer to them in a derogatory way." "An Additional Note to 'Mark 11.15-19: Brigands in the Temple,'" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 31 (1960): 105.

22. *War* 4.3.7 (151); 5.1.2 (5-7).

23. Buchanan, "Brigands," 176-7; "Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?" *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 288-89; Joel Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 3 (1992): 450.

24. Marcus, "Jewish War," 451. Marcus thinks that the occupation of the Temple by the Zealots was "in pursuit of their military aims and their theology of purificatory war against the infidel."

25. *War* 4.3.10 (183).

26. *War* 4.6.3 (388).

27. Collins, *Mark*, 534.

# Chapter Fourteen

## A Lull in the Fighting

*War is only a cowardly escape from the problems of peace.*  
*Thomas Mann*

The Romans now suspend operations temporarily.

A resolution was now taken by Titus to relax the siege for a little while, and to afford the seditious an interval for consideration, and to see whether the demolishing of their second wall would not make them a little more compliant, or whether they were not somewhat afraid of a famine, because the spoils they had gotten by rapine would not be sufficient for them long; so he made use of this relaxation in order to compass his own designs.<sup>1</sup>

Mark uses this interlude to give the “seditious” a series of lessons on true leadership.

### HEAVEN SENT      MARK 11:27–33

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.” They argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But shall we say, ‘Of human origin?’”—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Now Jesus confronts representatives of the Jewish establishment: chief priests, and scribes, and elders. The cleansing of the Temple was directed against them.<sup>2</sup> The question, naturally, is the source of genuine leadership. The salvation movement, whose great hero was John the Baptist, claims its authority comes

from God. The established authorities do not dare to challenge this popular belief. The Temple is now held by John of Gischala.

John, who had seized upon the temple, had six thousand armed men under twenty commanders; the zealots also that had come over to him, and left off their opposition, were two thousand four hundred, and had the same commander that they had formerly, Eleazar, together with Simon the son of Arinus.<sup>3</sup>

He has effectively replaced the Temple hierarchy. It is his authority to lead which here is principally challenged.

## THE SIEGE WALL                      MARK 12:1-12

Then he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?" When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

This is a transparent allegory.

The Markan vineyard parable is to be understood as a description of the wicked behavior of Israel's religious leaders and as a warning of coming judgment. The <<vineyard>> symbolizes Israel, or the people of God, the <<tenants>> symbolize Israel's religious leaders, and the various servants no doubt are meant to be understood as the prophets of old.<sup>4</sup>

Mark uses the parable to describe the present military situation. It is based on the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7.

Let me sing for my beloved  
my love-song concerning his vineyard:  
My beloved had a vineyard  
on a very fertile hill.  
He dug it and cleared it of stones,  
and planted it with choice vines;

he built a watch-tower in the midst of it,  
and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
he expected it to yield grapes,  
but it yielded wild grapes.

Already before Mark wrote, this Song had been interpreted to refer to Jerusalem as the vineyard. The watch-tower is the Temple; the wine vat is the altar. The Targum, or Aramaic interpretation, paraphrases this passage, "And I sanctified them and I built my sanctuary in their midst, and I even gave my altar to atone for their sins."<sup>5</sup> Rabbinic literature makes the same identification.<sup>6</sup> This imagery is found also in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>7</sup> Mark expects his readers to see one further identification; the fence built around the vineyard<sup>8</sup> is the siege wall, or circumvallation, which the Romans now build around the City. It will keep the inhabitants from deserting and prevent supplies from being brought in. Since the rebel factions had burned each other's grain supplies in the civil war between them, the City was assured to suffer a terrible famine. Titus intended to bring the war to a speedy conclusion.

That therefore his opinion was, that if they aimed at quickness joined with security, they must build a wall round about the whole city; which was, he thought, the only way to prevent the Jews from coming out any way, and that then they would either entirely despair of saving the city, and so would surrender it up to him, or be still the more easily conquered when the famine had further weakened them.<sup>9</sup>

So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market-places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead, wheresoever their misery seized them.<sup>10</sup>

The Song of the Vineyard was downbeat in theme. The failure to pursue righteousness brings the wrath of God.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem  
and people of Judah,  
judge between me  
and my vineyard.  
What more was there to do for my vineyard  
that I have not done in it?  
When I expected it to yield grapes,  
why did it yield wild grapes? (Isa 5:3-4)

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;

he expected justice,  
but saw bloodshed;  
righteousness,  
but heard a cry! (Isa 5:7)

The Targum expresses it this way:

*I thought that they would do good deeds, but they made their deeds evil. Prophet, say to them, Behold, the house of Israel have rebelled against the law, and they are not willing to repent. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge now my case against my people. What more good did I promise to do for my people that I have not done for them? When I thought they would do good deeds, why did they make their deeds evil? And now I will tell you what I am about to do to my people. I will take up my Shekhinah from them, and they shall be for plundering; I will break down the place of their sanctuaries, and they shall be for trampling. And I will make them [to be] banished; they will not be helped and they will not be supported, and they will be cast out and forsaken; and I will command the prophets that they prophesy no prophecy concerning them. For the people of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; I thought that they would perform judgment, but behold, oppressors; that they would act innocently, but behold, they multiply sins.*<sup>11</sup>

The consequence is divine retribution in the form of foreign invasion. "He will raise a signal for a nation far away, and whistle for a people at the ends of the earth; Here they come, swiftly, speedily!" (Isaiah 5:26) Clearly, the Romans fulfill the prophecy. "At some point in time subsequent to the Babylonian exile and during the emergence of the targumic traditions Isa 5:1–7 came to be understood as a prediction of the temple's destruction."<sup>12</sup>

Mark describes the sins of Israel's leadership in terms of rejecting the prophets, the servants, sent to instruct them and give God his due. "And though the LORD persistently sent you all his servants the prophets, you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear" (Jer 25:4). Isaiah says "they have rejected the instruction of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa.5:24b). Ezra declares, "Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies" (Neh 9:26).

Finally, God sends his son, who is identified with the cornerstone of Psalm 118:22. This resonates with Isaiah. The prophet first says, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem" (Isa 28:14), and then quotes God as saying:

See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: "One who trusts will not panic." And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter (Isa 28:16–17).

The Qumran Community is likewise termed "the precious cornerstone."<sup>13</sup> They lay a "foundation of truth for Israel."<sup>14</sup> This reflects "the self-understanding of the community at Qumran as a metaphorical temple."<sup>15</sup> As the only true Israel, the Essenes are the "first-born" or "beloved" Son of God (Exod 4:22). Mark seems to be saying that the rejection of the Essenes by the Temple hierarchy has doomed the leadership to destruction. The vineyard of Jerusalem will be taken from them and given to others, namely, the Romans who are about to capture the Temple.<sup>16</sup> "Your holy people took possession for a little while; but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary" (Isaiah 63:18). Evans notes that "here in Mark's vineyard parable the point is being made that God has the right to replace the establishment and to bring about a new order."<sup>17</sup> The relevance of the vineyard to this judgment is clear.

It was at the time of the grape harvest and festival that Israel celebrated and reflected upon her election. It was on this occasion that the Israelites recounted God's mighty acts of leading them out of Egypt and slavery and into the promised land. In celebrating the grape harvest the Israelites celebrated their election. Israel is God's choice vineyard. It was against this setting that the prophet Isaiah sang his song and declared that Israel had been unfaithful and so had to be punished.<sup>18</sup>

In an earlier passage, Isaiah revealed the cause of the downfall.

The LORD rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts (Isa 3:13-15).

This is the Essenic point of view, and this is the theme of social justice which Mark will now develop.

### THE PAYMASTER MUSTERS      MARK 12:13-17

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

This well-known passage, so often invoked in discussions of church and state, alludes to the controversy over the tax census instituted when Rome took over

Judea in 6 A.D., and Judah led a revolt on that grounds that "this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty."<sup>19</sup> Now with Judea in full scale revolt against Rome, this admonition would have resonance. To Mark, it appears, it is best to avoid the subject. Taxation is not a proper reason for revolt from Rome.

The immediate occasion for this episode, however, is described by Josephus. Titus, who has suspended operations, now takes the opportunity to pay the troops.

Accordingly, as the usual appointed time when he must distribute subsistence money to the soldiers was now come, he gave orders that the commanders should put the army into battle-array, in the face of the enemy, and then give every one of the soldiers their pay. So the soldiers, according to custom, opened the cases wherein their arms before lay covered, and marched with their breast-plates on, as did the horsemen lead their horses in their fine trappings. Then did the places that were before the city shine very splendidly for a great way; nor was there anything so grateful to Titus's own men, or so terrible to the enemy, as that sight. For the whole old wall, and the north side of the temple, were full of spectators, and one might see the houses full of such as looked at them; nor was there any part of the city which was not covered over with their multitudes; nay, a very great consternation seized upon the hardiest of the Jews themselves, when they saw all the army in the same place, together with the fineness of their arms, and the good order of their men. And I cannot but think that the seditious would have changed their minds at that sight, unless the crimes they had committed against the people had been so horrid, that they despaired of forgiveness from the Romans; but as they believed death with torments must be their punishment, if they did not go on in the defense of the city, they thought it much better to die in war. Fate also prevailed so far over them, that the innocent were to perish with the guilty, and the city was to be destroyed with the seditious that were in it.<sup>20</sup>

This temptation to surrender is reflected in the dilemma over paying taxes in Mark's story. The soldiers may render service unto Caesar in return for payment in his coin, but the Jewish defenders owe their loyalty to God. "He said in effect 'If they use Caesar's coinage, let them serve Caesar.'"<sup>21</sup>

## LIVING AGAIN      MARK 12:18-27

Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that 'if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.' There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heav-



en. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."

Here for the first time, Jesus confronts the Sadducees, the conservative party which dominated the Temple aristocracy. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees accepted only the Torah, the so-called five books of Moses, which does not explicitly teach the resurrection of the dead. Jesus attempts to prove the resurrection of the dead from the law of Moses (Ex 3:6). The Pharisees, like the Essenes, belonged to the left, innovative wing of Judaism. Resurrection was one of the new doctrines introduced after the Babylonian Exile.<sup>22</sup> The Pharisees accused the Sadducees of being Epicureans, or hedonists. "The charge of hedonism meant to dismiss their lack of belief in an afterlife as fear of a final judgment that their sins would have given them reason to fear."<sup>23</sup>

Support for the doctrine of resurrection of the dead is found in the prophetic and apocryphal texts. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" Dan 12:2. "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead" (Isa 26:19). The hope of resurrection was particularly cogent for those who were persecuted:

And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws." When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (1 Macc 7:9,14-23).

Or for those who died in battle:

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin (2 Macc 12:43-44).

There is good reason to debate resurrection at this point. Josephus describes in grisly detail the high body count which was reached during the siege, largely as a result of the famine brought on by the rebels themselves, who had destroyed

their own grain supplies during their senseless civil war. This was especially hard on the poor, who could not afford the extravagant prices for what food was left. No fewer than 115,880 dead bodies had been carried out through one gate since the onset of the siege, no less than 600,000 altogether. When the bodies could no longer be carried out, they were piled up in heaps in large houses. People were forced to eat dung.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, whether these faithful departed would rise again and receive their reward was not an academic question at the height of the siege.

## SACRIFICES CEASE      MARK 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,' --this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

It is now, in mid-July, that the sacrifices which the Temple was designed to offer, can no longer take place.

And now Titus gave orders to his soldiers that were with him to dig up the foundations of the tower of Antonia, and make him a ready passage for his army to come up; while he himself had Josephus brought to him, (for he had been informed that on that very day, which was the seventeenth day of Panemus, the sacrifice called "the Daily Sacrifice" had failed, and had not been offered to God, for want of men to offer it, and that the people were grievously troubled at it,) and commanded him to say the same things to John that he had said before, that if he had any malicious inclination for fighting, he might come out with as many of his men as he pleased, in order to fight, without the danger of destroying either his city or temple; but that he desired he would not defile the temple, nor thereby offend against God. That he might, if he pleased, offer the sacrifices which were now discontinued by any of the Jews whom he should pitch upon. Upon this Josephus stood in such a place where he might be heard, not by John only, but by many more, and then declared to them what Caesar had given him in charge, and this in the Hebrew language. So he earnestly prayed them to spare their own city, and to prevent that fire which was just ready to seize upon the temple, and to offer their usual sacrifices to God therein.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of love of God and man was well recognized.<sup>26</sup> Mark believes they are superior to bloody sacrifice. In this he was at one with Johanan ben

Zakkai, a model for the kind of scribe who was not far from the kingdom of heaven.

Once when R. Johanan b. Zakkai was leaving Jerusalem, R. Joshua was walking behind him and saw the Temple in ruins. R. Joshua said, "Woe is us that this has been destroyed, the place where atonement was made for the sins of Israel." "No, my son, do you not know that we have a means of making atonement that is like it. And what is it? It is deeds of love, as it is said (Hos. 6:6): 'For I desire kindness, and not sacrifice.'"<sup>27</sup>

The Essenes had been practicing this philosophy for two centuries.

When these exist in Israel in accordance with these rules in order to establish the spirit of holiness in truth eternal, in order to atone for the fault of the transgression and for the guilt of sin and for approval for the earth, without the flesh of burnt offerings and without the fats of sacrifice—the offering of the lips in compliance with the decree will be like the pleasant aroma of justice and the correctness of behavior will be acceptable like a freewill offering—at this moment the men of the Community shall set themselves apart (like) a holy house for Aaron, in order to enter the holy of holies, and (like) a house of the Community for Israel, (for) those who walk in perfection.<sup>28</sup>

That charity was superior to sacrifice was a favorite theme of the prophets.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isa 1:11,16–17).

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:6–8)

I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:21–24).

A similar sentiment in a pagan context was expressed by Appollonius of Tyana: "The gods do not need sacrifices. Then what can one do to please them? Acquire wisdom, it seems to me, and do good to honorable men as far as one is able. That is what is dear to the gods; sacrifice is the occupation of the godless."<sup>29</sup> Sacrifices have ceased; the Temple will soon be destroyed. Now is the time for loving kindness. That is Mark's message.

## THE PEOPLE'S PRINCE      MARK 12:35-37

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared,

'The Lord said to my Lord,  
"Sit at my right hand,  
until I put your enemies under your feet.'"

David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?" And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

The concept of the Messiah began with the belief that God would restore the kingdom of David. Any king, of course, would be a "messiah," an anointed one. After the conquest of Judea by Babylon, however, there had been no descendant, or "son" of David, on the throne. The hope was that a son of David would soon deliver his people from their enemies.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land (Jer 23:5).

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old (Amos 9:11).

But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jer 30:9).

For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time (Jer 33:14-18).

This last passage is particularly poignant. The daily sacrifices have now ceased, precisely because there were no priests to offer them. Just as the priesthood has

failed, so has the royal dynasty. It will not be restored. What the scribes have promised, will not come to pass.

Mark takes this opportunity to expound on his philosophy of political leadership. He quotes from Psalm 110 to show that David himself acknowledged that the Messiah would be his Lord, not his son. A father cannot be subordinate to his offspring. David was divinely inspired to write the Psalms. His last words were, "The spirit of the LORD speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam 23:2). Hence, David is a prophet when he testifies to the authority of the Messiah. Mark may be endorsing John of Gischala, who was the son of Levi, and therefore most likely not a descendent of David.<sup>30</sup> There is good reason that "the large crowd was listening to him with delight." The implication is that the Messiah will serve the people. In effect, the common folk are the Messiah. This is a theme that Mark has been developing.

### PRIDE BEFORE THE FALL      MARK 12:38-40

As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

The meaning of this is fairly straightforward. Mark has contrasted Jesus, the true cause of Israel's salvation, with the scribes all along. He now criticizes their clerical ambition. The scribes were the learned professionals of their day, the ones who worked with books. Their principal text, of course, was the Bible. Their main function was to draw legal lessons from scripture, to expound the Law of Moses. Hence, their role was a merger of lawyer and Bible scholar, surely a dangerous combination. It has been suggested that the scribes "devoured widows' houses" by being appointed trustees of their property, for which, of course, they were paid out of the assets of the estate. Saying long prayers gave them the appearance of piety, which might facilitate their appointment.<sup>31</sup> The scribes, no doubt, enjoyed their prestige and flaunted it. This was inconsistent with Mark's view of servant leadership.

### THE WIDOW'S REVENGE      MARK 12:41-44

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Now Mark takes the part of the widows, presumably the ones the scribes had exploited. In contrast to their ambition and greed, and the show of wealth by the rich, Mark praises the humility and piety of the poor widow. The message is obvious. Their wealth will not save them when the Romans ravage the City. The Temple, to which their wealth is conspicuously contributed, will fall. The riches of the Temple will be transported to Rome. Only the good will of the widow will prevail.

In the same vein, Josephus, writing after the Temple has been destroyed, has Samuel say to Saul:

But the prophet said that the Deity was not pleased by sacrifices, but by those who are good and just. Such were those who followed his will and commands, and who thought nothing to have been done well by themselves other than what they did at God's direction. For it is not by not sacrificing to him that one despises [God], but by seeming to disobey him. "From those who do not obey or offer the true worship that alone is pleasing to God—even if they sacrifice many fat victims, or present magnificent dedicatory offerings made from silver and gold—he does not receive these things benevolently, but rejects them and regards them as proofs of vileness rather than of piety. Rather, it is those who keep in mind only what God has uttered and directed and who choose to die rather than transgress any of these things in whom he takes pleasure. From them he seeks no sacrifice, and, if they do sacrifice anything, however humble, he will more readily accept the honor [given him] by poverty than by the wealthiest."<sup>32</sup>

This brings the North City Cycle to a close. The lull in the fighting has ended. The Romans will now begin their assault on the Temple. The failure of the defenders to subscribe to the moral theology which Mark, through the figure of Jesus, has been preaching will end in the fall of the Temple and the demise of the Temple hierarchy.

## NOTES

1. *War* 5.9.1 (348).

2. It is possible to include this question on authority in the previous phase, where the cleansing of the Temple occurred. However, the fact that Jesus returns to the City and begins his confrontation with the authorities argues for dividing the phases as this point.

3. *War* 5.6.1 (250).

4. Craig A. Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12," *Biblishe Zeitschrift* 28 (1984): 85.

5. Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible 11 (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 2007), 10.

6. Tosefta, Sukkah 3.15; Meilah 1:16. "Though this Jewish interpretation is preserved in admittedly late (i.e., post-NT) sources, the similar usage and context in Mark suggest that this interpretation is at least as old as the first century and that the evangelist Mark was aware of it." Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (1989): 240.

7. Joseph M. Baumgarten, "4Q500 and the Ancient Conception of the Lord's Vineyard," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989):1-6; George J. Brooke, "4Q500 1 and the Use of Scripture in the Parable of the Vineyard," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2, no. 3 (Nov. 1995): 268-94.
8. The fence, or wall, appears in the Septuagint of Isa 5:2.
9. *War* 5.12.1 (499). The course of the wall is detailed in *War* 5.12.2 (504--07).
10. *War* 5.12.3 (512-13).
11. Chilton, *Targum*, 10-11.
12. Evans, "Vineyard," 83.
13. IQS 9.8.
14. IQS 5.6. R. J. McKelvey, "Christ the Cornerstone," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961-2): 355.
15. Collins, *Mark*, 548, citing IQS 8:4-10, 9:3-6.
16. If the "wicked sharecroppers" are "the corrupt temple elders," then "the new tenants are the conquering Romans." Price, *Son of Man*, 285.
17. Evans, "Vineyard," 86.
18. Evans, "Vineyard," 85-86.
19. *Ant.* 18.1.1 (4).
20. *War* 5.9.1 (349).
21. K. Grayston, "The Study of Mark XIII," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 56 (1974): 372.
22. b Sanh 90b-92b.
23. Price, *Son of Man*, 251.
24. *War* 5.13.7 (567-71).
25. *War* 6.2.1 (93-95). The summer month of Panemus in the Macedonian calendar is approximately the equivalent of the Roman month of July or the Jewish month of Tammuz.
26. Deut 6:4-5; Lev 19:18; y Ned 9:4; T. Dan 5:3; T. Iss 5:2; Shab 31a.
27. ARN 4.21.
28. IQS 9.3-6. This passage "implies the rejection of sacrifices and their replacement by prayer, deeds of charity, and the moral life." J. L. Teicher, "Priests and Sacrifices in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 5, no. 3 (1954): 93.
29. Robert J. Penella, *The Letters of Appollonius of Tyana: A Critical Text with Prolegomena, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 47, Letter No. 26. "To the priests of Olympia."
30. *War* 2.20.6 (575); *Life* 10 (43).
31. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "'Eating up the Houses of Widows': Jesus's Comment on Lawyers?" *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1972): 1-9.
32. *Ant.* 6.7.4 (147-9).

# *Chapter Fifteen*

## Fall of the Temple

*Priests pollute altars with blood.*

*Apollonius of Tyana*

Mark has now brought us to a critical pass. The Romans have resumed operations. They are preparing to assault the very Temple itself. This is the opening phase of the Prophecy of Doom cycle. As the last phase in the Judgment on Jerusalem series, it focuses on the destruction of the City. The time is early August. The Temple is about to fall.

NO STONE WILL STAND

MARK 13:1-2

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

It is generally recognized that Mark is alluding to the destruction on the Temple mount. The main building was the sanctuary itself, which was built of huge stones.<sup>1</sup> Josephus describes what happened when the siege of the City was over.

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury, (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne; and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison, as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhab-



ited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.<sup>2</sup>

Some commentators quibble about the technical accuracy of this prediction.<sup>3</sup> It is true that Titus left towers in the city standing, so there were some stones left on top of other stones, but Mark here is referring to the Temple Mount. At most, this is merely another example of rhetorical hyperbole. It no more matters that not every stone was torn down than that not "all the people of Jerusalem" went out to be baptized by John (Mark 1:5). It is more than doubtful that the High Priest went wading in the Jordan. Moreover, it is not a cogent comment that the Western Wall was left standing, and may be seen today. Mark refers to "buildings," not the retaining wall of the Temple platform. Josephus specifically states that the Temple proper, the sanctuary, was torn down.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Western Wall is scarcely visible when exiting toward the Mount of Olives to the east. It is hardly an objection that Mark does not refer to burning the Temple.<sup>5</sup> He was emphasizing the unbuilding of the buildings. The reason for Mark's emphasis on building stones is that the Bible itself refers to it. "Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the LORD's temple," etc. (Hag 2:15) "The sacred stones lie scattered at the head of every street" (Lam 4:1). "O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins" (Ps 79:1). "Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins" (Jer 26:18). Stones do not burn. That the interior of the Temple was set afire does nothing to detract from the fact that the Temple, as Josephus clearly states, was razed to the ground. As Marcus notes, "the complete demolition of the Second Temple, down to its very foundations, became proverbial in rabbinic circles and was even used to distinguish the second destruction by the Romans from the first destruction by the Babylonians."<sup>6</sup>

## WOE AND WARFARE

## MARK 13:3-8

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

As Boring observes, "The imagery of labor pains for the troubles the world must go through in bringing forth the Messiah is a Jewish idea developed from biblical roots."<sup>7</sup> Many pretended messiahs will come in the name of "Jesus," *i.e.*, the true cause of Israel's salvation. Many will claim to be the savior of Israel.

Hence, Mark's warning against those who claim to be the one — "I am he!" — to save the nation.

The birth pangs echo phrases from the Bible.

There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book (Dan. 12:1).

I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom (Isa 19:2).

They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress (2 Chr 15:6).

Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children (Isa 66:8).

Vespasian had participated in the invasion of Britain and was a principal in the civil wars which led to becoming emperor, and, of course, there was the Jewish War itself. So much for "wars and rumors of wars." As for earthquakes, they struck in Asia Minor in 61 A.D., Pompeii and Herculaneum in 63 A.D., shortly before Nero's death, in Jerusalem. There were famines under Claudius and Nero and during the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

## FATE OF THE FAITHFUL

## MARK 13: 9-13

"As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, 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. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

The fate of the rebels is sealed. They will suffer persecution. The "good news," that is, the news of Israel's ultimate victory, must be heralded to all the nations. Civil war will divide families, as it always does.

Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household (Mic 7:5-6).

The faithful will be hated because of the name of "Jesus," the salvation of Israel. Those keep up the fight and do not surrender will ultimately be victorious.

## THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

MARK 13:14-23

"But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; the one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything.

What is here translated "desolating sacrilege" is more commonly rendered the "abomination of desolation." The term comes from the desecration of the Temple by the Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanes when "they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt-offering" (1 Macc 1:54).

Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate (Dan 11:31).

He shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates (Dan 9:27).

This was "the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up" (Dan 12:11).

Now the Temple is besieged by the Romans. The sacrifices again have ceased. The sanctuary is again desecrated, but how exactly? Commentators point out the term for "desolating sacrilege" is grammatically a neuter noun, whereas the participle which follows is masculine. The NRSV translation, therefore, is misleading. The pronoun should be "he" not "it", and he is not "set up" but "standing."<sup>9</sup> The male person who is standing in the sacred precinct is, of course, Titus.

And now, since Caesar was no way able to restrain the enthusiastic fury of the soldiers, and the fire proceeded on more and more, he went into the holy place of the temple, with his commanders, and saw it, with what was in it, which he found to be far superior to what the relations of foreigners contained, and not inferior to what we ourselves boasted of and believed about it.<sup>10</sup>

"The masculine participle would thus refer to the divinized emperor or to the deity he claimed to be or to represent."<sup>11</sup> Boring argues that

The "abomination of desolation" is cryptic apocalyptic language for the desecration and destruction of the temple, which is about to happen or has just happened. The grammatical shift from neuter "abomination" to masculine "standing" points to the desecration of the temple not by an altar, but by a human act. In Mark's perspective, this could have referred to the actions of Titus and his soldiers in 70 C.E.<sup>12</sup>

Kelber recognizes this as well:

The "desolating sacrilege," conceived as a personal power and standing where forbidden, will be a coded reference to the Roman general Titus who commanded the final assault on the temple and took possession of the ruined site (A.D. 70).<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that the numerical value of "desolating sacrilege" in Hebrew is 876, which is also the numerical value of the Greek form of Titus, which is TITOS.<sup>14</sup> The parenthetical phrase—"let the reader understand"—is "a literary device to indicate that the preceding allusion to the 'desolating sacrilege' or 'abomination of desolation' is a cryptic saying that requires interpretation."<sup>15</sup> For Mark, the ideal reader would be the Teacher of Righteousness, who was able to interpret scripture, such as Daniel, to predict the future. The prophet Habakkuk (2:2) has the Lord say: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it." The Commentary on Habakkuk says of this: "Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets."<sup>16</sup>

Note that Mark says those in Judea must flee to the mountains, not those in Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> There can be no objection, therefore, that it was impossible to flee the City. This recalls the Maccabees, who fled to the hills to carry on guerilla warfare (1 Macc 2:28). It also recalls the command to flee the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah: "When they had brought them outside, they said, 'Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed'" (Gen 19:17). Shortening the days so that fugitives may flee now in the summer recalls the Babylonian conquest. "At the destruction of the First Temple God lengthened the days so that it occurred in the summer and not in winter!"<sup>18</sup>

Josephus mentions several who would be king in the years leading up to the war. Judas led a tax revolt;<sup>19</sup> Simon burned down the royal palace in Jericho;<sup>20</sup> Arthrongus "filled all Judea with a piratic war";<sup>21</sup> Theudas promised to divide the Jordan;<sup>22</sup> an unnamed Egyptian promised to cause the walls of Jerusalem to fall;<sup>23</sup> Manahem tried to take over the war against Rome.<sup>24</sup> Worst of all were the false prophets who appeared at this critical point when the Temple was in flames. Thousands died as a result.

A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by

the tyrants to impose on the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes.<sup>25</sup>

## COMING ON THE CLOUDS

## MARK 13: 24-27

"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

This language recalls Isaiah: "For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light" (Isa 13:10). Here the prophet is predicting the wrath of God which will come: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty!" (Isa 13:6) The same imagery is found in Joel. "The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (Joel 2:10). This, too, is a sign of divine judgment.

I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:30-32).

After setting the stage, Mark calls on Daniel for the drama.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14 RSV).

For some unknown reason, the translators of NRSV have chosen to be politically correct in Daniel, where the phrase "Son of Man" is rendered "human being," but traditional in the passages in Mark where this passage in Daniel is alluded to. This does a disservice to the reader, who cannot readily recognize that the Danielic prophecy is the origin of the Markan apocalypse. Here, the Revised Standard Version has been quoted instead, for the convenience of the reader.

Mark's meaning is clear. The day of Israel's triumph is coming. The Son of Man, which in Daniel refers to the righteous remnant, will ultimately be victori-

ous. The Gentiles will serve the Jews, not the other way around, as now appears in the destruction of Jerusalem.

But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever (Dan 7:18).

The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them (Dan 7:27).

Although the Son of Man came to mean a celestial figure who would judge the peoples and would be identified with the messiah, for Mark the Son of Man represents the Jewish people, or more particularly, the elect among them who will be gathered in.<sup>26</sup> “Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back” (Deut 30:4). The Essenes considered themselves the “elect of Goodwill who shall atone for the Land and pay to the wicked their reward.”<sup>27</sup> They are the “elect of righteousness.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Mark hopes the Essenic community will be restored.

## LONG HOT SUMMER

## MARK 13: 28–31

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

There were two crops of figs, an early harvest in May and June, and the summer harvest from mid August to October.<sup>29</sup> The Romans took the outer wall of the City about the time of the early figs. Now, when the summer figs are ready to pick, the Temple is about to be taken. The fruit is a prophetic sign.

This is what the Lord GOD showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the LORD said to me, The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” says the Lord GOD; “the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!” (Amos 8:1-3)

This is the lesson to learn from the fig tree. Mark warns the “he is near.” Here, again, “he” is Titus, who is at the very gates of the Temple. He now gives orders to set the gates on fire.<sup>30</sup>

## WATCH AND WAIT

## MARK 13: 32-37

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. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

Cogently, Mark warns the “doorkeepers,” the Jewish defenders, to stay awake. No one knows when Titus will attack the Temple. “So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia, and resolved to storm the temple the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army, and to encamp round about the holy house.”<sup>31</sup> This was the fateful anniversary of the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians. Impetuously, one of the soldiers grabbed a burning torch and threw it through a window into the sanctuary. Thus was the Temple set afire.<sup>32</sup>

This brings the Judgment on Jerusalem series to a close. The siege has climaxed with the destruction of the holy place itself. The Romans will now conquer the rest of the City, which in narrative terms will be depicted as the Passion.

## NOTES

1. *War* 5.5.6 (224).
2. *War* 7.1.1 (1–4).
3. Collins, *Mark*, 601–2.
4. *Ton neōn kataskaptein*.
5. Gundry, *Mark*, 754.
6. Marcus, *Mark*, 869, citing b. Git. 57b, Exod. Rab. 35.5, Lam. Rab. 5.1.
7. Boring, *Mark*, 363, fn. 54. See his citations.
8. Marcus, *Mark*, 877.
9. Collins, *Mark*, 591, “standing where he should not”; Boring, *Mark*, 361, “standing where he must not.”
10. *War* 6.4.7 (260).
11. Collins, *Mark*, 610.
12. Boring, *Mark*, 367–78. Boring also considers it possible that the actions of the Zealots who occupied the Temple are referred to. See also Malone, *Mark*, 259; Gundry, *Mark*, 742.
13. Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 68.
14. O. T. Owen, “One Hundred and Fifty Three Fishes,” *The Expository Times* 100 (1988-9): 53.
15. Collins, *Mark*, 596.
16. 1QpHab 7.4.
17. Contra Gundry, *Mark*, 755.
18. Lam R. I. 14 (56a).

19. *War* 2.4.1 (56); 2.8.1 (117-18).

20. *War* 2.4.2 (57-59).

21. *War* 2.4.3 (60-65).

22. *Ant.* 20.5.1 (97-99).

23. *Ant.* 20.8.6 (167-72); *War* 2.13.5 (261-63).

24. *War* 2.17.8-9 (433-448).

25. *War* 6.5.2 (285-86).

26. John J. Collins, suggests that this occurs in the company of angels. "The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 50-66.

27. IQS 8.6 Vermes.

28. IQH 10(2).13.

29. Hiers, "Season for Figs," 133. Marcus, *Mark*, 910, translates *theros* as "harvest," rather than, in NRSV, "summer." Clearly, it is the summer harvest that is in mind.

30. *War* 6.4.1 (228).

31. *War* 6.4.5 (249).

32. *War* 6.4.5 (250-53).



## *Chapter Sixteen*

# Massacre of Martyrs

*Only the dead have seen the end of war.*

*George Santayana*

Now that the Temple has fallen, the fate of the City is sealed. The Passion of Jerusalem will follow. The martyrdom of the messiah will represent the tragic fate of the chosen people, who appear to have been forsaken by their God. The paradox of the martyred messiah will be resolved when Israel rises again, which is the meaning of the resurrection. If the Gospel is, as Kähler put it, "a passion narrative with an extended introduction,"<sup>1</sup> it is because the long history of Israel, in Mark's view, has led to this disaster. Here in the closing phase of the Prophecy of Doom cycle, the slaughter of the people of Jerusalem will be dramatized.

### THE DISLOYAL ELITE

### MARK 14:1-2

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

The true cause of Israel's salvation, or "Jesus," is like the righteous man who falls victim to the forces of the established order — the chief priests and scribes — and in the end be vindicated.

### THE MARTYRED MESSIAH

### MARK 14:3-9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For

you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

In this charming story, Mark combines the two roles of Jesus, martyr and messiah. Both are symbolized by anointing. Jesus, the king messiah is anointed. Oil is poured over his head.

Her anointment immediately brings to mind the ancient ritual of royal enthronement. Anointment, the pouring of oil over the head, was the central act by which the kings of Israel were appointed and installed into the royal office. David was made king by Samuel's anointment (1 Sam. 16:13), and his successors were the "anointed ones" of God (Ps. 45:7, 89:20). In analogy to this ancient ritual, the royal Davidic Messiah was likewise expected to be appointed by the royal investiture of anointment.<sup>2</sup>

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward (1 Sam 16:13).

Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him; he said, "The LORD has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around. Now this shall be the sign to you that the LORD has anointed you ruler over his heritage" (Ps 10:1).

At the same time, his body is anointed for burial. "His is an anointment unto death."<sup>3</sup> A lesson in Jewish ethics is implied.<sup>4</sup> Unnamed critics complain that the woman has wasted her expensive ointment and should have sold it and donated the money to the poor. Jesus defends her by saying that she has performed a "good service," *kalon ergon*, literally a "beautiful work." Jewish ethics distinguishes between giving alms and performing personal services.<sup>5</sup> The latter is considered superior in moral merit.

Our masters taught: Loving-kindness is greater than charity in three ways. Charity is done with one's money, while loving-kindness may be done with one's money or with one's person. Charity is given only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and to the rich. Charity is given only to the living, while lovingkindness may be shown to both the living and the dead.<sup>6</sup>

Highly praised is burying the dead. Hence, in preparing him for burial she is doing a greater good. There will be time for almsgiving later. "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land'" (Deut 15:11). Instead of being in remembrance "of her," this may mean her memorial to Jesus.<sup>7</sup> The

fact that the anointing takes place at Bethany, east of the City, in the house of a leper may reflect the Essenic prescription for lepers to live in that area.<sup>8</sup>

## THE REBELS CONSPIRE

MARK 14:10-11

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

In Chapter Three, we looked at the names of the Twelve. The last named was Judas Iscariot, which we interpreted to mean the Sicarii Jew, extremists who betrayed the true cause of Israel's salvation, or "Jesus." Here they are depicted as conspiring with the disloyal elite, which will surrender to the Roman invaders.

But now at this time it was that one of the priests, the son of Thebuthus, whose name was Jesus, upon his having security given him, by the oath of Caesar, that he should be preserved, upon condition that he should deliver to him certain of the precious things that had been repositied in the temple came out of it, and delivered him from the wall of the holy house two candlesticks, like to those that lay in the holy house, with tables, and cisterns, and vials, all made of solid gold, and very heavy. He also delivered to him the veils and the garments, with the precious stones, and a great number of other precious vessels that belonged to their sacred worship. The treasurer of the temple also, whose name was Phineas, was seized on, and showed Titus the coats and girdles of the priests, with a great quantity of purple and scarlet, which were there repositied for the uses of the veil, as also a great deal of cinnamon and cassia, with a large quantity of other sweet spices, which used to be mixed together, and offered as incense to God every day. A great many other treasures were also delivered to him, with sacred ornaments of the temple not a few; which things thus delivered to Titus obtained of him for this man the same pardon that he had allowed to such as deserted of their own accord.<sup>9</sup>

## THE MESSIANIC MEAL

MARK 14:12-21

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one

after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

We have seen that the Essenes had branches throughout the country. An important settlement was in Jerusalem. Josephus speaks of the Essene Gate in the wall of the City. This has been identified with a gate cut into the wall in the southwest of the city wall. The Essene quarter lay behind it. The Essenes would exit through this gate to use the lavatory, or "Bethso," to the northwest. Their purity law prohibited relieving themselves in the sacred city.<sup>10</sup> The Damascus Document, as we have seen, governed the lives of the associates of the community, who lived married lives. The same Document, however, prohibits sexual intercourse in the City. "No man should sleep with his wife in the city of the temple, defiling the city of the temple with their impurity."<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Jerusalem Essenes must have been celibate, as they were at Qumran. It is significant, then, that Jesus tells the two disciples to look for a man carrying a water jar. Although men might carry animal skins containing water, water was carried in jar by women for household use.<sup>12</sup> In a celibate male community, of course, some men would have to do "women's work," like carrying water in a jar.<sup>13</sup> Josephus tells us how the Essenes welcomed visiting members of their order. Here, Jesus and his followers are to celebrate the Passover in the guest house in the Essene quarter.<sup>14</sup>

They have no one certain city, but many of them dwell in every city; and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go in to such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing at all with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly, there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and to provide garments and other necessaries for them.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note that the traditional site of the "upper room" is in the same area as the Essene quarter.<sup>16</sup> Mark dramatizes the betrayal of Israel's cause by the rebel leaders.

Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me (Ps 41:9).

It is not enemies who taunt me— I could bear that; it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me— I could hide from them. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the throng (Ps 55: 12-14).

Is it not a sorrow like that for death itself when a dear friend turns into an enemy? (Sir 37:2)

## BLOOD OF THE COVENANT      MARK 14:22-26

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

This is commonly called the "institution of the Lord's supper." What is significant is that this same ceremony had been celebrated by the Essenes for perhaps two centuries. The difference was that they celebrated their communion in anticipation of the coming of the messiah, whereas here the messiah has put in an appearance and celebrates it as a foretaste of the messianic banquet which will be celebrated when the kingdom of God has arrived. What was done in anticipation of the messiah will now be done in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25).

The Rule of the Congregation describes the celebration of this Essenic ceremony when the priestly and royal Messiahs appear before the assembled congregation, which "uses imagery from the motif of the messianic banquet."<sup>17</sup>

And [when] they gather at the table of community [or to drink] the new wine, and the table of community is prepared [and] the new wine [is mixed] for drinking, [no-one should stretch out] his hand to the first-fruit of the bread and of the [new wine] before the priest, for [he is the one who bl]esses the first-fruit of bread and of the new wine [and stretches out] his hand towards the bread before them. Afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall stretch out his hand towards the bread. [And afterwards, shall] bless all the congregation of the community, each [one according to] his dignity. And in accordance with this regulation they shall act at each me[al, when]at least ten m[en are gat]hered.<sup>18</sup>

The Rule of the Community describes this anticipatory ceremony, which would have been celebrated on a regular basis.

In every place where there are ten men of the Community council, there should not be a priest missing amongst them. And when they prepare the table to dine or the new wine for drinking, the priest shall stretch out his hand as the first to bless the first fruits of the bread {or the new wine for drinking, the priest shall stretch out his hand as the first to bless the first fruits of the bread} and of the new wine.<sup>19</sup>

According to Schiffman, "the dominant motif in these meals is the Messianic banquet. For the Qumranites believed that they lived at the dawn of the Messianic era."<sup>20</sup> The communal meal was "a sample of the world to come."<sup>21</sup> The prospect of the messianic banquet is found in Isaiah (25:6): "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear." The

communal meal replaced the sacrifice in Jerusalem,<sup>22</sup> which at this point in the story can no longer be offered. Josephus says that

when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Bread and wine are a part of daily sacrifices.<sup>24</sup>

Mark draws on the imagery of the ritual cannibalism practiced in the pagan mystery cults in which the body and blood of the savior god was symbolically consumed. This would be quite impossible in a Jewish context in which the consumption of blood was forbidden (Gen 9:4). The "blood of the covenant" represents the sacrificial blood which Moses dashed against the altar.

Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exod 24:7-8)

The ritual symbolizes salvation. "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD," and "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones" (Ps 116:13-15). This sanguinary spectacle was likely prompted by the massacre of martyrs by the rebel extremists, which may explain the image of betrayal by insiders.

And now the seditious rushed into the royal palace, into which many had put their effects, because it was so strong, and drove the Romans away from it. They also slew all the people that had crowded into it, who were in number about eight thousand four hundred, and plundered them of what they had.<sup>25</sup>

## SCATTERING THE SHEEP

## MARK 14:27-31

And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Mark draws on the prophecy of Zechariah:

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate," says the LORD of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones (Zech 13:7).

The true cause of Israel's salvation, or "Jesus," will be deserted even by his inner circle. "You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape" (Ps 88:8). Not surprisingly, many Jews now attempted to escape, or "desert" the cause.

But as for the tyrants themselves, and those that were with them, when they found that they were encompassed on every side, and, as it were, walled round, without any method of escaping, they desired to treat with Titus by word of mouth.<sup>26</sup>

**They rejected Titus' offer of surrender.**

That they could not accept of it, because they had sworn never to do so; but they desired they might have leave to go through the wall that had been made about them, with their wives and children; for that they would go into the desert, and leave the city to him.<sup>27</sup>

**The rebels tried to prevent desertion.**

So they dispersed themselves before the city, and laid themselves in ambush among its ruins, to catch those that attempted to desert to the Romans; accordingly many such deserters were caught by them, and were all slain; for these were too weak, by reason of their want of food, to fly away from them; so their dead bodies were thrown to the dogs. Now every other sort of death was thought more tolerable than the famine, insomuch that, though the Jews despaired now of mercy, yet would they fly to the Romans, and would themselves, even of their own accord, fall among the murderous rebels also.<sup>28</sup>

**We also read of Simon resisting desertion or surrender, which may explain why Simon Peter protests that he will not desert Jesus.**

It was at this time that the commanders of the Idumeans got together privately, and took counsel about surrendering up themselves to the Romans. Accordingly, they sent five men to Titus, and entreated him to give them his right hand for their security. So Titus thinking that the tyrants would yield, if the Idumeans, upon whom a great part of the war depended, were once withdrawn from them, after some reluctancy and delay, complied with them, and gave them security for their lives, and sent the five men back. But as these Idumeans were preparing to march out, Simon perceived it, and immediately slew the five men that had gone to Titus, and took their commanders, and put them in prison.<sup>29</sup>

**As Mark predicted and as we will see, Simon will indeed desert the true cause of Israel's salvation.**

## PREPARING THE ASSAULT      MARK 14:32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Mark now depicts a pregnant interlude during which the Romans prepare to assault the Upper City.

Now when Caesar perceived that the upper city was so steep that it could not possibly be taken without raising banks against it, he distributed the several parts of that work among his army, and this on the twentieth day of the month Lous [Ab]. Now the carriage of the materials was a difficult task, since all the trees, as I have already told you, that were about the city, within the distance of a hundred furlongs, had their branches cut off already, in order to make the former banks.<sup>30</sup>

This is dramatized as Jesus suffering alone in the face of his impending fate. The anguish is poignant. "My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me" (Ps 55:4-5).

I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?" As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?" Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God (Ps 42:9-11).

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit" (Ps. 51:12). That the scene takes place on the Mount of Olives is significant. It recalls David grieving over the rebellion of his son. "But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, with his head covered and walking barefoot; and all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went" (2 Sam 15:30). Soon, the Upper City will fall.



This is the closing phase of the Prophecy of Doom cycle. The Destruction Series, the "Passion," has begun. Jerusalem will soon be defeated.

## NOTES

1. Martin Kähler, *Jesus, The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, translated by Carl E. Braaten, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 80 n. 11.
2. Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 72.
3. Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 72; m Shab 23.5.
4. Joachim Jeremias, "Die Salbungsgeschichte Mc 14 3-9," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 35 (1936): 75-82; "Mc 14<sub>9</sub>," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 44 (1952/53): 103-07.
5. The Hebrew terms are *tzedaka*, literally "righteousness," and *gemilut hasadim*, "giving of loving-kindness."
6. b Suk 49b.
7. J. Harold Greenlee, "Εἰς μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς, 'For her Memorial': Mt xxvi. 13, Mk xiv. 9," *The Expository Times* 71 (1959-60): 945.
8. 11Q Temple 46.16-18; Gundry, *Mark*, 811.
9. *War* 6.8.3 (387-91).
10. Pixner, *Paths*, 192-219; "Jerusalem's Essene Gateway: Where the Community Lived in Jesus' Time," *Biblical Archeology Review* 23, no. 3 (May/June 1997).
11. CD 12.1-2.
12. Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 404; Gundry, *Mark*, 821; Witherington, *Mark*, 370; Taylor, *Mark*, 537. Boring, *Mark*, 388, thinks it would not be unusual to see slaves carrying water jars.
13. Pixner, *Paths*, 240.
14. Pixner, *Paths*, 240.
15. *War* 2.8.4 (124-25).
16. Pixner, *Paths*, 241.
17. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 156.
18. 1QSa 2.17-22.
19. 1QS 6.3-6.
20. Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Communal Meals at Qumran," *Revue de Qumran* 10 (1979): 46.
21. Schiffman, "Meals," 53, quoting b Baba' Batra' 16a, 17a.
22. Hans Burgmann, "Das Kultmahl der Qumrangemeinde und der politische Gegensatz zum Makkabäer Jonathan," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 27, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1971): 392.
23. *Ant.* 18.1.5 (18-19).
24. Burgmann, "Kultmahl," 394; Exod 29:40.
25. *War* 6.7.1 (358).
26. *War* 6.6.2 (323).
27. *War* 6.6.3 (351-53).
28. *War* 6.7.2 (366-69).
29. *War* 6.8.2 (378-86).
30. *War* 6.8.1 (374-75).

## *Chapter Seventeen*

### **The City Surrenders**

*War does not determine who is right—only who is left.*

*Bertrand Russell*

The Romans have now completed their earthworks. They are ready to assault the Upper City, home of the rich and powerful. Here “Jesus,” the true cause of Israel’s salvation, will be on trial before the chief priests, and scribes, and elders, the Jewish establishment.

#### **THE CAPTURE      MARK 14:43–50**

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.”

The arrest of Jesus at the hands of the crowd sent by the ruling class represents the taking of the Upper City. The aristocratic quarter offers little resistance. Essentially, the City surrenders.

And now were the banks finished on the seventh day of the month Gorpieus, [Elul,] in eighteen days' time, when the Romans brought their machines against the wall. But for the seditious, some of them, as despairing of saving the city, retired from the wall to the citadel; others of them went down into the subterranean vaults, though still a great many of them defended themselves against those that brought the engines for the battery; yet did the Romans overcome them by their number and by their strength; and, what was the principal thing of all, by going cheerfully about their work, while the Jews were quite dejected, and become weak. Now as soon as a part of the wall was battered down, and certain of the towers yielded to the impression of the battering rams, those that opposed themselves fled away, and such a terror fell upon the tyrants, as was much greater than the occasion required; for before the enemy got over the breach they were quite stunned, and were immediately for flying away.<sup>1</sup>

The capture of the innocent is a well-known motif. "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training" (Wis 2:12). The treacherous Judas, symbol of misguided revolutionaries, betray the true cause of Israel's salvation, "Jesus," into the hands of the Jewish authorities. The kiss is a sign of fellowship. It could also be a deception. "Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (Prov 27:6).

Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword in Joab's hand; Joab struck him in the belly so that his entrails poured out on the ground, and he died (2 Sam 20:9-10a).

Cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave is a curious detail. That would have disqualified the high priest to serve,<sup>2</sup> but not his slave. Perhaps Mark is thinking of the incident in which the ear of the tribune of Vitellius was cut off just before Vitellius was assassinated.<sup>3</sup>

## THE AUTHOR ESCAPES

## MARK 14:51-52

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

This incident has puzzled commentators. The simplest explanation is that the young man is Mark himself, our author, "a modest signature to the gospel."<sup>4</sup> "There is no better conjecture than that it was Mark himself."<sup>5</sup> He seems to be telling us that he escaped capture at this critical juncture. He survived to write our Gospel. "And those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, says the LORD" (Amos 2:16). "The Hebrew expression translated 'shall flee naked' means to 'flee unarmed.'"<sup>6</sup> Fortunately for us, Mark lived to tell about it.

## ON TRIAL BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT

MARK 14:53-65

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Here Mark has created a poignant vignette. Jesus, the very symbol of salvation, is on trial before the established Jewish authority. The counterculture of the messianic movement is condemned by those in power. The very messianic ideal itself is on trial.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus is accused of planning the destruction of the Temple, which has just taken place. It will be replaced with a spiritual temple "not made with hands." This has been the Essenic ideal for two centuries. As we noted in Chapter 3, their Community was a "House of Holiness for Israel" and a "Most Holy Dwelling for Aaron,"<sup>8</sup> a "temple of man," *miqdash adam*.<sup>9</sup> God himself was prophesied to destroy the manmade Temple (Jer 7:12-15; 26:4-9). This accusation recalls the story of another Jesus, who prophesied the destruction of the Temple a decade before it fell.<sup>10</sup>

But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple, began on a sudden to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!" This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city.<sup>11</sup>

In Mark's view, the destruction of the Temple was part of God's plan. It was not the fault of the rebels. Jesus is falsely accused.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence (Ps 27:12).

Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me about things I do not know (Ps 35:11).

So the presidents and the satraps tried to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom. But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him (Dan 6:4).

Like the other Jesus, he makes no response.

However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say any thing for himself, or any thing peculiar to those that chastised him, but still went on with the same words which he cried before.<sup>12</sup>

Only when asked directly if he is the Messiah, does he speak. He answers in the affirmative. Some question whether Jesus committed any blasphemy here. They cite the Mishna, which states that blasphemy consists of pronouncing the name of God.<sup>13</sup> The better view is the blasphemy consists of invading the province of God, "a human being claiming a greater degree of authority and power than he has a right to do and, directly or indirectly, claiming divine status for himself."<sup>14</sup> Jesus does this by saying that the Messiah as the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of God.<sup>15</sup> This combines two images from the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup>

The LORD says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool" (Ps 110:1).

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him (Dan 7:13 RSV).

There is an echo of divinity in the answer, "I am." It reflects the divine name. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exod 3:14)<sup>17</sup>

Mark depicts the messiah with divine or semi-divine properties in order to show that God was on the side of the religious revolutionaries. Much the same thing happened in the American Revolution. The colonists rebelled against a king who claimed to rule by the grace of God. How better to counter the divine right of kings than to assert the human rights came from God: "endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights." When government became destructive to the ends of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, it was the right of the

people to "alter or abolish it." In the ancient world, apocalyptic eschatology served the equivalent purpose of revolutionary ideologies today. The Jewish War was as much a revolution against the Jewish establishment as against the foreign power of Rome.

Indeed, far from providing leadership for Jewish society against the worst of the oppressive effects of Roman rule, the Jewish aristocracy turned increasingly, during the final decade prior to the great revolt, to predatory behavior against their own people. The high priests and others of the ruling class used their position of authority and power for short-sighted self-aggrandizement. The net effect of their greedy and irresponsible actions was, of course, to contribute to the breakdown of social order.<sup>18</sup>

By putting "Jesus," the true cause of Israel's salvation represented as a supernaturally endowed Messiah, on trial before the chief priests, and scribes, and elders, Mark is validating the anti-establishment counterculture which formed the foundation for his account of the "good news." As Brown observes, "in apocalyptic Jewish circles of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the portrayal in Dan 7 had given rise to the picture of a messianic human figure of heavenly pre-existent origin who is glorified by God and made a judge."<sup>19</sup> The righteous victim is abused by those who serve the authorities.

[T]o give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults (Lam 3:30).

I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting (Isa 50:6).

The fate befell Jesus the son of Ananus, who, too, offered no defense to the charge of threatening the Temple.

However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say any thing for himself, or any thing peculiar to those that chastised him, but still went on with the same words which he cried before.<sup>20</sup>

This story "demonstrates that one could not consistently challenge the temple, even verbally, with impunity."<sup>21</sup>

## SIMON DESERTS THE CAUSE

## MARK 14:66-72

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Cer-

tainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Mark has predicted desertion by the rebel leaders. Peter, who is Simon bar Gio-  
ra, has protested his devotion to the cause. Now his denial of Israel's salvation,  
"Jesus," comes to pass.

This Simon, during the siege of Jerusalem, was in the upper city; but when the Roman army was gotten within the walls, and were laying the city waste, he then took the most faithful of his friends with him, and among them some that were stone-cutters, with those iron tools which belonged to their occupation, and as great a quantity of provisions as would suffice them for a long time, and let himself and all them down into a certain subterraneous cavern that was not visible above ground. Now, so far as had been digged of old, they went onward along it without disturbance; but where they met with solid earth, they dug a mine under ground, and this in hopes that they should be able to proceed so far as to rise from under ground in a safe place, and by that means escape. But when they came to make the experiment, they were disappointed of their hope; for the miners could make but small progress, and that with difficulty also; in-  
somuch that their provisions, though they distributed them by measure, began to fail them. And now Simon, thinking he might be able to astonish and elude the Romans, put on a white frock, and buttoned upon him a purple cloak, and appeared out of the ground in the place where the temple had formerly been. At the first, indeed, those that saw him were greatly astonished, and stood still where they were; but afterward they came nearer to him, and asked him who he was. Now Simon would not tell them, but bid them call for their captain; and when they ran to call him, Terentius Rufus<sup>5</sup> who was left to command the army there, came to Simon, and learned of him the whole truth, and kept him in bonds, and let Caesar know that he was taken. Thus did God bring this man to be punished for what bitter and savage tyranny he had exercised against his countrymen by those who were his worst enemies; and this while he was not subdued by violence, but voluntarily delivered himself up to them to be punished, and that on the very same account that he had laid false accusations against many Jews, as if they were falling away to the Romans, and had barbarously slain them for wicked actions do not escape the Divine anger, nor is justice too weak to punish offenders, but in time overtakes those that transgress its laws, and inflicts its punishments upon the wicked in a manner, so much more severe, as they expected to escape it on account of their not being punished immediately.<sup>6</sup> Simon was made sensible of this by falling under the indignation of the Romans. This rise of his out of the ground did also occasion the discovery of a great number of others of the seditious at that time, who had hidden themselves under ground. But for Simon, he was brought to Caesar in bonds, when he was come back to that Caesarea which was on the seaside, who gave orders that he should be kept against that triumph which he was to celebrate at Rome upon this occasion.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

1. *War* 6.8.4 (392–95).
2. *Ant.* 14.13.10 (366); *War* 1.13.9 (269).
3. Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.84.
4. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 438.
5. Philip Carrington, *Mark, According to Mark: A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 321. Contra Gundry, *Mark*, 861.
6. Collins, *Mark*, 694.
7. There are striking similarities between the trial of Jesus and that of Zacharias, the son of Baruch, by the Zealots. *War* 4.5.4 (334–40).
8. IQS 8.5, 8–9, Vermes.
9. 4Q Flor 1.6. Devorah Diman, “4QFlorilegium and the Idea of the Community as Temple,” *Hellenica et Judaica* (1986): 165–89; Jacqueline C.R. de Roo, “David’s Deeds in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6, no. 1 (March 1999): 50.
10. Gerd Theissen, “Die Tempelweissagung Jesu: Prophetie im Spannungsfeld von Stadt und Land,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 32 (1976): 146–48.
11. *War* 6.5.3 (300–01).
12. *War* 6.5.3 (302).
13. *Sanh* 7.5.
14. Collins, *Mark*, 706. She cites Philo, *Leg. Gaj.* 46 §368; *Som.* 2.18 §§ 130–32.
15. “The impression, however, is created that it was the last part, the reference to the exaltation, that earned him the charge of blasphemy.” Joseph Plevnik, “Son of Man Seated at the Right Hand of God: Luke 22, 69 in Lucan Christology,” *Biblia* 72 (1991): 336.
16. N. Perrin, “Mark XIV.62: The End Product of a Christian Peshet Tradition?” *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965–6): 150–55.
17. Ronald Youngblood, “A New Occurrence of the Divine Name ‘I am,’” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972): 144–52.
18. Richard A. Horsley, “High Priests and the Politics of Roman Palestine: A Contextual Analysis of the Evidence in Josephus,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17, no. 1 (1986): 44.
19. Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Vol. 1 & 2, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday 1994), 511.
20. *War* 6.5.3 (302).
21. Frank J. Matera, “The Trial of Jesus: Problems and Proposals,” *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 13.
22. *War* 7.2.2 (26–36).



# Chapter Eighteen

## Judea Capta

*Only the dead have seen the end of war.*

*George Santayana*

The end has come. Rome is victorious. Judea is captive. The Romans will issue coins in celebration depicting a woman seated on the ground with a Roman soldier standing over her, with the caption *Judea Capta*.<sup>1</sup> This is the final phase of Mark's messiah myth. The humiliation of the messiah symbol in death will represent the abject submission of the Chosen People, whose God has apparently abandoned them. They will be mocked by the heathen, but in the end, Mark assures us, Israel will rise again. That is the meaning of the resurrection.

### ISRAEL ON TRIAL

### MARK 15:1-5

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Mark returns to the story of Jesus, son of Ananus, the prophet of doom.

Hereupon our rulers, supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator, where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" And when Albinus (for he was then our procurator) asked him, Who he was? and whence he came? and why he uttered such words? he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him.<sup>2</sup>

This image is found in scripture.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa 53:7).

My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbors stand far off. Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin, and meditate treachery all day long. But I am like the deaf, I do not hear; like the mute, who cannot speak. Truly, I am like one who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no retort. But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait; it is you, O LORD my God, who will answer. For I pray, "Only do not let them rejoice over me, those who boast against me when my foot slips" (Ps 38:11-16).

### THE VERDICT      MARK 15:6-15

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Here Mark deviates from the story of Jesus, the son of Ananus, who was released, and incorporates another story about, indirectly, Agrippa, grandson of Herod, when he was appointed king of the Jews by Caligula.

There was a certain madman named Carabbas, afflicted not with a wild, savage, and dangerous madness (for that comes on in fits without being expected either by the patient or by bystanders), but with an intermittent and more gentle kind; this man spent all this days and nights naked in the roads, minding neither cold nor heat, the sport of idle children and wanton youths.<sup>3</sup>

Mark has Carabbas, alias Barabbas, "son of the father," released in place of Jesus. It is interesting to note that some manuscripts of Matthew say the given name of Barabbas was "Jesus."

### A MOCK MESSIAH      MARK 15:16-20

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they

put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

The staging of this scene suggests a triumph, a celebration of victory. In mockery, Jesus is dressed in the purple robe of the triumphator, the crown of Jove on his head.<sup>4</sup> The "whole cohort" gathers.

It would be extremely odd for the entire soldiery (at least two hundred men) to be called together to mock and beat a single prisoner. We should consider the details here as chosen carefully to evoke a familiar occasion; namely, the gathering of the soldiery as the precursor of a triumph.<sup>5</sup>

Mark continues with the story of Carabbas.

[A]nd they, driving the poor wretch as far as the public gymnasium, and setting him up there on high that he might be seen by everybody, flattened out a leaf of papyrus and put it on his head instead of a diadem, and clothed the rest of his body with a common door mat instead of a cloak and instead of a sceptre they put in his hand a small stick of the native papyrus which they found lying by the way side and gave to him; and when, like actors in theatrical spectacles, he had received all the insignia of royal authority, and had been dressed and adorned like a king, the young men bearing sticks on their shoulders stood on each side of him instead of spear-bearers, in imitation of the bodyguards of the king, and then others came up, some as if to salute him, and others making as though they wished to plead their causes before him, and others pretending to wish to consult with him about the affairs of the state. Then from the multitude of those who were standing around there arose a wonderful shout of men calling out Maris; and this is the name by which it is said that they call the kings among the Syrians; for they knew that Agrippa was by birth a Syrian, and also that he was possessed of a great district of Syria of which he was the sovereign.<sup>6</sup>

The release of Barabbas, apparently one of "the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection," and the condemnation and mockery of Jesus represents the cruel fate of the patriotic Jews who were taken prisoner following the fall of Jerusalem. The Romans made sport of them and many suffered death.

But as for Titus, he marched from that Cesarea which lay by the sea-side, and came to that which is named Cesarea Philippi, and staid there a considerable time, and exhibited all sorts of shows there. And here a great number of the captives were destroyed, some being thrown to wild beasts, and others in multitudes forced to kill one another, as if they were their enemies.<sup>7</sup>

While Titus was at Cesarea, he solemnized the birthday of his brother [Domitian] after a splendid manner, and inflicted a great deal of the punishment intended for the Jews in honor of him; for the number of those that were now slain in fighting with the beasts, and were burnt, and fought with one another,

exceeded two thousand five hundred. Yet did all this seem to the Romans, when they were thus destroyed ten thousand several ways, to be a punishment beneath their deserts. After this Caesar came to Berytus, which is a city of Phoenicia, and a Roman colony, and staid there a longer time, and exhibited a still more pompous solemnity about his father's birthday, both in the magnificence of the shows, and in the other vast expenses he was at in his devices thereto belonging; so that a great multitude of the captives were here destroyed after the same manner as before.<sup>8</sup>

## THE TRIUMPH MARK 15:21-32

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "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." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

The Jewish prisoners captured in Jerusalem are transported to Rome to be exhibited in a victory parade known as a "triumph." Mark depicts the triumph as a crucifixion.<sup>9</sup> The triumph celebrating the conquest of Judea followed the traditional route.<sup>10</sup> It began at the Campus Martius, Field of Mars, the war god, and ended at the Capitol, the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the Best and Greatest. The name of the Capitol, which comes from *caput*, the Latin word for "head," is based on the legend that when the foundations of the Temple were dug, a human head was found buried there with its features intact. Soothsayers proclaimed the Capitoline hill will be head of all Italy.<sup>11</sup> Mark calls the Capitol, place of the head, Golgotha, place of the skull.<sup>12</sup> Golgotha "denoted not an empty skull but more generally the head." Therefore, "'place of the *head*' or perhaps 'place of the *death's head*' would be a more accurate rendering."<sup>13</sup> Although experts debate the location of the crucifixion, whether the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or Gordon's Calvary, the true site is not to be found in Jerusalem, but on the Campidoglio, the former Capitoline Hill, in far off Rome.

The fact that Simon comes from Cyrene, a city in North Africa, may well reflect the revolt of the Jews in that city following the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> The placement of Jesus between two bandits may reflect the structure of the Capitol,

which featured a sanctuary to Jupiter in the center with side chapels to Juno and Minerva.<sup>15</sup> Much of the imagery Mark uses in the crucifixion comes from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm.

But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!" (Ps 22:6-8)

They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots (Ps 22:17-18).

This reflects the harassment of the conquered king as he was led through the streets of Rome. There may also be an echo of the mockery of Vitellius, when he was defeated by the forces of Vespasian, who now celebrates his triumph.

They seized him, covered as he was with rubbish and blood (for he had been bitten by the dogs), and tearing off his tunic they bound his hands behind his back and put a rope round his neck. And thus they led down from the palace the Caesar who had revelled there; along the Sacred Way they dragged the emperor who had often paraded past in his chair of state, and they conducted the Augustus to the Forum, where he had often addressed the people. Some buffeted him, some plucked at his beard; all mocked him, all insulted him, making comments especially upon his riotous living, since he had a protuberant belly.<sup>16</sup>

## THE EXECUTION

## MARK 15:33-39

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Mark, again, borrows from scripture. The "cry of dereliction" is, again, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, which, in spite of despair, holds out hope for redemption of the nation.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame (Ps 22:1-5).

[I]f the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries (Wis 2:18).

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it (Ps 22: 22-31).

On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight (Amos 8:9).

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink (Ps 69:21).

Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa 53:12).

A triumph culminated with execution of the conquered king, here represented by "Jesus," the King of the Jews. This role in reality was played by Simon bar Giora. "[A] great many of the populace were obedient to him as their king."<sup>17</sup> The execution of this rebel king is described by Josephus:

Now the last part of this pompous show was at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, whither when they were come, they stood still; for it was the Romans' ancient custom to stay till somebody brought the news that the general of the enemy was slain. This general was Simon, the son of Gioras, who had then been led in this triumph among the captives; a rope had also been put upon his head, and he had been drawn into a proper place in the forum, and had withal been tormented by those that drew him along; and the law of the Romans required that malefactors condemned to die should be slain there.<sup>18</sup>

It is fair to ask why Simon bar Giora, who had previously been cast in the role of Simon Peter, would now play the part of Jesus. The reason is that Mark, who regards Simon as an enemy of the true cause of Israel's salvation, can now be the messiah he presumably strove to become, because now he is defeated in

death. Crucifixion was an ignominious death reserved for slaves and traitors. Jewish law regarded it with horror.<sup>19</sup>

When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not defile the land that the LORD your God is giving you for possession (Deut 21 :22-23).

Josephus confirms the burial practice.

Nay, they proceeded to that degree of impiety, as to cast away their dead bodies without burial, although the Jews used to take so much care of the burial of men, that they took down those that were condemned and crucified, and buried them before the going down of the sun.<sup>20</sup>

He paraphrases scripture: "Let one who blasphemes be stoned and hanged for a day; let him be buried without honor and in obscurity."<sup>21</sup>

The Hebrew, however, is ambiguous. It may mean that the condemned man "cursed God." The Rabbis interpreted it to mean both that the man was condemned for cursing God, *i.e.* blasphemy, and also, as Paul put it, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree (Gal 3:13)."<sup>22</sup> The Essenes had their own interpretation, which is found in the Temple Scroll.

If a man informs against his people, and delivers his people up to a foreign nation, and does harm to his people, you shall hang him on the tree, and he shall die....And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and has defected into the midst of the nations, and has cursed his people and the children of Israel, you shall hang him also on the tree, and he shall die.<sup>23</sup>

Yadin comments that

the crimes specified by our author are all of a political nature, coming under the heading of treason: transmitting information to the enemy; causing or intending to cause the surrender of his nation to the enemy; evading the judicial process for a capital offense, fleeing to enemy territory, and there cursing his own people.<sup>24</sup>

It is also clear that, in contrast to the Rabbis, the Essenes believed that "the culprit was to be hanged alive, and his death brought about by the hanging."<sup>25</sup> In Mark's view, therefore, it would only be fitting and proper for the treacherous Simon to be crucified as one who had betrayed his people. The sarcastic centurion punctuates the sorry scene.<sup>26</sup> When he sees how badly "Jesus" dies — forsaken by his God as well as his supporters, unable to come down to the cross, calling on Elijah to save him, dying prematurely, heaving a heavy sigh of despair — he sneers, "Oh, this was the son of some god, all right." The sorry Simon was anything but that.<sup>27</sup>

## WATCHING FROM AFAR

## MARK 15:40-41

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

These three women refer to three female figures associated with the Palatine Hill, some 500 meters to the southeast of the Capitoline, whom Mark depicts as watching events at the "Place of the Head" from afar atop the Palatine. Mark uses Jewish names as a play on the names of these Roman figures, one a goddess, another a legendary woman, the third an historical woman.<sup>28</sup> The first woman named by Mark, who appears in all three references to the women, is Mary the Magdalene, *Maria hē Magdalēnē*, which refers to the goddess Cybele from Anatolia, whose Temple stood atop the Palatine.<sup>29</sup> The Greek name, *Maria*, may be broken down into two parts. The first is *Ma*, which refers to Cybele as *Magna Mater*, the Great Mother. She was closely associated with another mother goddess from Asia Minor, *Ma Bellona*, patroness of the Roman Army.<sup>30</sup> Hence, Cybele was a "Ma." She was also identified by the Greeks with the mother of the gods, *Rhea*, a name by which she was generally known in Rome.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the name "Maria" is simply a play on *Ma* plus *Rhea*. She is surnamed "The Magdalene," supposedly because she comes from the town of Magdala, which means tower in Aramaic, or Migdal in Hebrew. This is actually because Cybele was the patroness of cities, which is why she was brought to Rome, to protect it from the Carthaginians.<sup>32</sup> As such, she was always depicted as wearing a "mural" crown, *i.e.*, one in the shape of the walls of a city, complete with towers, or turrets. Hence it was also known as *corona turrata*, turreted crown, and Cybele herself was known as *mater turrata*, the turreted mother, or *turrigera*, tower bearer.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the name Mary Magdalene refers to the "turreted mother Rhea," who is observing events on the Capitoline from her vantage point on the Palatine.

The second woman is another Mary, that is, another *Ma* named *Rhea*, this one known as *Rhea Silvia*.<sup>34</sup> Like the Mary in the Gospel, she is famous for her sons. Hence, Mark identifies her as Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses. Again, Mark is playing with words. One of the remarkable facts of ancient history is that two great nations, Israel and Rome, were each founded by the younger of two twin brothers, Jacob in the case of Israel and Romulus in the case of Rome. Hence, Mark gives Romulus the name of his Jewish alter ego, Jacob. This is obscured in English translation due to the convention of translating *lakōbos* in the New Testament as "James," while the same name in the LXX is translated "Jacob." This is because the name *Jacobus* evolved through stages into *Jacomus*, and eventually *James*.<sup>35</sup> When used of a Christian figure, therefore, the name is always "James." Mark further identifies Jacob/James as *tou mikrou*, traditionally rendered "the less." In other words, the "micro" James. This may either refer to stature or, as generally understood by commentators



today, age, hence "James the younger."<sup>36</sup> This is usually thought to imply that the reader will be familiar with another, older James. A more natural reading in the context of the passage is that James, or Jacob, is younger than his brother, who is mentioned second, although it was the elder brother who was usually accorded higher honor in ancient cultures.<sup>37</sup> This is because Romulus, alias Jacob, usurped his older brother, and was notorious as the younger of the two. The second, older brother is named Joses in Mark, which must refer to Remus, older brother of Romulus, and to Esau, older brother of Jacob. Why does Mark not call him Esau? Probably because it would be too obvious. Instead, he calls him Joses, a variation on the name Joseph. This is because another Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Hence, Remus and Esau, like Joseph, were the victims of brother betrayal. In the case of Esau, it was because his younger brother, Jacob, tricked their blind father Isaac into bestowing his blessing on the wrong son. In the case of Remus, various accounts are given, but somehow Romulus claimed to see more vultures than his brother, so that by augury the right to found the city fell to the younger brother.<sup>38</sup> He founded the City on the Palatine. His supposed hut preserved from early times was next to the Temple of Cybele.<sup>39</sup>

The third woman is simply named Salome, without further elaboration. This very likely refers to Livia, later known as Julia, the wife of Caesar Augustus, whose palace, the House of Livia, was on the Palatine, not far from the Temple of Cybele and the Hut of Romulus. Livia was closely allied with the sister of Herod the Great, whose name was Salome.<sup>40</sup> Hence, Mark gave Livia her name, again, a Jewish name for the Roman equivalent.

## THE BURIAL

## MARK 15:42-47

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

Josephus tells a similar story of himself.

And when I was sent by Titus Caesar with Cerealius, and a thousand horsemen, to a certain village called Thecoa, in order to know whether it were a place fit for a camp, as I came back, I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of

them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered.<sup>41</sup>

Since Josephus, or Joseph, was the son of Matthew, in Aramaic *bar Matityahu*, very similar in sound to Arimathea, Mark may be thinking of him here. Josephus wrote the *Jewish War* in Rome at the same time Mark was writing his Gospel, possibly also in Rome. This may be Mark's tribute to his colleague.

Mark is quite consistent in how he uses the names of the women. Commentators note that he varies in whether he mentions Salome and how he refers to the second Mary. He first mentions both her sons, then one, then the other, which Bultmann attributed to different stories brought together.<sup>42</sup> Boring finds this perplexing. "Neither source-critical theories nor reference to Mark's clumsy construction resolves this odd series of description; it seems intentionally but subtly designed to provoke reflection."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, this "confusing variation"<sup>44</sup> makes perfect sense when we consider the Palatine perspective. The three women are all mentioned when they are watching the crucifixion at the Capitol/Golgotha from the Palatine. Mark then has Cybele, alias Mary Magdalene, see where they buried the body. This is because the ritual burial of an image of Attis was part of the Spring festival of Cybele.<sup>45</sup> The second woman, Rhea Silvia, is a witness to the burial as the mother of Remus/Joses, who died and was buried. Romulus, or James, is not mentioned. Enraged at his betrayal by Romulus, Remus leapt over the wall his brother had built and was slain, perhaps by Romulus himself, who at least did bury him.<sup>46</sup> Hence, it is Mary, as the mother of *Joses*, who is witness to the burial. The third woman, Livia, as Salome, is not mentioned here because Caesar Augustus was cremated and not buried. His bones were placed in a mausolcum.<sup>47</sup>

## RISING AGAIN      MARK 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.<sup>48</sup>

This is an event which had not yet occurred. Mark is predicting that Israel would rise again. His account of the resurrection is based on the prophet Hosea. "Come, let us return to the LORD; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;

he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him (Hos 6:1-2). It is the nation which will rise. "In Hosea this quote is in the mouth of Israel understood as a corporate reality, and represents the people/nation."<sup>49</sup> The young man in the white robe appears to be the same figure as the one who escaped arrest (Mark 14:51-52). Again, this may be Mark himself, announcing the future revival of the Jewish people. That, after all, is the purpose of his Gospel. The Jews have just suffered a catastrophic defeat. It is a little premature to be talking about rising again. No wonder the women flee the scene and say nothing. They were understandably afraid of this kind of talk. As Scott says, this "makes marvelous sense as a conclusion."<sup>50</sup>

Again, the identity of the women makes perfect sense. Mary Magdalene, *i.e.*, Cybele, comes to the tomb because the resurrection of Attis was part of the passion play ceremonial, when the priest declared that he was risen.<sup>51</sup> The second Mary, Rhea Silvia, bears witness to the resurrection this time as the mother of Romulus, or James, because according to legend Romulus did not die but was taken up into heaven in a thunder cloud.<sup>52</sup> Livia, as Salome, is now present because the soul of Caesar Augustus was supposedly seen to rise into heaven in the form of an eagle from the Emperor's funeral pyre.<sup>53</sup> Hence, whether and how Mark alludes to the women depends on their relationship to burial of the dead and to overcoming death.

The female figures referred to reflect not only the Palatine perspective, but the Augustan imperial ideology as well. The poet Virgil wrote the *Aeneid* under imperial patronage and attempted to legitimize Augustan rule by depicting the Trojan origins of Rome. As Ovid put it, "Rome is traced back to its Phrygian ancestors."<sup>54</sup> Cybele figures prominently in the epic,<sup>55</sup> beginning with giving her sacred trees for the Trojans to build their ships, which she begged Zeus to make indestructible, and on which they sailed to Italy.<sup>56</sup> When she was brought to Rome, her image, a meteorite, was first placed in the temple of Victory on the Palatine.<sup>57</sup> Her own temple, intentionally built to invoke the memory of Romulus and Remus, who were descended from the Mother of the Gods through their mother Rhea Silvia, burned down and was rebuilt by Augustus.<sup>58</sup> Livia is portrayed as Cybele in an onyx cameo.<sup>59</sup> By invoking the mythic origins of the Augustan cult, Mark apparently sought to dramatize the triumph of Rome over the conquered King of the Jews.

This brings Mark's Messiah myth to a close. For its original readers, it offered the hope of recovery from the destruction inflicted by Rome. It held out the prospect of vindication. God had always saved his people Israel, and would do so again. That is the good news Mark is proclaiming.

## NOTES

1. The Latin spelling is *Judaea Capta*. See D. Bernard Hoenicg, "The Other Side of the Coin: Israel Answers Ancient Rome's Judea Capta Series with Liberata Medals," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 7, no. 2 (March/April 1981): 44–45.
2. *War* 6.3.2 (303–5).
3. Philo *Flac.* 6:36.
4. T. Schmidt, "Mark 15.16–32: The crucifixion narrative and the Roman triumphal procession," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995), 7; *War* 7.5.4 (124).
5. Schmidt, "Mark," 6.
6. Philo *Flac.* 6.37–39.
7. *War* 7.2.1 (23–24).
8. *War* 7.3.1 (37–40).
9. Schmidt, "Mark," 1–18. See also the popularized version, T. Schmidt, "Jesus' Triumphal March to Crucifixion: The Sacred Way as Roman Procession," *Bible Review* 13 no. 1 (Feb. 1997): 30–37, which is presented as a revision of the earlier article. Although this author came to the same conclusion two decades earlier, to Schmidt goes the credit for making it public. Schmidt, however, mistakenly considers Jesus the conqueror, who celebrates the triumph, rather than the conquered king, who was defeated.
10. E. Makin, "The Triumphal Route, with Particular Reference to the Flavian Triumph," *Journal of Roman Studies* 12 (1922): 25–36. See also M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007); R. Payne, *The Roman Triumph* (London: Abellard-Schuman, 1962).
11. Dion. Hal. 4.59–61; *Livy Epit.* 50.55.5–6.
12. Schmidt, "Mark," 10–11; "March," 33–34.
13. Schmidt, "Mark," 10; "March," 34.
14. *War* 7.11.1 (437–39).
15. See G. Duzemil, *Archaic Roman Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) 2.285. *Livy Epit.* 7.5.3; *Ovid Fast.* 6. 34, 52, 73–4.
16. Dio Cassius 64.20.2.
17. *War* 4.9.4 (510).
18. *War* 7.5.6 (153–54).
19. Max Wilcox, "'Upon the Tree' – Deut 21:22–23 in the New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 no. 1 (1977): 85–99.
20. *War* 4.5.2 (317).
21. *Ant.* 4.8.6 (202).
22. Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (New York: Random House, 1985), 205.
23. 11QT 64:10–13, translation by Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 206.
24. Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 206.
25. Yadin, *Temple Scroll*, 206.
26. Earl S. Johnson, Jr., "Is Mark 15.39 the Key to Mark's Christology?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 3–22; "Mark 15,39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion," *Biblica* 81, no. 3 (2000): 406–13; Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 74, fn. 7; Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark, Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 146; Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 206–209; Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University, 2000), 185; L. Michael

White, *Scripting Jesus: The Gospels in Rewrite* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 288–9; S. Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 162.

27. This account of the triumph is based on the author's paper, "Christ the Conquered King: Further Reflections on the Triumph in Mark," presented at the Central States Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in St. Louis, MO, on March 18, 2013.

28. The names of the women are hardly an "afterthought," as contended by Collins, *Mark*, 774. Collins, who finds it "unlikely that Mark simply made up the names of the three women," does not consider the possibility of metaphor. *Mark*, 775.

29. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 120; Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: the Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 41; Henri Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle. Mère de Dieux à Rome et dans L'Empire Romain* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1912), 320; Grant Showerman, *The Great Mother of the Gods* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1901), 34–5, 47; Hugo Hepding, *Attis: seine Mythen and sein Kult* (Gieszen: J. Richer'sche, 1903), 141.

30. Graillot, *Cybèle*, 99, 127, 135; Showerman, *Mother*, 27; Hepding, *Attis*, 125, 171, 213, 217.

31. Gasparro, *Cybele*, 26; Graillot, *Cybèle*, 503; Showerman, *Mother*, 10, 32–3, 73, 77–8; Livy 29.10–11, 14.

32. Showerman, *Mother*, 47; James George Frazer, *Adonis Attis Osiris* (New York: St. Martin's, 1966), 265.

33. "But why is her head weighted with a turreted crown? [*turrifera caput est onerata corona*] Is it because she gave towers to the first cities?" Ovid, *Fasti* 4.219–20; "Cybele, whose brow is crowned with a coronet of towers." [*turrigera frontem Cybele redimita corona*] Ovid, *Fasti* 6.322; "And the turreted mother." *turritaque Mater* Ovid, *Meta*. 10.696; "Cybelle, her head tower-crowned." *Turrigero iuxta dea magna Cybelle*. Propertius, *Elegies* 3.17.

34. Livy 1.3–1.4.

35. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, ed., "James," *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2nd ed. 1989).

36. Boring, *Mark*, 435, n. a. Boring prefers "less" to preserve the ambiguity.

37. Gundry, *Mark*, 977, thinks he is younger than his brother Jesus.

38. Livy 1.7.1f; Valerius Maximus, *De Auspicio* 1.4 praef.; Ennius in Cic. *Div.* 1.107f.

39. Vermaseren, *Cybele*, 41; Graillot, *Cybèle*, 100.

40. *Ant.* 17.1.1 (7)&(10); War 2.9.1.(167).

41. *Life* 75 (420–21).

42. Collins, *Mark*, 773.

43. Boring, *Mark*, 437.

44. Collins, *Mark*, 774.

45. Vermaseren, *Cybele*, 115–6; Graillot, *Cybèle*, 130; Frazer, *Attis*. 272; Hepding, *Attis*, 120, 137, 146.

46. Plut. *Rom.* 10.1; 11.1

47. Suetonius, *Augustus* 100.3–4; Strabo *Geography* 5.3.8.

48. For a useful discussion of the ending of Mark's Gospel, see "Postscript: The Markan Ending," Marcus, *Mark*, 1088–96.

49. Scott, *Resurrection*, 90.

50. Scott, *Resurrection*, 166.

51. Vermaseren, *Cybele*, 116; Graillot, *Cybèle*, 130-2; M. J. Vermaseren, *The Legend of Attis in Greek and Roman Art* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) 40, 45, 59; Frazer, *Attis*, 263, 272; Hepding, *Attis*, 120, 137, 146-7, 166; Finn. Mat. *De err.* 22.1-20.

52. Plut. *Rom.* 27.5-28.2; *Numa* 2.1-3; Livy 1.16; Ovid *Meta.* 14.805f; *Fasti* 2.475f; Cicero *De Re Pub.* 1.16.25; 2.10.17,20; Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.23, compares Romulus with Jesus.

53. Suet. *Aug.* 100.4; Justin *First Apol.* 21.3.

54. Ovid *Fasti* 4.272.

55. "Throughout the *Aeneid* Cybele figures as a tutelary goddess of the Trojans; a Trojan goddess with Roman connections since 205 B.C. when she arrived in Rome, she fits nicely into the Troy-Rome historiomythography of the Augustan period." R. J. Littlewood, "Poetic Artistry and Dynastic Politics: Ovid at the Ludi Megalenses (*Fasti* 4.179-372)," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, 31 no. 2 (1981), 381 n. 1.

56. Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.99-109.

57. Livy 29.14.

58. *Res Gest.* 4.19.

59. Littlewood, "Artistry," 384; Vermaseren, *Cybele*, 75; Graillot, *Cybèle*, 347; P. Lambrechts, "Livie-Cybèle," *La Nouvelle Clío* 4 (1952): 251-60.

## **Conclusion**

# **The Gospel According to Myth**

*Faith, being personal decision, cannot be dependent upon a historian's labors.*

*Rudolf Bultmann*

And that is how Mark created the story of Jesus – or at least that is how he created *his* story of Jesus. It is necessary to qualify it in that way because Mark is not the only source about Jesus. Nevertheless, most of what we think we know about Jesus comes from Mark. It is expanded in Matthew and Luke, but without the Markan framework, their additional material would not make much sense. The matter is well stated by the Anglican Benedictine Dom Gregory Dix:

The importance of this Gospel lies in the fact that it is the sole independent 'Gospel', *i.e.* proclamation of the Person of Jesus as the Divinely-given centre of all history. The other Gospels depend on Mark; their additional material would not by itself form a 'Gospel', nor would it be possible to extract a 'Gospel' from Acts or S. Paul's Epistles alone. The origin of S. Mark's Gospel is therefore a question of vital importance.<sup>1</sup>

In this book, I have attempted to outline an alternate origin for Mark's Gospel. The implications of this theory have yet to be determined.

## **MYTH OR HISTORY**

*Every religion is true one way or another. It is true when understood metaphorically. But when it gets stuck in its own metaphors, interpreting them as facts, then you are in trouble.*

*Joseph Campbell*

Those for whom Mark has always written fiction will, quite possibly, be unconcerned by how he went about writing it. If one's view of Jesus, for example, is based on Q, and particularly Q1, the theorized earliest layer, which

depicts Jesus as a wisdom teacher, then an allegorical interpretation of Mark's Gospel will not matter. The interpretive reality will be no more important than the narrative reality. Wells, the most prolific of the myth writers, was converted to the view that "some features of Jesus as he is portrayed in the synoptic gospels may well derive from the biography of an actual itinerant Galilean preacher."<sup>2</sup> There is, however, some problem in assuming that this wisdom teacher was the Jesus known to Mark. For one thing, Jesus does not come across as much of a teacher in Mark, and especially not as a teacher of wisdom. Neither are the historical figures allegorized in Mark recognizable as wisdom figures. Where, for example, is Solomon or wisdom as a woman? The theory of Jesus as a wisdom teacher is a problem in itself. Proponents of this view recognize that there are Gnostic teachings attributed to Jesus in Thomas' Gospel, which almost certainly cannot be the words of Jesus. There are apocalyptic teachings attributed to Jesus in Q and Thomas which wisdom theorists do not think originated with Jesus, either, but rather reflect the views of the early church. Finally, there are sapiential, or wisdom, sayings attributed to Jesus which many insist really do go back to Jesus, or at least reflect the sort of things he might have said. Yet, it is by no means clear why a specific teacher is needed to explain the sapiential, any more than the apocalyptic or Gnostic, material. This problem, of course, exists independently of any interpretation of Mark.

A further difficulty is whether Q ever even existed, either as a written document or as oral tradition. Although a fixed feature of the two source hypothesis, which holds that Matthew and Luke both used Mark and Q independently, and that Q predates Mark, this view has not gone unquestioned. In 1955, at about the time the New Quest was beginning, Austin Farrer wrote an article entitled "On Dispensing With Q."<sup>3</sup> His thesis, as summarized by Goulder, was that "Mark wrote first; Matthew wrote an expanded version of Mark; and Luke used and adapted both earlier Gospels. Under this theory Luke either copied or rehandled the 'Q' verses in Matthew, so the lost source can be dispensed with."<sup>4</sup> Most recently, skepticism about Q has been championed by Mark Goodacre in his book *The Case Against Q*.<sup>5</sup> If the teaching material came not from Q but from Matthew, then the link back to Jesus is broken.

The validity of teachings, moreover, is independent of the teacher. Whether any of the teachings attributed to Jesus actually come from a person of that name has no bearing on whether they may nevertheless be edifying. The Lebanese American author Khalil Gibran wrote *The Prophet*,<sup>6</sup> a work of fiction about an imaginary prophetic figure, Almustafa, who is asked to speak on a variety of topics and delivers sermonettes which many have found inspiring. The fact that these are the words of Gibran and not a prophet does not detract from their value.<sup>7</sup> Gibran himself wrote a book, *Jesus, the Son of Man*,<sup>8</sup> which consists of the fictitious recollections of Jesus of 77 people who supposedly knew him. That these are also a product of Gibran's own mind does not make them less valuable as spiritual lessons.

The search for a pre-Markan Jesus, *i.e.*, one that Mark did not make up, whether he actually existed or not, invariably invokes the epistles attributed to



Paul. What we learn of the earthly Jesus from Paul is quite limited. At best he provides us with a rudimentary storyboard, which may later have been elaborated. He tells us that Jesus was "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4). He does not give her name or say that she was a virgin. He was "descended from David" (Rom 1:3). Paul does not say where he was born, whether in David's city or elsewhere. He instituted holy communion (1 Cor 11:22-27). Paul does not say whether it was a Passover meal or when he was "handed over." He was crucified by "the rulers of this age" (1 Cor 2:8), which elsewhere refers to demonic powers (Eph 6:12). Even if by human rulers, Paul does not name them. There is no Pilate or Caiaphas. He "died for our sins," "was buried," and "was raised on the third day" (1 Cor 15:3-4). He was "declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4). This is the Gospel of Paul. It is important to note, however, the origin of his Gospel. "For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12). Paul was a visionary; *i.e.*, he saw visions in which knowledge of Jesus was revealed to him. He was not an eyewitness and although he refers to meeting with individuals who could have been eyewitnesses, he does not attribute his knowledge of Jesus to them. This alone makes Paul suspect as a source for any historical Jesus.

Moreover, Paul's Jesus is merely the earthly manifestation of a celestial being, a Cosmic Christ.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8).

Doherty questions whether the "emptied" Godlike Christ made it all the way to planet earth.<sup>9</sup> Assuming with Wells<sup>10</sup> that Jesus did set foot on terra firma, Paul does not favor us with any particulars about him. There is no historical context. He does not say Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, or any Roman, and we know that crucifixion was carried out in Palestine by Alexander Jannaeus, who crucified 800 Pharisees more than a hundred years before.<sup>11</sup> He does not say Jesus lived in Galilee or that he died in Jerusalem. He does not depict Jesus as much of a teacher, and often fails to cite Jesus as authority when it would support Paul's own teaching. Although his silence may be explained away, the visionary, mystical quality of his testimony does not inspire confidence in its veracity. Dionysus, too, is said to have appeared in the flesh. "I've changed my form from god to human."<sup>12</sup> That does not make him historical.

It is more than doubtful that either the didactic Jesus of Q or the mystic Jesus of Paul stands behind the mythic Jesus of Mark. Indeed, in all of early Christian literature, Jesus serves principally as a symbol of salvation. There is a lack of particularity. Neither in Q nor in Paul is Jesus identified as a particular

person who lived at a particular time and in a particular place. Mark appears to particularize Jesus, but when the interpretive reality is uncovered, the symbolic framework emerges, with Mark referring to other persons at other times and other places. Jesus seems to be a freely floating symbolic figure whom different writers use for their own particular purposes. It is debatable whether Mark even knew of the Pauline Jesus, quite aside from whether Paul's Jesus historically existed or was merely part of his visionary experience. Mark does not appear to regard Jesus as the Cosmic Christ descended, but as an ordinary human being who receives the power of the Spirit at his baptism. Mark does not appear to be fitting a celestial figure out with a terrestrial biography. Add to this the fact that the authenticity as well as the dating of the epistles attributed to Paul is debated. The so-called Dutch radical school, today championed by Hermann Detering,<sup>13</sup> contends that all of the epistles are late forgeries. It does appear that the Christology of Paul fits in better with that of John and the Gnostics and suggests a late first century or early second century origin.<sup>14</sup> If that is true, then even the vague references to Jesus in the epistles do not prove the existence of a pre-Markan Jesus, even as an idea.

It is sometimes argued that there is more evidence for the historical existence of Jesus than there is for Julius Caesar. That is too glib. Let us suppose that the earliest account of the life of Julius Caesar, upon which later accounts were based, turned out to be an allegory of the history of Rome from, let us say, the Stoic point of view, and that Caesar served as a personification of valor and stood for a series of hero figures from Romulus on. Suppose also that there were no archeological evidence, no statuary, no inscriptions relating to Caesar. Many scholars in that case would suggest that Julius Caesar was the legendary founder of the Roman Empire. The situation with Jesus more closely resembles that of William Tell than Julius Caesar. The evidence shows that stories about Tell actually predate him and are found, for example, in Danish legends of Palnatoki, who also shot an arrow off his son's head. Modern historians would generally dismiss Tell as the legendary founder of the Swiss Confederation. Perhaps the same is true of the founder of Christianity. Moreover, many scholars deny that Jesus founded a new religion. If anyone founded Christianity, it was Paul. Hence, it can be surmised that Jesus as the founder of Christianity did not exist, even if some other Jesus did.

## HISTORY OF JESUS

*Accidental truths of history can never become proofs of necessary truths of reason.*

*Lessing*

If our analysis of Mark's Gospel is correct, then the historical existence of Jesus can no longer be considered axiomatic. Instead, it has become decidedly *problematic*. The first problem is defining what is meant by an historical Jesus.

If what is meant is a person upon whose life the Gospel is based, then there appears to be not one historical Jesus, but many historical Jesuses, from Joshua on. Instead of a nuclear Jesus perhaps we should speak of a modular Jesus; *i.e.*, a Jesus put together from various modules, each of which may have an historical basis. Rather than the semi-historical, semi-mythical Jesus of conventional scholarship, we have a multi-historical, multi-mythical Jesus.

It is virtually impossible to separate the historical Jesus from the mythical Jesus in Mark. The historical Jesus is an allusive, if not completely illusory, concept. The Jesus of history is more amorphous than is generally realized. If it is insisted that the historical Jesus must be more closely identified with the Jesus character than the component figures allegorized in Mark, then the question becomes, how close? What are the identifying characteristics of the historical Jesus? Does his name have to be "Jesus"? It was a common name, but one that could also have a symbolic meaning. Mark clearly uses Jesus as a personification of salvation, because that is what the name means. Paul makes an issue of the name "Jesus."

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

Philo, too, makes an issue of the name.

Moses also changes the name of Hosea into that of Joshua; displaying by his new name the distinctive qualities of his character; for the name Hosea is interpreted, "what sort of a person is this?" but Joshua means "the salvation of the Lord," being the name of the most excellent possible character; for the habits are better with respect to those persons who are of such and such qualities from being influenced by them.<sup>15</sup>

Possibly the historical individual was given this exalted name as a title. His real name may have been Isaac or Jacob.

Did the historical "Jesus" have to live in the first century A.D. or die under Pontius Pilate? The Talmud puts Jesus in the time of Alexander Jannaeus,<sup>16</sup> who ruled 103 to 76 B.C., while the *Toledoth Yeshu* places Jesus under his widow, queen Salome Alexandra, who reigned 76 to 67 B.C. Would this qualify as an historical Jesus whose life has been updated in Mark? Did he have to live in Galilee? For Mark, Galilee symbolized Gentile territory. Was he required to journey to Jerusalem? Mark is concerned with the City because of its destruction, not that of Jesus. Did he have to die there? Again, it was the old Israel that was dying. Did it have to be under Pontius Pilate? Mark may have set the story in that timeframe in order to bring Jesus into association with the Baptist. Does Jesus have to be a single individual? Could there have been both a wisdom teacher and an apocalyptic preacher whose stories were merged?

If Mark meant to eulogize a particular person, he had a strange way of going about it. To begin with, as we have seen, Jesus disappears from the scene in present time. It is John the Baptist who serves as an historical anchor to Mark's Gospel, not Jesus. Moreover, the events of his life are derived from the lives of other people at other times and in other places. The most that we can say is that the Jesus character may have been modeled on some figure known to Mark. In other words, is there a man behind the myth? Although this is certainly possible, it does not appear to be particularly promising. We might also ask if the figure of the pilgrim named Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* is modeled on an individual of that name who lived in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. It seems more likely that the character of Jesus was a product of Mark's imagination as Christian was of Bunyan's, based on many historical figures who embodied the ideals found in Jesus as in the Pilgrim. Mark may not have needed a model for the metaphor, a literal Jesus for the figurative Jesus. There is no need for such a Jesus to explain the Gospel of Mark. There may, however, be a need for one to explain Christian origins.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Mark did have a main model in mind, a specific individual whose life served as a point of departure for the story of Jesus. This invites an examination of the Markan Jesus as a character type. The basic job description of Jesus in Mark is itinerant faith healer and exorcist. That is how Jesus attracts attention. That is how Jesus becomes famous. There is also an overlay of apocalyptic prophet. The in-breaking of the spirit is a dominant theme. In short, the Markan Jesus takes a charismatic, spiritualized approach to religion, at home in the Galilean countryside, in contrast to the institutionalized legalism of the Pharisees and other members of the Jerusalem establishment.<sup>17</sup> Some logic to this view may be seen in the progressive sophistication of Jesus in later Gospels, as his role as faith healer and exorcist is diminished in proportion to other, more elevated portrayals of Jesus as teacher and divine savior. Extrapolating backwards before Mark, there may have been a holy man who walked the dusty roads of Galilee and laid his hands on poor sick folk. Jesus may have done some of the same sort of things as the character in the Gospel. For example, he may have reportedly healed paralytics, which Mark took as the motif to reflect David's political activities. He may have had a group of followers, which Mark has recast as the Essenic community. He may have taught in parables, but Mark has clearly created parables for his own, allegorical purposes. Something like this model is suggested by the *Hasid* figures described by Vermes in *Jesus the Jew*, such as Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa.<sup>18</sup> Whether the main model is a particular person or simply a general type, however, is uncertain. In any event, Mark has so fictionalized the story of Jesus for his allegorical purposes that it is virtually impossible to determine what sort of Jesus, if any, stood behind the Gospel, as opposed to the many Jesuses buried beneath it. Mark does not appear to have known of a particular historical Jesus, or if he did, he does not appear to have been very concerned about him. Mark seems more to be basing his story of Jesus on the life of Israel, than on the life of any specific Jesus.

It may, nevertheless, be worth the effort to attempt to reconcile the historical subtext, or subhistory, in Mark with the prehistory assumed in previous scholarship. It will, however, be somewhat challenging to do so. An historical Jesus is certainly more than conceivable but may be less than probable. Mark's Jesus is so shrouded in myth that recovering a pre-Markan Jesus may not be possible. Mark's messiah myth is systematic and not merely sporadic. The more credible, human Jesus is as much a part of the historical allegory as the cultic, supernatural figure. If Mark's view of Jesus is kerygmatic, that is, if he depicts Jesus as the personification of divine salvation in order to enhance his status as the Christ of faith, this requires a reevaluation of Jesus and of the Markan community. It is all very well to cast Joshua and David in the role of Jesus—fairly standard typology. But what are we to make of Jesus as the Teacher of Righteousness, who was entirely unknown until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls? Even more difficult are Judah the Galilean and John of Gischala, Jewish rebels hard to reconcile with the conventional view of the pacifist Jesus. What of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, the founder of Rabbinic Judaism? And what sort of "post-Easter faith" are we dealing with if the resurrection is not of Jesus but of Israel, and had not yet occurred? We would have to conclude that Jesus was a far more Jewish figure than we usually realize, if identifying him with such Jewish heroes is to make sense. The community for which Mark wrote would also have to be much more Jewish if Mark's readers were to appreciate these allusions. Finally, early Christianity and early Judaism must be much more closely related than we realize—not merely siblings, but fraternal twins.

### MYTH OF CHRIST

*History may defeat the Christ but it nevertheless points to him as the law of life.*

*Reinhold Niebuhr*

There have been many models of Jesus: magician, teacher, healer, prophet, rebel, cynic, sage, and others. Surely it is intellectually respectable for someone to say that none of these models is convincing and that one is left without a belief in any sort of Jesus. Belief in some generic Jesus can hardly be made mandatory. For Bultmann, it was not the "Was," the "what" of Jesus, that mattered, but the "Dass," i.e., "that" he existed. Perhaps we will be forgiven if we opine that there can be no *Dass* without the *Was*. We must know *what* Jesus was in order to know *if* he existed. Bultmann made the infamous statement that, "No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community."<sup>19</sup> Bultmann also said, in the same book, however, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality

of Jesus."<sup>20</sup> Logic is an element of sanity, even for Bible scholars. Logic dictates that if we know nothing about Jesus, there may be nothing to know.

What Bultmann, and others, have advocated may be described as a kind of virtual Christology, *i.e.*, the Christ of faith without a Jesus of history. Although Bultmann stops short of denying the historical existence of Jesus and insists on its "thatness," it is not entirely clear why that is essential. "It seemed, therefore, to his opponents that he had reduced the Christian story to a timeless statement of subjective truth, a suspicion which his continued assertion of the fundamental historicity of Christ did little to allay."<sup>21</sup> The Christ concept may still be spiritually significant without any certainty about the historical existence of a specific individual. Even if "Jesus did not exist as a historical individual," he may still serve as "an icon of God's presence in the world and in human history."<sup>22</sup> Jesus as a symbol of salvation based on savior figures in the life of Israel may provide a sufficient historical foundation for Christ consciousness, for the view that God enters into human experience, which is the meaning of the incarnation. Christianity should be a "living myth" and not "dead history."<sup>23</sup> "Without myth, Christianity degenerates either into doctrinal system or into ethical culture."<sup>24</sup> Certainly, there is no necessary connection between the historical existence of Jesus and the metaphysical existence of God. Then again one may simply accept the historical basis of the kerygma as a matter of faith without regard to any allegorical, or any other critical, analysis of Mark.

Paul Tillich recognized that faith in Christ is separate from the history of Jesus.

The attempt of historical criticism to find the empirical truth about Jesus of Nazareth was a failure. The historical Jesus, namely, the Jesus behind the symbols of his reception as the Christ, not only did not appear but receded farther and farther with every new step.<sup>25</sup>

Karl Barth, too, criticized the Jesus questers for "chasing the ghost of an historical Jesus in the vacuum behind the New Testament."<sup>26</sup>

In 1841, Theodore Parker, Unitarian Minister and transcendentalist, delivered an ordination sermon entitled "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," in which he stated:

So if it could be proved,—as it cannot,—in opposition to the greatest amount of historical evidence ever collected on any similar point, that the gospels were the fabrication of designing and artful men, that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived, still Christianity would stand firm, and fear no evil.

For Parker, it was Jesus who was transient; Christ was permanent. Schweitzer took much the same position.

The truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually risen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical

Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world.<sup>27</sup>

Schweitzer recognized the possibility that myth might prevail over history. "Seen from a purely logical viewpoint, whether Jesus existed or did not exist must always remain hypothetical."<sup>28</sup> He warned against placing too much emphasis on the historical Jesus.

Modern Christianity must always reckon with the possibility of having to abandon the historical figure of Jesus. Hence it must not artificially increase his importance by referring all theological knowledge to him and developing a 'christocentric' religion: the Lord may always be a mere element in 'religion', but he should never be considered its foundation.

To put it differently: religion must avail itself of a metaphysic, that is, a basic view of the nature and significance of being which is entirely independent of history and of knowledge transmitted from the past, and which can be recreated afresh at every moment and in every religious subject. If it does not possess this direct and inalienable quality, then it is a slave to history and must live in a spirit of bondage, perpetually vulnerable and perpetually threatened.<sup>29</sup>

We do not now have, and may never have, enough evidence to reconstruct Christian origins. The road may lead to a dead end. We may conclude either that Jesus never existed, or that we can never know if he existed, or at least that we can never know anything meaningful about him if he did. The result in any case is the same. Jesus remains an unknown quantity. All that remains is myth. Whether it is possible to be a mythic Christian remains to be seen.

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## *Appendix*

# Ears to Hear: Myth and History in Mark

*Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history.*

*Plato, Ion*

This book is about myth and history in Mark's Gospel, exploring a new way of reconciling myth with history. We will now examine the problem of myth and history in the broader context of New Testament scholarship, analyzing how this theory fits in with other theories and ways in which it may be more productive of meaning.

## MYTH AND HISTORY

*History is a myth that men agree to believe.*

*Napoleon*

The word "myth" has many meanings. Originally in Greek, *mythos* meant something that was thought and then something that was said. From this it came to mean a tale that was told. Because the Greeks liked to tell stories about their gods and about their heroes, *mythos* came to mean a story about gods and heroes. Later, as some came to doubt the literal accuracy of their myths, intellectuals attempted to salvage the tales by attaching symbolic, rather than literal, meaning and significance. In the final analysis, myth came to mean something that simply was not true.<sup>1</sup> In this book, myth means, in some sense, all of the above. The Gospel is clearly a story about a hero who is a god.

Myths are narratives that tell of the interaction of divine being/s with the world of human beings in such a way as to communicate to those who accept them compelling modes of looking at the world and equally compelling patterns of behavior. On such a view, the Gospel of Mark is a mythical narrative.<sup>2</sup>

We have examined whether Mark's story may be true in some symbolic sense, ultimately concluding that the story which people have believed for two thousand years is quite possibly not, as they believe it, literally true. It is, however, profoundly true in a figurative sense. It is also myth in the sense that the Gospel is a cult myth which forms the basis of Christian faith. Indeed, after two thousand years, it has become a traditional account of the origins of the Christian religion, and in that sense some would say that it is a foundational myth.

Throckmorton cogently defines New Testament myths as

[D]ramatic stories in symbolic language, about God and his relation to men and the world, which demand of man a decision and a commitment. These dramatic stories may be representations of events that have occurred or are to occur in history.<sup>3</sup>

According to Norman Perrin, "Myths are narratives that express in symbolically rich language human experiences that resist expression in any objective, descriptive language."<sup>4</sup> Myth may interpret history and history may function as myth.<sup>5</sup>

A good working definition of myth is a story which, while it may not be literally true, may nevertheless still be true in some symbolic sense. It must have something to do with truth in order to be myth. In the positive sense, myth is something which the speaker thinks is true in some way, even if it is not literally true. In the negative sense, myth is something the speaker knows is false but which the opponent, perhaps foolishly, thinks is true. This latter definition is disparaging; it is what myth has come to mean in common parlance. Myth is never simply fiction, however. It must be true in some sense to someone in order to be myth. Clearly, the Gospel of Mark is myth in that sense. While we are dealing with fact and fiction, it is historical fact and mythic fiction which concern us.

For our purposes, then, myth will mean whatever in the Gospel of Mark is not literally true. Many scholars avoid the use of the word myth, both because of its negative connotations and because of some technical definitions of myth which do not fit Gospel stories. "New Testament scholars, although not always in agreement when defining myth, have often recognized that myth is a significant element of the literary and imaginative world of the gospels."<sup>6</sup> For our study of Mark, myth is a useful term to contrast with history. The one is the product of imagination, the other of memory. To be sure, the two are closely related. Our imagination utilizes memory as source material, while our memory is always influenced by our imagination. That is why eyewitness testimony is so unreliable. Different witnesses to the same event will remember, or imagine, it differently. This makes it difficult to separate remembered history from imagined myth. This book proposes a new resolution of the problem of myth and history in the Gospel and argues that Mark is a myth *about* history.

Many assume that the Gospel must be taken at face value. What it says is what it means. When it says that Jesus went there and did that, we should think he did go there and did do that. The problem is that stories are always told as if they were true. We expect a story to be told affirmatively, not hypothetically. To assume without proof that an account in narrative format is necessarily true is what may be called naïve historicism. Not that all historicism is naïve. In the Gospel of Mark we have a story of Jesus. The story is told as if it were true. That does not mean that Mark is claiming that anything he says about Jesus is literally true. All that we can know for certain is that Mark wants us to think about Jesus doing this or doing that. *Why* he wants us to think that is open to question. There are, furthermore, many so-called "apocryphal" Gospels which never made it into the canon, not to mention the Koran and the Book of Mormon, all of which tell stories of Jesus and purport to be inspired scripture. Clearly, people have no trouble at all making up things that Jesus supposedly did and supposedly said and holding them out to be true. The canonical Gospels may just be the first four fictions. The authors are unknown. They certainly were not apostles or eyewitnesses. It is just a scholarly convention to refer to the authors by their traditional names, such as Mark.

Taking the Bible literally involves many problems, the first being how to determine which writings should be included in the Bible. The canon of scripture has never been authoritatively determined, at least for Protestants. Early in the fourth century, Eusebius listed some books which were accepted by everyone, some which were rejected, and others debated. Later in the same century, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter read in his churches, listed the 27 books commonly included in the New Testament. The Council of Trent defined the canon for Catholics, but the Reformers disputed certain books. Luther wanted to exclude Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. Catholics accepted certain books in the Old Testament as deuterocanonical, which Protestants rejected as apocryphal.

The second problem is that the text of scripture is often uncertain. Books were copied by hand, which means that many mistakes were made, and many perceived mistakes "corrected." Scribes differed as to what should be included. The last twelve verses of Mark are not found in the best manuscripts, and an alternate shorter ending is found in others. This may be important for snake handlers who rely on Mark 16:18, which may not really be the original text. It may be claimed that it is the original manuscripts, the autographs, which are inerrant. However, we have no autographs. The reconstruction of the original text is a product of fallible human reasoning. A further problem is that the New Testament is written in Greek, while Jesus would have spoken in Aramaic. No translation is ever perfectly accurate, so what Jesus actually said may be debatable. Then there is the problem that the meaning of many Bible terms is also debatable. Finally, for those who read the Bible in translation, there is again the problem that no translation is perfect. Hence, the "inerrancy" of scripture is dependent on factors which are anything but inerrant. What good is an edifice of authority built on the shifting sands of uncertainty?

## HISTORY

*If you take truth from history, what is left is but an idle tale.*  
*Polybius<sup>7</sup>*

The problem with reading the Gospels as pure history is that they are riddled with inconsistencies which cannot readily be explained away. There may be inconsistencies within a given Gospel, between the four Gospels, between Gospels and other books of the New Testament, between the Gospel and external evidence, and, finally, between the Gospel and the laws of nature. This latter is the problem of miracles. Although conservative Christians may believe that liberal Christians want to exclude miracles alone, presumably because they believe in a "closed universe" in which miracles do not happen, miracles represent only the most dramatic examples of incredible incidents that may be disputed. Most of the material which critical scholars find unacceptable has nothing to do with the miraculous. The Gospels do not qualify as historical sources for many reasons unrelated to the supernatural.<sup>8</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17). He recites fourteen generations from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen more to Jesus. It makes for a pleasing symmetry, based on fourteen, the numerical value of David's name. Unfortunately, he names only thirteen generations after the captivity and leaves out three generations between David and the exile (1 Chron 3:10-12). Luke also has a genealogy, but it does not agree with Matthew's. Is Jacob the father of Joseph as Matthew says or is Heli as Luke would have it? And so on back to Joseph's great-grandfather. More important, how is either one a genealogy of Jesus? Both authors emphasize the virgin birth. Jesus is the son of God, not Joseph. Why does it matter that Jacob is "the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah"? (Matt 1:16). Luke says that Jesus "was the son (as was thought) of Joseph," etc. (Luke 3:23). This is the genealogy of Joseph, not Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

The next question is, when did Jesus become the son of God? In the Acts of the Apostles (13:32-33), Luke says: "And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" Clearly, Jesus here becomes the son of God at his resurrection. However, in his Gospel (3:21-22), Luke, again quoting the same psalm, says that Jesus becomes the son of God at the time of his baptism:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Matthew (3:16-17) and Mark (1:10-11) agree. Hence, Jesus is the son of God throughout his ministry. Then again, both Matthew and Luke write that Jesus become the son of God by virtue of his divine conception. He is the son of God all his life. "The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God'" (Luke 1:35). Finally, in John (1:1-2), Jesus is not only the son of God, but God, from all eternity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." This can be explained as a sort of escalating Christology, as the divinity of Jesus becomes more and more fundamental. However, these conflicting accounts cannot be reconciled either as history or theology.

The nativity of Jesus appears in two completely different versions which have nothing in common except the names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Bethlehem. What most people think of as the Christmas story is really the Christmas pageant story. In a pageant, the shepherds and wise men appear on the stage together, an arbitrary combination of the two narratives. The reason for the different stories is that the authors are appealing to different audiences. For Matthew, Jesus is the royal son of David, for Luke he is the savior of the world. Matthew has Jesus living with his family in Bethlehem, the city of David. He does not go to Nazareth until the family returns from Egypt, to fulfill the unknown prophecy, "He will be called a Nazorean" (Matt 2:23). For Luke, the family has always lived in Nazareth. Joseph only makes the arduous journey to his ancestral home with the pregnant Mary in obedience to the oppressive imperial tax decree. In John (7:41-42), where Jesus comes from is an issue:

Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"

We are given no evidence in John that Jesus did come from Bethlehem, either as his hometown as in Matthew or at least as his birthplace as in Luke. Mark (1:9) knows only that Jesus came from Nazareth. Where Jesus came from is a problem, even without raising the question of whether Nazareth existed in the first century or whether Nazarene had a sectarian or symbolic meaning.

In Matthew, wise men from the exotic east bear witness to the royal character of the infant Jesus, while for Luke it is the humble, working class shepherds who acknowledge him as the Savior. The holy family apparently remains in Bethlehem, their home town, for two years, because the jealous Herod, seeking to destroy his royal rival, ordered children slaughtered who were younger than two years (Matt 2:16). Luke has Jesus presented in the Temple a month after birth and the family then return to Nazareth. It is obviously impossible to reconcile these two conflicting stories, and scholars seldom try. Luke's version has superior literary properties and is the Gospel normally read

liturgically. That does nothing to make it true. It is not only the improbability of a virgin birth which makes the Bible literally unbelievable. There is an inconsistency with the Old Testament here as well. Matthew (1:23) quotes the Greek version of Isaiah 7:14: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." This uses the word *parthenos*, which can mean "virgin," to translate the Hebrew word *almah*, which simply means "young woman." Isaiah was not predicting a virgin birth, as Matthew claims.

There is also the question of the decree which supposedly "went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered," taken "while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:2). There is, of course, no evidence of a general census, which would be impossible to carry out if everyone in the empire was obliged to return to the home of some ancient ancestor. Which ancestor? Which home? Besides that, we know that Quirinius did not become governor of Syria until 6 A.D., when Judea was annexed to Syria and the Romans took over direct rule. The tax census was only of the Jews, not "all the world," and caused a tax revolt.<sup>10</sup> It would not have applied to residents of Galilee, which was not under Roman rule. Herod died in 4 B.C., and so the census could not very well have forced Joseph to travel to Bethlehem if Jesus was born when Herod was king, as Matthew claims. There is, furthermore, no evidence of a "slaughter of the innocents" under Herod.

Jesus begins his ministry when he is baptized by John, although Luke does not say explicitly who baptized him (3:21). In all three synoptics, Jesus is declared to be the Son of God by a voice from heaven, although here again, Luke differs: it is only after his baptism that the voice is heard. In Mark (1:11) and Luke (3:22), the acknowledgment of paternity is addressed to Jesus—"You are"—whereas in Matthew (3:17) it is in the third person—"This is"—and must be addressed to the bystanders, not Jesus, who already knows whose son he is. In John (1:32-34), it is apparently the Baptist who learns this important lesson as he reports it to the priests and Levites. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit where he is tempted by Satan. All three synoptics agree on this. In John, however, the Baptist sees Jesus walking by the very next day (1:35-6). The day after that, Jesus decides to go to Galilee (1:43). What happened to the wilderness? Also, in Mark, "the angels waited on him" (1:13), that is, gave him food to eat. In Matthew (4:2-4) and Luke (4:2-4), by contrast, Jesus has nothing to eat for forty days. The devil even tempts him to turn stones into bread. What happened to the angels?

Mark (1:14) and Matthew (4:12) have Jesus begin his ministry after John is arrested. Luke (4:14) is silent on the subject, while John has Jesus and the Baptist active at the same time. "John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison" (John 3:24). In the synoptic Gospels, the career of Jesus apparently spans one year or less. There is only one Passover. In John, however, there are three. Furthermore, in John the cleansing of the Temple occurs at the outset of the ministry (2:13-16), at the first Passover. In the synoptics, on the other hand, Jesus challenged the moneychangers and others who profit from religion,

turning the "house of prayer" into a "den of robbers," at the outset of the one and only Passover Jesus celebrates (Mark 11:15-17). This attack on established authority leads directly to his demise. The chief priests and scribes "kept looking for a way to kill him" (Mark 11:18). Jesus could not very well have repeated this provocation. The authorities would have been waiting for him the second time.

The sequence of events in the first third of Mark's Gospel is altered in Matthew. For example, the storm at sea and excursion to the Decapolis are moved earlier in the ministry, before Jesus heals the paralytic. Although this may not seem important, Mark repeatedly indicates the passage of time, often with the work *euthus*, "immediately." He clearly means for one thing to follow another. If the sequence changes in Matthew, then one of them is wrong. The chronology has been fictionalized. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is delivered on the Plain in Luke. The wording of the Lord's Prayer is different. So, too, the Beatitudes. In Mark (9:40), "Whoever is not against us is for us," while in Matthew (12:30), "Whoever is not with me is against me," a difference of some importance to non-Christians. When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah in Mark (8:29-33), he ends up being condemned as Satan, while in Matthew (16:16-19), he is given the keys of heaven. In the synoptics, Jesus celebrates the Passover at the Last Supper, whereas in John, it is the day before. The words of institution differ. The bread comes first in Mark (14:22-25) and Matthew (26:26-29). In Luke, Jesus first takes the cup, then the bread, then, oddly, the cup again (22:17-20). In Matthew (27:5), Judas hangs himself. In Mark and Luke, he does nothing. In Acts (1:18), Judas falls, his belly bursts, and his guts spill out.

In Mark (14:64) and Matthew (26:66), Jesus is sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin for blasphemy. He is then tormented by those present. After a second, early morning meeting, he is turned over to Pilate without comment. In Luke, by contrast, he is tormented by his captors, then taken to the Sanhedrin, which convicts him of blasphemy, but imposes no sentence. The group immediately turns him over to Pilate, accusing him of disloyalty to Rome, because he is claiming to be "the Messiah, a king" (23:1-2). After sending Jesus to Herod, Pilate finds him innocent. In John, Jesus is taken before the former high priest Annas, who questions him about his teaching, but there is no charge of blasphemy. Next he is sent to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, the officiating high priest, without discussion, then to Pilate, because the Jews cannot impose the death penalty (John 18:12-14, 19-24, 28-32). There is no mention of the Sanhedrin. In Mark, when asked if he is the Messiah (14:61-62), Jesus answers, "I am." In Matthew (26:63-64), he responds, "You have said so." In Luke (22:67-68), he is even more evasive. "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer." In John, this key question is not even put to him.

In the synoptics, Simon of Cyrene carries the cross for Jesus. In John (19:17), Jesus is shown "carrying the cross by himself." In Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46), Jesus asks plaintively why God has forsaken him. In Luke, Jesus asks God to forgive those who crucify him, tells the criminal crucified

with him, who defends Jesus as innocent, that he will be with Jesus in paradise, and before Jesus dies declares, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:46). In John, he simply states, "It is finished" (19:30). The sarcastic centurion in Mark, seeing how badly Jesus died, says cynically, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39) In Matthew, after seeing dead bodies climb out of their tombs when the earthquake struck, the now superstitious centurion, fearfully says the same thing. In Luke, by contrast, after seeing how nobly Jesus died, the more judicious centurion declares, "Certainly this man was innocent" (23:47). In John, the centurion disappears entirely.

In Mark (16:1-8), three women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and John, and Salome—bring spices to the tomb early Easter morning. The stone has already been rolled away. Inside they see a young man who declares that Jesus has risen. He tells the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee, but the women flee in fear and tell no one anything, leaving us to wonder how anyone found out about it. In Matthew (28:1-10), there are only the two Marys. Only in Matthew is the tomb guarded. Another earthquake strikes, and an angel comes down from heaven, rolls the stone away, sitting on the stone, not in the tomb. He tells them Jesus is risen, and to tell the disciples. They leave not only in fear but in joy. Jesus meets them and directs them to tell his brothers to meet him in Galilee. There he appears on a mountain and commissions them to preach to the nations (28:16-20). In Luke (24:1-53), unnamed and unnumbered women come to the tomb and, as in Mark, find the stone rolled away. They enter the tomb, and two men suddenly appear, who tell them Jesus is risen. The men say nothing about meeting Jesus in Galilee. The women, who are now the two Marys and Joanna, tell the disciples. Peter goes to the tomb to confirm it. Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a village near Jerusalem in Judea, and eats with them. They only belatedly recognize him. They return to Jerusalem and report to the disciples, where Jesus again appears. He leads them to Bethany where he ascends into heaven. In John (20:1-29), it is Mary Magdalene alone who comes to the tomb, finds the stone rolled away, and tells Peter and the beloved disciple, that "they" have taken the body. They visit the empty tomb and go home. Mary Magdalene is weeping at the tomb when she sees two angels sitting inside. Jesus appears to her and then appears to the disciples. A week later, he appears again and reassures a doubting Thomas. He next appears to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, not on a mountain (21:1-19). Hence, in Matthew and John, there are different post-resurrection appearances in Judea and Galilee, while in Luke Jesus appears only in Judea, never Galilee.

It is obviously impossible to extract from this mass of contradictory data any coherent account of the life of Jesus. The Gospels cannot be successfully harmonized. It is not enough to argue that the evangelists take different points of view. They do that, of course, but they are not telling the same story, either. Someone is writing fiction. Maybe they all are. The Bible scholar is forced to be selective. In any but the most conservative circles, that is what has always been done. This leads us into the second approach to studying the Gospel.



## MYTH IN HISTORY

*Myth is much more important and true than history.*

*Joseph Campbell*

If studying the Gospel as pure history leads to contradictions which cannot readily be resolved, it is reasonable to ask if there is fiction combined with fact, whether there is myth mixed in with the history.<sup>11</sup> For convenience, we may call this the mixed method, which constitutes the mainstream of New Testament scholarship. The scholar attempts to edit myth out of the history. It originated in the Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason. Vital to the intellectual climate of the time was the religious philosophy known as Deism, which, as the name implies, was a belief in the Deity alone and a rejection of human claims to speak for God. The Bible was not God's word, the Jews were not God's people, and Jesus was not God's son, let alone God himself. Contrary to popular opinion, the Deists rejected revelation, not necessarily providence. This was a caricature of the Deists by their opponents, designed to make their philosophy appear unappealing. As Voltaire observed, there was no more reason to worship a God who did not intervene in the world than there would be to venerate the emperor of China, who also was in no position to do anything for them. What is important for our purposes is that the Deists set about disproving the Bible because they rejected any claim of doctrinal authority. "The English Deists are the real precursors of critical Jesus study."<sup>12</sup>

The first Deist writer generally credited with a revisionist view of the Gospel was Hermann Samuel Reimarus, who wrote an essay entitled "The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples,"<sup>13</sup> in which he describes Jesus as a failed Messiah whose ambitions to be king of the Jews ended in defeat. His disciples, however, did not want to abandon their movement and go back to fishing. Instead they stole the body and invented the notion of a resurrected God man. After the death of Reimarus, the Deist philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published Reimarus' essays as anonymous "Fragments," this one in 1778. With Reimarus was born the conflict between the "Jesus of history," *i.e.*, what he really was, and the "Christ of faith," what the church claimed him to be. For Reimarus, Jesus was a failure; Christ was a fraud.

Two other Deist thinkers of that era who dealt with the Jesus question were the American founders Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Payne. While President, Jefferson edited a collection of the teachings of Jesus which Jefferson found acceptable, called "The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth." He said the true teachings of Jesus stood out from the rest like "diamonds in a dunghill." He believed the religion of Jesus was Deism, which Jefferson defined as the worship of one God, *i.e.*, not the worship of Jesus. Jefferson believed that it was Paul who turned Jesus himself into God. Later, after retiring from the White House, Jefferson wrote a more ambitious harmony of the Gospels in which he cut out, literally with a razor, everything that made Jesus look like more than

human. Gone was the virgin birth. The stone was rolled in front of the tomb—the End. It is not true, as often thought, that Jefferson merely cut out miracles. He did do that, but only because miracles were used to prove that Jesus was divinely endowed, and not because they could not happen.

Jefferson also cut out the Last Supper, because he contended that eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus, even symbolically, made him a cult object. Jefferson *did* keep the foot washing from John, because that showed Jesus as a humble servant. Jefferson called his work *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. It is more commonly referred to as the *Jefferson Bible*.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Jefferson, whose work was not published during his lifetime, Payne published *The Age of Reason*, in 1795. His book was designed to debunk the Bible, both the Old and New Testament. Again, Payne wrote as a Deist. He was not an atheist, as his enemies claimed. His purpose was to free the true religion of Deism from Bible mythology in order to combat atheism in the French Revolution. These Deist authors laid the foundations for later critical study of the Bible.

In response to Deist challenges to the historical accuracy of the Bible, some Christian theologians, such as Heinrich Paulus, developed the theory that miracles were based on natural events which were misinterpreted, e.g., Jesus was wading in shallow water and not walking on top of it. This view was challenged by David Friedrich Strauss, a German author who wrote a famous, or infamous, book in 1835 entitled *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*.<sup>15</sup> He argued that the improbable stories in Gospel were not based on misunderstandings of what actually happened, but were simply made up stories, or myths. His book caused a sensation. It was rewritten several times. Hundreds of other lives of Jesus were written as a result, all attempting to write a modern biography of Jesus with a coherent chronology and an analysis of Jesus' psychology.

An important part of historical research was determining which sources were used in writing the Gospels. This is known as source criticism. The three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, known as the synoptics because they look at things in much the same way, were considered historical sources. The Gospel of John, by contrast, was deemed a theological tract in which Jesus proclaims his importance: "I am" this and "I am" that. The Gospel of Mark, the shortest and least literary of the synoptics, had long been considered nothing more than an abbreviated version of Matthew. Now, in the nineteenth century, Mark was finally recognized as the original Gospel, the earliest written, and the one upon which Matthew and Luke are dependent. Two books appeared in 1838 which demonstrated the priority of Mark's Gospel.<sup>16</sup> This view was revived by Holtzmann in 1863.<sup>17</sup> Some 90% of Mark is repeated in Matthew, often nearly verbatim, while Luke reproduces about half of Mark. There are many examples of passages in which Matthew and Luke appear to improve upon Mark, resolving some problem in language or theology. Today, virtually every Bible scholar accepts the priority of Mark. In the Lives of Jesus period, when the concept of Mark as the earliest Gospel was new, it was thought to represent the

most reliable account of his life, while the later Gospels had been influenced by the Church's developing theology.

Life of Jesus research was criticized by Martin Kähler in his 1896 book, significantly entitled *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*.<sup>18</sup> In this work, he concluded that "we do not possess any sources for a 'Life of Jesus' which a historian can accept as reliable and adequate."<sup>19</sup> A century of historical criticism climaxed in a work by William Wrede, entitled *The Messianic Secret*, published in 1901.<sup>20</sup> Wrede argued that Mark had depicted Jesus as keeping his role as Messiah secret as a way of explaining away the apparent contradiction between the modest ministry of Jesus and the later claims of the church that he was the Messiah. The "life of Jesus" era came to an end with the publication in 1906 of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*<sup>21</sup> by Albert Schweitzer, a German theologian who was later to gain fame as a medical missionary in Africa. The English subtitle is significant. Schweitzer presented a detailed examination of what has come to be known as the "quest," the search for the historical Jesus. He showed that the authors who wrote about the life of Jesus were attempting to construct a Jesus they could live with, a liberal Jesus who was compatible with modern thinking. Schweitzer judged the quest a failure.

There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus. The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of heaven upon earth, and died to give his work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb. This image has not been destroyed from without, it has fallen to pieces, cleft and disintegrated by the concrete historical problems which come to the surface one after another...<sup>22</sup>

Schweizer saw Jesus as an apocalyptic prophetic whose prediction of the end of the world was proved false. This Jesus had nothing to offer the modern world.

Another development which brought the quest to a close was the perception that the Gospel of Mark was composed of independent units, that is, stories, sayings, dialogues, which had been handed on by oral tradition, essentially as Christian folklore. It was theorized that these separate elements were eventually collected and edited into a coherent narrative by Mark. In 1919, Karl Schmidt published *The Framework of the Story of Jesus*,<sup>23</sup> in which he argued that Mark had created the sequence of events, which could not be taken as historical. His Gospel, in this view, was little more than a scrapbook in which Mark pasted the ancient equivalent of newspaper clippings. This approach is known as form criticism, or *Formgeschichte*, "form history," in German. Form criticism seeks to identify the form which these different units took and how they fit into the life of the church, the *Sitz im Leben*, or setting in life. In this view, the church had shaped or created material to serve its own purposes. The focus shifted from the life of Jesus to the life of the church. The technique of the form critics was to

sort items from the Gospel into three categories: material that goes back to Jesus, changes and additions during the course of transmission, and editorial comments by the Gospel writer.

A leading figure in form criticism was Rudolph Bultmann, whose classic work, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*,<sup>24</sup> published in 1921, set the standard. For Bultmann, it was not only impossible to write a biography of Jesus, it was completely unnecessary, because it was the Christ of faith who mattered, not the Jesus of history. In an essay published in 1941 entitled "New Testament and Mythology,"<sup>25</sup> Bultmann introduced the term "demythologize," which means to reinterpret the Bible in modern, scientific terms, not the mythological world view of the ancient past. In a broader sense, demythologizing is what criticism is all about. In the Introduction of his book, *Jesus and the Word*, originally published in 1926, Bultmann made the now-famous assessment:

I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist.<sup>26</sup>

Three decades later his students gathered for a reunion. One of his students, Ernst Käsemann, delivered a lecture in which he agreed that while a biography of Jesus was not possible, it was nevertheless important to understand the message of Jesus in its historical context. Another of Bultmann's students, Günther Bornkamm, wrote a book entitled *Jesus of Nazareth*. He followed his mentor by saying, "No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus."<sup>27</sup> He then proceeded to write one with, however, an emphasis on the words of Jesus, although he was skeptical about that as well.

We possess no single word of Jesus and no single story of Jesus, no matter how incontestably genuine they may be, which do not contain at the same time the confession of the believing congregation or at least are embedded therein. This makes the search after the bare facts of history difficult and to a large extent futile.<sup>28</sup>

This was part of the so-called New or Second Quest which attempted to reconcile the Jesus of History with the Christ of Faith, something Bultmann thought could not be done.

The next phase of the quest came with the founding of the Jesus Seminar by Robert Funk in 1985. Funk saw the Seminar as a renewal of the second quest. Meanwhile, a third quest was undertaken by others to understand Jesus in the context of the First Century world.<sup>29</sup> Members of the Seminar first studied the sayings of Jesus and then his deeds. They voted verse by verse with colored beads. Black and grey represented a negative assessment of the material's veracity, while red and pink were positive. The result was that less than 20% of the material contained in the Gospels was authentic, that is, something that Jesus could have said or done. In our terms, it was myth. There is more to it than

simply “separating the human Jesus from the myth,” as Bishop Spong entitles Part I of his book, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*.<sup>30</sup> Much of what is eliminated by the Jesus Seminar as inauthentic has nothing to do with Jesus being divine and is not all mythological embellishment. The members in many cases simply do not believe it is attributable to Jesus. Consider, though, that these scholars may be asking the wrong question. They ask, what did Jesus really do and what did Jesus really say? Perhaps they should ask, what did *someone* really do and what did *someone* really say? In this book, we examine history as it relates to myth without any presumption about the prehistory which led up to the Gospel. It is this preoccupation with the presumed prehistory which has led to unproductive results.

The tendency of this mixed method of Jesus research is to reduce Jesus to a less imposing figure. Robert Funk writes that, “We should give Jesus a demotion.”<sup>31</sup> The effect of this reductionist methodology is well stated in the title of two books: *Cutting Jesus Down to Size*, by G. A. Wells, and *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, by Robert Price.<sup>32</sup> Many will be surprised at just how slimmed down the Jesus of the Gospels may become, as a result of, in the words of another book, *Deconstructing Jesus*.<sup>33</sup> Schweizer, in contrast, took a dubious view of reductionism. “The more one cuts from the reports of Jesus, the less important and the more lifeless he becomes, until he holds nothing for religion, or at best nothing more than many other talented individuals.”<sup>34</sup>

## Criteria of Confusion

Fundamental to the mixed method is some technique for filtering fact from fiction. Questers, past and present, utilize what are known as criteria of authenticity, which are used to test each item.

Whereas the general appeal to the criteria has pursued at least a semblance of objectivity in historical-critical research, in practice the criteria have provided useful and clearly identifiable windows into how scholars have conceived the task(s) of historical reconstruction (i.e., their particular subjectivity).<sup>35</sup>

What is important about these criteria is that they have never been empirically verified. Of course, verification would be impossible with the Bible evidence alone since we have no access to the oral tradition, the folklore, until it was written down, leaving the question of what goes back to Jesus. However, in principle it should be possible to validate the criteria by examining other cultural developments to which we do have access. We could, for example, examine the development of a story about a hero figure in modern times to see if these criteria successfully separate fact from fiction. Instead, we are asked to accept these criteria because they seem intuitively valid. The criteria, however, often appear counterintuitive and, therefore, do not inspire confidence in the result.

High on the list is the criterion of multiple attestation. It is thought that a saying or story which is repeated in different sources must be true, at least, if the

sources are independent of one another. The problem here is that we have no way of knowing what sources are dependent on other sources unless, as in the synoptic Gospels, there is nearly verbatim repetition. Even where the wording differs, however, what is written down in a given document may draw on ideas which were current in the cultural community and were recorded in different ways in different places. These ideas do not necessarily go back to Jesus. Furthermore, the fact that a saying or story is often retold, or "multiply attested," may mean no more than that the writers or their readers liked it. This might better be called the criterion of popularity. Clearly, a saying or story is not necessarily true merely because it is popular.

Another recognized criterion is "dissimilarity," which means that the item is inconsistent with its cultural environment, either that of contemporary Judaism or the early church. This conflicts, however, with another line of investigation which attempts to understand Jesus as a Jew. Seeing Jesus as a radical reformer who challenges conventional values may appear anti-Jewish and may even promote anti-Semitism. This criterion also assumes that we know enough about ancient Judaism and the early church to make that assessment. It further assumes that only Jesus could be peculiar, not someone else who made up the saying. Most difficult of all, however, is that it emphasizes what is peculiar about Jesus rather than what may be more typical of him, and more important in understanding him. This criterion of peculiarity fails to assure us that it produces a view of Jesus as he really was. Dissatisfaction with this criterion prompted Gerd Theissen to posit instead the criterion of historical plausibility, which views issues positively in both a Jewish and a Christian context.<sup>36</sup>

The criterion of embarrassment assumes that Gospel writers would not report sayings and stories which they found embarrassing unless these items were so well known as historical fact that they could not be ignored. This, of course, presupposes that we know what the authors would find embarrassing. Mark, for example, did not find the baptism of Jesus embarrassing. After all, that was when God acknowledged him as his son. Matthew may have found it embarrassing that Jesus needed to be baptized by John, but he had no choice but to include the story, not because it was an historical event which actually happened, but because Mark had made the story so well known. It is not only fact, but fiction, which may be embarrassing. This criterion might better be called the criterion of irony because it overlooks the important role that dramatic irony plays in storytelling. What the modern critic finds embarrassing, the ancient reader may have found entertaining or inspiring.

Another criterion, sometimes called the criterion of Semitism, considers a saying of Jesus more authentic if it sounds more like it was originally told in Aramaic than in the Greek of the Gospel. The problem with this is that sayings which go back decades to Jesus and have been told and retold over and over among Greek-speaking Christians would over time have become polished like stones in a stream. The sayings would have gradually been assimilated to the cultural environment and would be retold in better and better Greek. This lapidary effect means that Semitism may be a sign of recent invention, of

sayings which have not had time to be assimilated. Moreover, Jesus was not the only Jew who spoke Aramaic. Some Aramaic-speaking or thinking Christian, maybe even the Gospel writer himself, may have coined the saying. This criterion of assimilation, therefore, really tells us nothing about the authenticity of sayings attributed to Jesus.

Finally, there is the criterion of coherence, which brands a saying or story as authentic if it “coheres,” or fits in with, other sayings or stories which are believed to be authentic. This, of course, presupposes that the material to which a given item is compared has been correctly identified as authentic. If, however, critics have been mistaken in identifying the control group as definitive, then the assessment will also be erroneous. This might better be described as the criterion of circularity, because it validates circular arguments and proves nothing.

If these criteria as employed by the critics inspire more confusion than confidence, it is fair to ask what the quest, old or new, is really all about. According to N. T. Wright, the quest

is not the detailed objective study of individual passages, leading up to a new view of Jesus and the early church. *It is a particular view of Jesus and the early church, working its way through into a detailed list of sayings that fit with this view.*<sup>37</sup>

Remember that Schweizer concluded that the nineteenth-century liberal lives of Jesus reflected the values of their authors. Bourgeois German intellectuals produced a bourgeois German Jesus. The same phenomenon continues today. The quest for the real historical Jesus turns out oftentimes to be a quest for the real rhetorical Jesus instead, a Jesus who can be invoked to support the philosophy of the particular critic. Scholars who have a Jesus agenda, not surprisingly, come up with an agenda Jesus. “It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical-Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.”<sup>38</sup> This is seen rather clearly in the work of modern critics who emphasize the view of Jesus as a wisdom teacher, rather than, as Schweizer concluded, an apocalyptic prophet. Like the liberal critics before them, they seek a Jesus who will challenge the institutions of the modern world as he, supposedly, did those of the ancient past. He was, as Borg puts it, “a teacher of subversive wisdom.”<sup>39</sup> Critical scholarship often tells us more about critics than it does about Jesus. The verdict of John Dominic Crossan, a leading 21<sup>st</sup>-century New Testament scholar, is telling:

I do not think, after two hundred years of experimentation, that there is any way, acceptable in public discourse or scholarly debate, by which you go directly into the great mound of the Jesus tradition and separate out the historical Jesus layer from all later strata. You can, as mentioned above, do so if you have already decided who Jesus was. That works, of course, but it is apologetics rather than research.<sup>40</sup>

## Fact and Faith

Lawyers distinguish between questions of fact and questions of law. There are also mixed questions of fact and law. A fact is something which can be proven by evidence which is obtained from observation. In Biblical studies, there are questions of fact, which in principle can be proven by observation, and there are questions of faith, which cannot be proven by observation. There are also questions of fact which function as faith. This is where critical study of the Bible produces problems. For example, whether or not Jesus was crucified is a matter of fact. Witnesses on the scene could observe him being crucified and could testify to what they had seen. On the other hand, whether or not Jesus atoned for sins by dying on the cross is something that no witnesses, however attentive, could observe. We cannot see atonement. We cannot measure it. Whether Jesus rose from the dead, by contrast, is in principle something which witnesses could observe, just as surely as they observe the crucifixion. Indeed, some people believe in the resurrection because they think the Gospels contain eyewitness testimony, at least of the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances. However, as a practical matter, it is unlikely that anyone who is not a Christian is going to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Anyone who comes to the conclusion that he did so would be well advised to convert to Christianity, if only to end up on the winning side.

The quest for the historical Jesus, therefore, is inherently biased against conservative Christians. If the historical Jesus is defined as what non-Christian scholars would agree that Jesus did or said, then many of the most important doctrines of the Christian religion would be lost. Events which people believe occurred, such as the resurrection or the virgin birth, could not be accepted by those who are not Christian. This produces a distorted result, based on theology rather than history. It reduces Jesus to the lowest common denominator. Although it is conventional to distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, what the historical critical method produces is not so much the Jesus of history as the Jesus of interfaith. Conservatives quite rightly object to this. History in common parlance is not the special province of historians. History is whatever happened in the past. The "historical" Jesus should mean Jesus as he really was. What we end up with is not so much the historical Jesus as the historian's Jesus or the historiographic Jesus. What we must recognize is that what appears to be fact may really be faith, and vice versa. There are many mixed questions of fact and faith. Outside of math and logic, there is no such thing as proof. What we call proof is simply evidence that someone finds convincing. That is why we have juries to decide whether they are convinced by the evidence. Who it is that's convinced, how convinced they are, and why—these are the questions which make for controversy.



## MYTH

*Man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate.*

*Paul Tillich*

The third approach we will consider views the Gospel as pure myth. This is reducing Jesus literally to the "vanishing point."<sup>41</sup> It carries myth to an extreme. "It is a lurking monster present wherever critical studies are recognized and proceed," according to one author,<sup>42</sup> "a side current in New Testament study" to another.<sup>43</sup> Although not as well known as the mixed method, mythicism, as the myth method is known, has its roots in the same Enlightenment challenge to authority. While some, such as Jefferson and Payne and Reimarus, believed in a Jesus who was a man and not a god, others of the period denied he had existed at all. He was, in their view, a purely fictitious character, not semi-historical and semi-mythical but entirely mythical. The first writer to espouse this view was Constantin François Volney, who wrote a book entitled *The Ruins of Empires*.<sup>44</sup> Charles François Dupuis wrote a book in twelve volumes known as *Origin of All Religious Worship*.<sup>45</sup> These books appeared during the French Revolution, the same decade when Thomas Payne, a prisoner of Robespierre, was writing the *Age of Reason*. Both Volney and Dupuis believed that all religions were ultimately derived from the same source, worship of the sun.

The most prominent proponent of the myth theory in the nineteenth century was Bruno Bauer, a student of Hegel, the great philosopher of history. Bauer undertook to apply rational historical principles to a study of revelation. He first examined the Gospel of John and determined that it was a work of art. He then turned his attention to the synoptic Gospels. He found that all three were literary inventions. He accepted the view that Mark was the earliest Gospel written. "Mark, according to him, is an artistic unity, the offspring of a single mind."<sup>46</sup> Initially he believed that a great personality inspired the Gospel. Later, after analyzing the Pauline Epistles, Bauer came to believe that Jesus never existed. He published *Critique of the Gospel History* in 1850.<sup>47</sup> In his later work, *Christ and the Caesars: How Christianity Originated from Graeco-Roman Civilization*, he espoused the view that the writings of the Stoic philosopher Seneca and the cult of the Roman emperor were the source of the Gospel.<sup>48</sup> Schweizer wrote sympathetically of Bauer in the *Quest* and made the intriguing statement that "now, when, retaining the assumption of the priority of Mark, the historicity of the hitherto accepted view of the life of Jesus, based upon the Marcan narrative, is called in question."<sup>49</sup>

In the second edition of *The Quest*, Schweizer reviewed recent studies on the historicity of Jesus.<sup>50</sup> He was less impressed with the newer authors than he was with Bauer. These included the American William Benjamin Smith<sup>51</sup> and the Scotsman John M. Robertson.<sup>52</sup> Arthur Drews was a philosophy professor in

Germany who, in 1909, published a book entitled *The Christ Myth*,<sup>53</sup> which has come to be a common term for belief in the non-historical Jesus, much as “quest” as to the historical Jesus. Drews saw himself as an heir to Strauss, with his work on myth, and Bauer, who denied that Jesus had existed. His views were not new but he stimulated discussion on the historicity of Jesus. A public debate in the Berlin Zoo took place in 1910 between Drews and Von Soden, a notable Bible scholar. The second volume of Drews’ work appeared in 1911 and emphasized astral mythology. In 1921 he published a book whose title translates *The Gospel of Mark as Evidence Against the Historicity of Jesus*,<sup>54</sup> which interpreted the Gospel as an astrological allegory.

There has been a resurgent interest in the myth theory in recent decades. In 1971, George Albert Wells, an Englishman, published his book, *The Jesus of the Early Christians*.<sup>55</sup> He has since published a number of other books on the same theme. He places his emphasis on Jesus as a personification of Wisdom. Wells later came to the conclusion that “some features of Jesus as he is portrayed in the synoptic gospels may well derive from the biography of an actual itinerant Galilean preacher,”<sup>56</sup> a step in the direction of the mixed method. In 1999, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy published *The Jesus Mysteries*, significantly subtitled *Was the “Original Jesus” a Pagan God?*<sup>57</sup> They argue that Jesus was modeled on a divine figure they call Osiris-Dionysus and that Christianity began as a mystery cult in which the symbolic meaning was conveyed to insiders. Somehow, the Outer Mysteries came to be taken literally and orthodox Christianity was the result. Earl Doherty, a Canadian, published *The Jesus Puzzle*, also significantly subtitled *Did Christianity begin with a mythical Christ?*, in the same year.<sup>58</sup> An expanded version, *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man*,<sup>59</sup> has recently appeared. The view that Christian mythology comes from Egypt has been championed by the Canadian Tom Harpur,<sup>60</sup> and the American D. M. Murdock.<sup>61</sup> Thomas Thompson, an American who is now a Danish citizen, published *The Messiah Myth* in 2005. His thesis is explained by the subtitle: *The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*.<sup>62</sup> Robert Price published *The Christ Myth Theory and Its Problems* in 2011.<sup>63</sup>

In his response to Price’s essay on *Jesus at the Vanishing Point*, Crossan, who prefers “Jesus-parable” to “Christ-Myth,” thinks that “the character of God is revealed in the factual life of a historical person and not in the fictional life of a parabolic person,” which he takes to be “the heart of Christianity itself.”<sup>64</sup> He thinks that “nobody could ever live nonviolent resistance even unto martyrdom” without Jesus as a role model. That does not prove that such a role model existed, however.

## Comparative Mythology

The main approach of the myth method is to draw comparisons between pagan mythology and the story of Jesus. Although these parallels are sometimes overstated and overgeneralized, and the research outdated, there can be no question that there was an essential similarity between the two. The best

evidence for this is the testimony of the second century Christian apologist, Justin Martyr. He wrote in a letter to the emperor to defend the Christian religion:

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter. For you know how many sons your esteemed writers ascribed to Jupiter: Mercury, the interpreting word and teacher of all; Aesculapius, who, though he was a great physician, was struck by a thunderbolt, and so ascended to heaven; and Bacchus too, after he had been torn limb from limb; and Hercules, when he had committed himself to the flames to escape his toils; and the sons of Leda, and Dioscuri; and Perseus, son of Danae; and Bellerophon, who, though sprung from mortals, rose to heaven on the horse Pegasus. For what shall I say of Ariadne, and those who, like her, have been declared to be set among the stars? And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears he has seen the burning Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre? And what kind of deeds are recorded of each of these reputed sons of Jupiter, it is needless to tell to those who already know.<sup>65</sup>

Here Justin recognizes similarities to the virgin birth, resurrection, and ascension. There can be no question that these myths were well known and not secrets of the mystery cults. They were, as he says, recorded by "esteemed writers." Justin knew what he was talking about. He continues:

Moreover, the Son of God called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary generation, yet, on account of His wisdom, is worthy to be called the Son of God; for all writers call God the Father of men and gods. And if we assert that the Word of God was born of God in a peculiar manner, different from ordinary generation, let this, as said above, be no extraordinary thing to you, who say that Mercury is the angelic word of God. But if any one objects that He was crucified, in this also He is on a par with those reputed sons of Jupiter of yours, who suffered as we have now enumerated. For their sufferings at death are recorded to have been not all alike, but diverse; so that not even by the peculiarity of His sufferings does He seem to be inferior to them; but, on the contrary, as we promised in the preceding part of this discourse, we will now prove Him superior—or rather have already proved Him to be so—for the superior is revealed by His actions. And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus. And in that we say that He made whole the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, we seem to say what is very similar to the deeds said to have been done by Aesculapius.<sup>66</sup>

Now Justin adds the healing miracles, comparable to those of the god of health. Justin attributes the similarities to the work of demons, who read the Old Testament and its prophecies about Christ.

But those who hand down the myths which the poets have made, adduce no proof to the youths who learn them; and we proceed to demonstrate that they have been uttered by the influence of the wicked demons, to deceive and lead astray the human race. For having heard it proclaimed through the prophets that the Christ was to come, and that the ungodly among men were to be punished by fire, they put forward many to be called sons of Jupiter, under the impression that they would be able to produce in men the idea that the things which were said with regard to Christ were mere marvelous tales, like the things which were said by the poets. And these things were said both among the Greeks and among all nations where they [the demons] heard the prophets foretelling that Christ would specially be believed in; but that in hearing what was said by the prophets they did not accurately understand it, but imitated what was said of our Christ, like men who are in error, we will make plain. The prophet Moses, then, was, as we have already said, older than all writers; and by him, as we have also said before, it was thus predicted: "There shall not fail a prince from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until He come for whom it is reserved; and He shall be the desire of the Gentiles, binding His foal to the vine, washing His robe in the blood of the grape." The devils, accordingly, when they heard these prophetic words, said that Bacchus was the son of Jupiter, and gave out that he was the discoverer of the vine, and they number wine [or, the ass] among his mysteries; and they taught that, having been torn in pieces, he ascended into heaven. And because in the prophecy of Moses it had not been expressly intimated whether He who was to come was the Son of God, and whether He would, riding on the foal, remain on earth or ascend into heaven, and because the name of "foal" could mean either the foal of an ass or the foal of a horse, they, not knowing whether He who was foretold would bring the foal of an ass or of a horse as the sign of His coming, nor whether He was the Son of God, as we said above, or of man, gave out that Bellerophon, a man born of man, himself ascended to heaven on his horse Pegasus. And when they heard it said by the other prophet Isaiah, that He should be born of a virgin, and by His own means ascend into heaven, they pretended that Perseus was spoken of. And when they knew what was said, as has been cited above, in the prophecies written a foretime, "Strong as a giant to run his course," they said that Hercules was strong, and had journeyed over the whole earth. And when, again, they learned that it had been foretold that He should heal every sickness, and raise the dead, they produced Aesculapius.<sup>67</sup>

Hence, according to Justin, both pagan mythology and Christianity are the product of the Hebrew scriptures, corrupted, in the case of paganism, by demonic powers. In his fictitious dialogue with the Jew Trypho, Justin says:

"Be well assured, then, Trypho," I continued, "that I am established in the knowledge of and faith in the Scriptures by those counterfeit~~s~~ which he who is called the devil is said to have performed among the Greeks; just as some were wrought by the Magi in Egypt, and others by the false prophets in Elijah's days. For when they tell that Bacchus, son of Jupiter, was begotten by [Jupiter's] intercourse with Semele, and that he was the discoverer of the vine; and when they relate, that being torn in pieces, and having died, he rose again, and ascended to heaven; and when they introduce wine into his mysteries, do I not perceive that[the devil] has imitated the prophecy announced by the patriarch

Jacob, and recorded by Moses? And when they tell that Hercules was strong, and travelled over all the world, and was begotten by Jove of Alcmena, and ascended to heaven when he died, do I not perceive that the Scripture which speaks of Christ, 'strong as a giant to run his race,' has been in like manner imitated? And when he [the devil] brings forward Aesculapius as the raiser of the dead and healer of all diseases, may I not say that in this matter likewise he has imitated the prophecies about Christ?"<sup>68</sup>

These parallels, drawn by an author who lived in the age of mythology, must have struck a chord. They are not the product of modern mythicists. They constitute the very core of the Christ cult, as expressed in the Nicene Creed:

For us and for our salvation  
 he came down from heaven:  
 by the power of the Holy Spirit  
 he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.  
 For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
 he suffered death and was buried.  
 On the third day he rose again  
 in accordance with the Scriptures;  
 he ascended into heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Mythicists have often argued that Christianity is based on pagan mystery cults and that Jesus is a syncretic savior god.<sup>69</sup> James Frazer in his well-known book *The Golden Bough* advocated the theory that dying and rising savior gods were based on the cycle of vegetation. In the mystery cults, the worshipper is thought to have participated in the immortality of the god through ceremonies of baptism and communion. This theory has fallen on hard times, particularly as to whether the gods really rose from the dead and whether these myths were really pre-Christian or were evolving at the same time that Christianity was expanding.<sup>70</sup> Justin Martyr, as usual, blames the similarities on the devil reading the Old Testament.

"Be well assured, then, Trypho," I continued, "that I am established in the knowledge of and faith in the Scriptures by those counterfeits which he who is called the devil is said to have performed among the Greeks; just as some were wrought by the Magi in Egypt, and others by the false prophets in Elijah's days. For when they tell that Bacchus, son of Jupiter, was begotten by [Jupiter's] intercourse with Semele, and that he was the discoverer of the vine; and when they relate, that being torn in pieces, and having died, he rose again, and ascended to heaven; and when they introduce wine into his mysteries, do I not perceive that [the devil] has imitated the prophecy announced by the patriarch Jacob, and recorded by Moses?"<sup>71</sup>

Tertullian around 200 A.D. wrote of the cult of Mithra that it "celebrates also the oblation of bread, and introduces an image of a resurrection."<sup>72</sup> Christianity appealed to the same population and offered the same promises of perfection as

its pagan counterparts, only in a new and improved product. The truth is that Christianity spread because it sold well in the myth market. It was not a Galilean wisdom teacher, cynic sage, apocalyptic prophet, or what have you, which inspired conversion, let alone martyrdom. It was not some Jesus of history, but the Christ of faith, who won the Empire for Christianity. Whether this means that there was no historical Jesus, but only a mythic Christ, however, is another matter. Moreover, the argument that the Gospel reflects a powerful personality is not convincing. We have no evidence that a powerful personality could produce a mass movement in the ancient world. The main competitor with Christianity was Mithraism and no one argues that Mithra was an historical person, let alone a powerful personality.

## Non-Christian Witness

Myth theorists attempt to bolster their mythological analysis by arguing that, just as with mythical gods and heroes, there is no external evidence that such a figure as Jesus ever existed. This brings us to the witness which Jews and Romans either did or did not bear to Jesus. Initially it may be noted that this field of study is quite contentious with, in my view, undue emphasis placed on the importance of this material. Non-Christian witnesses are of marginal relevance to the historicity of Jesus. If the goal is either to corroborate Christian testimony, or to show it cannot be corroborated, then the sources available to us are of little use.<sup>73</sup>

To begin with, there are no contemporaneous accounts of Jesus by any non-Christian source, or for that matter, any Christian source. A good example of the evidence we would like to have, but do not, comes from Philo Judaeus who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and would have been a contemporary of Jesus. He wrote of an incident in which Pilate provoked the Jews by setting up golden shields in Herod's palace in Jerusalem inscribed with the name of the emperor, Tiberius. The Jews, led by Herod's sons, protested this as a violation of their customs. They threatened to send an embassy to the emperor.

This last remark exasperated Pilate most of all, for he was afraid that if they really sent an embassy, they would bring accusations against the rest of his administration as well, specifying in detail his venality, his violence, his thefts, his assaults, his abusive behavior, his frequent executions of untried prisoners, and his endless savage ferocity.<sup>74</sup>

The Jews wrote a letter to the emperor who ordered Pilate to remove the shields to the temple of Augustus in Caesarea. If Philo was concerned with Pilate's offenses, including "executions of untried prisoners," it would be extremely helpful if he had given some account, however brief, of the execution of Jesus by Pilate. Unfortunately, he did not.

Another source we would appreciate having is a book written about 75 A.D. by the Jewish historian Josephus. It is known as the *Jewish War* and recounts the

revolt of the Jews against Rome which began in 66 B.C. and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Josephus was a Jerusalem priest and should have heard how his predecessors had prevailed on Pilate to execute Jesus. Josephus was appointed commander of Jewish forces in Galilee where Jesus would have become a folk hero, having been executed by the Romans as a rebel king of the Jews. Furthermore, Josephus was not concerned only with describing the events of the war, but also the events leading up to it as well. He includes a rather lengthy section on Pilate in which he recounts two incidents of provocation. The first involved setting up standards containing images of the emperor in Jerusalem. The Jews, outraged at the idolatry, appealed to Pilate to remove them. Pilate had soldiers surround the crowd in order to massacre them. The Jews, however, declared they would rather die than violate their law. Pilate relented and removed the standards.<sup>75</sup> The second provocation occurred when Pilate spent money from the Temple treasury on aqueducts. When the Jews protested, he had them beaten, many to death.<sup>76</sup>

Again, as with Philo, there is no mention of any incident involving Jesus. Certainly, this could not be because Josephus would not have been interested in a rebel king executed by Pilate. He recounts the fate of number of rabble-rousers under the governor Felix.

These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of Divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty. But Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.<sup>77</sup>

He describes one would-be messiah in particular.

But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his that were to break into the city with him. But Felix prevented his attempt, and met him with his Roman soldiers, while all the people assisted him in his attack upon them, insomuch that when it came to a battle, the Egyptian ran away, with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive; but the rest of the multitude were dispersed every one to their own homes, and there concealed themselves.<sup>78</sup>

With his interest in disturbances under Pilate and false messiahs as preludes to the Jewish War, it is hard to explain why Josephus failed to mention the execution of a rebel king by Pilate. However, Josephus was writing the *Jewish*

War about the same time that Mark was writing his Gospel, and Josephus did not have the benefit of Mark's story of Jesus. Perhaps there was no other source to rely upon.

Only in his later book, the *Antiquities of the Jews*, written about 93-94 A.D.,<sup>79</sup> twenty years later, do we find a possible reference to Jesus. By this time, not only Mark but probably three other authors had written their stories of Jesus. Christianity had spread throughout the empire and persecutions were being carried out against the Christians under Domitian, particularly in Rome.<sup>80</sup> Josephus wrote under imperial patronage and was a member of the imperial court, writing a history of the Jews at a time that Christianity was considered a Jewish sect. Knowledge of what the Christians claimed about their origins, possibly under interrogation, would have been common knowledge, at least in official circles. It would not be surprising if Josephus at this late date showed some knowledge of the story of Jesus. If so, it would prove nothing. We have no reason to think that Josephus had independent evidence, *i.e.*, evidence independent of Christian evidence. It could, therefore, do nothing to corroborate Christian claims.

In the manuscripts of the *Antiquities* available to use, all of which are medieval, the following passage is found:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.<sup>81</sup>

This is known as the *Testimonium Flavianum* (TF), the "Flavian Testimony," because Josephus took the imperial name Titus Flavius Josephus. It was popular in the middle ages because it was thought to bear testimony to Jesus as the Christ. In the Reformation era, however, scholars objected that Josephus, who never became a Christian, could not have written this. It was assumed that a Christian scribe inserted the above passage, which would have been easily done when manuscripts were copied by hand. Not until the invention of the printing press did the text of a book become fixed. It was only with the advent of mythicist challenges to the historicity of Jesus that apologists began to rehabilitate this passage and attempt to come up with something that Josephus could conceivably have written.<sup>82</sup> Proponents of this passage attempt to add or subtract the fewest number of words possible to produce a believable version.<sup>83</sup> For example, the troublesome sentence, "He was the Christ," could either be deleted or rewritten as, "He was the so-called Christ" or "was believed to be the Christ." This seems to make some sense from the apologetic view point, *i.e.*, there is not much wrong with this passage, and it can be cleaned up rather



nicely. What is difficult to see is what possible significance this could have for historiography. Certainly, it cannot be argued that forgers only add or subtract a few words, presumably so that no one would notice. In the Slavonic version of the *Jewish War*, there is a much longer passage inserted about Jesus, which few have taken seriously.<sup>84</sup> A similar situation exists with the Gospel According to Mark. The last twelve verses of Mark are generally agreed not to have been in the original and are longer than the *Testimonium*. The story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11), which is not considered authentic, is longer, too. Obviously, forgers had no qualms about inserting whole passages into manuscripts. The first author to quote the TF was the church historian, Eusebius,<sup>85</sup> early in the fourth century, and some suggest that he was the forger.<sup>86</sup> One clue is that Josephus only uses tribe, *phylon*, to mean an ethnic, not a sectarian, group, while Eusebius does refer to "the Christian tribe."<sup>87</sup>

As we have seen, Josephus in the *Jewish War* discusses two controversies under Pilate, *i.e.*, the pagan standards and the aqueduct.<sup>88</sup> In the *Antiquities*, he discusses the same incidents, in the same order.<sup>89</sup> The second story, describing the massacre, ends with the words: "there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition."<sup>90</sup> In what appears to be the next paragraph, but following the presumably intrusive *Testimonium*, Josephus starts by saying: "About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder,"<sup>91</sup> but proceeds first to tell the story of the crackdown on the Isis cult in Rome, prefacing that by saying: "I will now first take notice of the wicked attempt about the temple of Isis, and will then give an account of the Jewish affairs." He then resumes his discourse by saying, "I now return to the relation of what happened about this time to the Jews at Rome, as I formerly told you I would." There follows an account of the similar crackdown on the Jews, ending in their expulsion from Rome.<sup>92</sup> The paragraph about Jesus does not fit in with the "sad calamities" which befell the Jews, and he makes it clear when he is digressing to talk about the Isis incident. He does not do so with the passage about Jesus. This makes it appear that the entire *Testimonium* has been interpolated here simply because it involves Pilate and Palestine, and this was the best place the forger could find to insert it. Hence, it is unlikely that the passage was originally written by Josephus and only "edited" by a Christian scribe. Moreover, once it is admitted that a document has been tampered with and nothing is offered but speculative reconstruction of the original, that document is quite worthless as evidence. The attempt to rehabilitate the *Testimonium*, therefore, is an idle exercise and proves nothing.

Another, shorter passage in the *Antiquities* is also invoked. It refers to a time when Albinus replaced Festus as governor.

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.<sup>93</sup>

This passage is also suspect because the first reference to it presupposes a different text. Origen writes:

And in such a way among the people did this James shine for his justice that Flavius Josephus, who wrote the *JUDAIC ANTIQUITIES* in twenty books, wishing to demonstrate the cause why the people suffered such great things that even the temple was razed down, said that these things came to pass against them in accordance with the ire of God on account of the things which were dared by them against James the brother of Jesus who is called Christ. And the wondrous thing is that, although he did not accept our Jesus to be Christ, he yet testified that the justice of James was not at all small; and he says that even the people supposed they had suffered these things on account of James.<sup>94</sup>

But he himself, though not believing in Jesus as Christ, in seeking the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, whereas he ought to have said that the conspiracy against Jesus was the cause of these things happening to the people, since they killed the prophesied Christ, even says, being unwillingly not far from the truth, that these things befell the Jews as vengeance for James the just, who was a brother of Jesus who is called Christ, since they killed him who was most just.<sup>95</sup>

The manuscripts of the *Antiquities* which we have say nothing about the death of James being the cause of the fall of Jerusalem. Clearly, this passage, too, is being tampered with, and, as with the TF, we can only speculate as to what Josephus really wrote.

The next witnesses are Roman. In about 112, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan. He hoped to determine imperial policy on the persecution of Christians. He had interrogated Christians and learned the following:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food.<sup>96</sup>

This, of course, proves only that there were Christians in Bithynia in the second century, not that there was a Jesus in Palestine in the first century. Christians today sing hymns to Christ as a god (*Christo quasi deo*). That does that prove there was a Jesus, either.

The next witness is Suetonius, author of *Lives of the Caesars*. In his *Life of Claudius*, written in around 115 A.D., he states: "The Jews, being constantly in an uproar due to the instigator Chrestus, he expelled from Rome."<sup>97</sup> The first question is whether Chrestus, a common name meaning "useful," really should be Christ. Then we may ask whether some messiah figure—he does not say "Jesus"—was agitating for rebellion in the years before the war broke out,

apparently in Rome itself. It could even mean that the Jews were reacting to an anti-Jewish instigator named Chrestus. Luke states (Acts 18:2) that Aquila and Priscilla had recently come from Italy "because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome." There is no hint this happened because of Jesus. Even supposing that Suetonius was referring to Jewish Christians who were agitated because of belief in Jesus, that would, as with Pliny, merely prove the existence of Christians, not of Jesus.

Finally, we may mention Tacitus. In the *Annals*, also written about 115 A.D., he describes how Nero attempted to refute the rumor he had set fire to Rome:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.<sup>98</sup>

This is the latest of the non-Christian witnesses, so late that we cannot be assured that Tacitus was doing anything more than reciting what had by then become the conventional wisdom. The Christians said they were named after Christ who was crucified under Pilate. They say the same thing today. That does not make it true. Note that Tacitus does not call him Jesus, as he would be known in Roman records, if Tacitus had read any. He also refers to Pilate as procurator, rather than the correct title, prefect, which, again, would have been contained in official records. Tacitus who, like Pliny, had been a governor in Asia Minor, might have learned the Christian's explanation of their origin when he interrogated them.<sup>99</sup> In any event, Tacitus is no more compelling as evidence than any of the other non-Christian witnesses.

The bottom line is that Jewish and Roman authors do nothing to corroborate Christian testimony, but neither do they do anything to refute it. Myth theorists often argue that there is a pregnant silence about Jesus in external sources. This presupposes that such authors would have had reason to take notice of Jesus. Especially if Jesus is reduced to a mere wisdom teacher, cynic sage, or apocalyptic prophet, however, there is no reason to think anyone would have cause to refer to Jesus until Christianity became a force to be reckoned with. Non-Christians would then quite naturally rely on the Christians themselves to tell their story. This is apparently what happened. The non-Christian witness, therefore, is inconclusive. It neither proves Jesus existed nor proves that he did not.

It is also argued that no ancient author questions the existence of Jesus. However, the existence of divine or semi-divine hero figures was not a typical concern of that era. It was their significance, not their existence, that occupied the ancient mind. Moreover, there is some evidence that the story of Jesus was

indeed disputed. The New Testament itself says defensively, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16)." Apparently, someone was indeed accusing the Christians of cleverly devising myths (*mythoi*). "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!" (2 John 1:7)

Justin Martyr's interlocutor, Trypho the Jew, is made to say,

But Christ—if He has indeed been born, and exists anywhere—is unknown, and does not even know Himself, and has no power until Elias come to anoint Him, and make Him manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing.<sup>100</sup>

Origen remarks:

This Jew of Celsus still accuses the disciples of Jesus of having invented these statements, saying to them: Even although guilty of falsehood, you have not been able to give a colour of credibility to your inventions.<sup>101</sup>

After this he says, that certain of the Christian believers, like persons who in a fit of drunkenness lay violent hands upon themselves, have corrupted the Gospel from its original integrity, to a threefold, and fourfold, and many-fold degree, and have remodeled it, so that they might be able to answer objections.<sup>102</sup>

The historical value of the Gospel, therefore, did not go unchallenged nor its mythic quality unrecognized. We must also keep in mind that, with the exception of buried treasure such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices, ancient literature has come down to us from Christian hands. All we know is what Christians say, or what Christians say that non-Christians say. After Constantine, as the religion of the Empire, Christians were in a position to block any attempt at disputing the authenticity of their faith.

The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence, either for or against the existence of Jesus. The burden of proof is on those who say they know that Jesus either did or did not exist. No one yet has borne the burden of proof, one way or the other. The matter remains fairly debatable.

## The Problems

A recent book by Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*,<sup>103</sup> is quite dismissive of the mythic view. A former fundamentalist turned "agnostic with atheist leanings," Ehrman claims that he has no "vested interest" in advocating the historicity of

Jesus, because he is not a Christian.<sup>104</sup> He criticizes mythicists as anti-Christian, a charge often levied against Ehrman himself, which he denies. He is, he says, only opposed to a “fundamentalist and conservative evangelical understanding of Christianity.”<sup>105</sup> If not a liberal Protestant, he is at least a sympathizer. As such he needs an historical Jesus to serve as the liberal role model. Furthermore, Ehrman is planning to write a book on how Jesus became a God.<sup>106</sup> Obviously, there must have been a Jesus in order for him to become one. He is the author of several other popular Jesus books. Ehrman, therefore, like other New Testament scholars, does have both a personal and a professional vested interest in an historical Jesus.

This points up an inherent problem in researching the historical existence of Jesus. The profession of New Testament studies is dominated by what might be called the Jesus Guild, whose members have built their career on the study of Jesus. They are understandably reluctant to entertain the notion that there may have been no Jesus to study. As Ehrman admits, he was surprised to discover “an entire body of literature devoted to the question of whether or not there ever was a real man, Jesus.”<sup>107</sup> This is typical.<sup>108</sup> Most New Testament scholars have never even studied the historicity of Jesus. How then can they claim expertise on that subject? If Jesus Guilders have never examined the issue but simply assumed that Jesus existed and then proceeded to devote their professional lives to studying that figure, there is little reason to defer to their consensus on that subject.

It is fashionable to dismiss myth theorists as unqualified dilettantes. Several of these writers, however, have advanced degrees in relevant fields. Price has two Ph.D.s, one in systematic theology, the other in New Testament. He is a member of the Jesus Seminar and a seminary professor. He is as well qualified as proponents of the mixed method. Harpur is a former Anglican priest and former professor of New Testament at the University of Toronto. Thompson is a retired professor of Biblical studies at the University of Copenhagen. Two other well-qualified mythicists are Richard Carrier, who has a Ph.D. in ancient history from Columbia University, and Hermann Detering, retired pastor in Berlin, Germany, who has a doctorate in theology. Intellectual snobbery is no solution. The real problems with the myth method lie elsewhere.

What may be seen as ironical about the Christ myth theorists is that they are too conservative. They emphasize the Christ of faith and when they dismiss that as myth, the Jesus of history is thrown out as well. This is the counterpart to the fundamentalist approach, which also refuses to separate Jesus from Christ. More moderate scholars, as we have seen, can dispense with the mythic Christ while retaining the historical Jesus. “Those who deny the existence of Jesus, especially twentieth-century skeptics, seem to neglect this moderate position. They prefer, as radical revisionists often do, to deal with the extremes.”<sup>109</sup> The problem with the comparative mythology approach is that all it has really accomplished has been to suggest sources of Gospel fiction in the mythology of the surrounding world. When the cultic material is removed, that is, when the doctrines of the Christ cult are excluded, however, there is still a great deal that remains. After

“shrinking” or “cutting Jesus down to size” or “deconstructing” him, we still have a figure who fits in well with what we know of first century Judaism. Added to that is the fact that the origins of pagan mythology are lost in the mists of time, while Christianity emerged within recent memory of the Gospel writers. Additionally, the story of Jesus is set not in mythic time and mythic space, but in a particular, relatively recent historical context. The most plausible explanation to account for all that is that there was an historical figure around whom mythological motifs developed. We have evidence that precisely that could happen. There were men, whose historical existence is generally not questioned and whose lives are depicted as filled with precisely the kind of cultic, mythic material found in the Gospels.

Pythagoras, a Greek who was famous for more than his theorem, was reputed to be the son of the god Apollo. His soul is described as having come down from heaven. Pythagoras founded a religious brotherhood which practiced secrecy. He was described as a wonder-worker. He predicted earthquakes, stopped pestilence, violent winds, and hail. He tranquilized waves so his disciples could cross over. His disciples, Empedocles and Epamenides, did the same, and Abaris could purportedly walk on water.<sup>110</sup> Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the first century, cast out a demon, and cured a boy of rabies along with the dog which bit him. He raised a bride who had died just before her wedding and raised the dead Achilles from his tomb.<sup>111</sup> There were many such wonder workers who are known as a *theios aner*, or “divine man.” Jesus would fit nicely in that job description.<sup>112</sup> Although mythicists believe that Christianity arose without any Christ, they have never succeeded in explaining it without one.

## MYTH OF HISTORY

*A myth is more than history; it is an attempt to explain the deeper significance of an event.*

*Karen Armstrong<sup>113</sup>*

The methods of relating myth and history in the Gospel which we have examined have one thing in common—they view myth and history as competing concepts. They may be arranged on a spectrum with history at one end, myth at the other, and varying degrees of myth and history in between. This is a linear relationship. “At the centre of the debate on the presence of myth in the gospels has been the belief that myth and history are two mutually exclusive categories.”<sup>114</sup> The mixed method, of course, seeks to mediate between the two extremes. What is here proposed is a fourth approach which may, as in mathematics, be described as parabolic rather than linear. The Gospel is parabolic also in a literary sense. The whole Gospel is a parable. Hence, the relationship between myth and history is parabolic and not linear. The Gospel of Mark is not pure history, neither is it pure myth, nor is myth mixed in with

history. Rather, the two operate on different levels. Myth figuratively reflects history. We may refer to this as the mirror method.

Myth and truth are not opposed to one another. Nor is myth contrary to the factual record of history; instead each gives an account of the facts from its own point of view, history looking at them from the outer physical side, myth from the inner spiritual side.<sup>115</sup>

A tacit assumption in previous study of myth in the Gospel is, first, that myth is not Jewish, and second, that myth is not history. The first assumption is particularly difficult to defend. We do not even need to explore myth in the Old Testament to realize that Jews were perfectly capable of making myth. The apocryphal books of Judith and Tobit are generally recognized as religious fiction. Rabbinical midrash is a kind of creative commentary which expands on Biblical narratives to prove a point. Both Philo and the Essenes engaged in the allegorical interpretation of scripture, which treats the Biblical text as a kind of myth that needs to be interpreted to reveal its true meaning. There is, therefore, no reason at all to think that Gospel myth could not derive from a Jewish cultural environment. The second assumption is easier to understand. Nothing is more natural than to contrast myth with history. Indeed, that is the main focus of this book. While the same thing cannot be both myth and history at the same time and in the same way, it is certainly possible to have a myth *about* history. Indeed, some would say that all history is a myth in the sense that the historian creates an account of what he or she imagines to have happened.

It is not really necessary, however, to oppose the historicization of myth to the mythicization of history. These two processes were complementary to one another. Historicization made myth relevant while the mythicization made history meaningful.<sup>116</sup>

The conventional view of myth in the Gospel is that it represents the *kerygma*, the preaching or proclamation, of the Christian community about Jesus. The cultural context is Christian, the subject matter is faith. Hence, we may describe this as Christian faith myth. The usual mythicist view is that Gospel myth derives from pagan mythology which is ultimately based on natural processes, such as the cycle of vegetation. This is pagan nature myth. Related to that is the Gnostic mystery myth of Gandy and Freke. Drews, as we have seen, saw Gospel myth, and religion in general, as derived from astrology, which comes from Babylonia. Hence, for Drews the Gospel was a Babylonian star myth. Bruno Bauer viewed the Gospel in terms of Roman philosophy as it related to politics. For him, the Gospel was a Roman state myth. Albert Kalthoff, a Lutheran pastor turned Marxist, thought the Gospel came from Italy and reflected the social conditions of the proletariat. Hence, for Kalthoff, the Gospel was an Italian class myth. More recently, Dennis MacDonald has analyzed the Gospel of Mark in terms of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. This may be described as a Greek epic myth. Perhaps the closest approach to that which we will take is the view that

the Gospel is based on a rewrite, or midrash, of stories from the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. Robert Price favors this theory. We may describe this as Hebrew Bible myth.

All of these previous approaches to the Gospel overlook the obvious. The Gospel is set in first century Jewish Palestine and purports to tell the story of a central character whose life is a culmination of the history of salvation. A simple assumption might be that the meaning of Gospel myth is likewise to be found in a Jewish cultural context with history as its subject matter and salvation as its theme. It could, in other words, be a Jewish salvation history myth. That is to say, the meaning of the myth could be concordant with the myth, or closely related, and not discordant as is generally assumed. Various predispositions may enter into this mistaken assumption—a universalizing view which seeks to derive all religion from a single source, a prejudice against Jewish religion and culture, a preoccupation with finding an historical Jesus. In this book, we explore the possibility that the truth lies close to the surface, although buried beneath it.

### The Narrative Perspective

The first half of the twentieth century was dominated, as we have seen, with the “no quest,” form critical approach. Dissatisfaction with this sterile period produced reactions which went in two different directions. Attention was again placed on historical inquiry with the new and renewed quests. At the same time, however, an entirely different approach was taken in other quarters. If study of the Gospel had shifted from theology to history, it now shifted still further to the Gospel as literature. Historical criticism was concerned with the life of Jesus, form criticism with the story of Jesus in the life of the church.

The major limitation of all these approaches... is that they fail to take seriously the narrative character of the Gospels. These books are stories about Jesus, not compilations of miscellaneous data concerning him. They are intended to be read from beginning to end, not dissected and examined to determine the relative value of individual passages. In focusing on the documentary status of these books, the historical-critical method attempted to interpret not the stories themselves but the historical circumstances behind them.<sup>117</sup>

Now, at midcentury, the emphasis would be on the story of Jesus in and of itself, quite apart from the life either of Jesus or the church. This new literary approach began with redaction criticism which emphasized the role of the evangelist. To the form critic the Gospel writer was merely an editor of oral tradition. Now he became, if not a full-fledged author, at least a creative editor. Redaction critics examined not only the material the evangelists added but how they arranged their Gospels with a view to understanding their theological viewpoint. This is also known as compositional criticism.



The term redaction criticism, or *Redaktionsgeschichte*, “redaction history,” in German, was coined by Willi Marxsen, who published *Mark the Evangelist* in 1956.<sup>118</sup>

On the whole, the so-called redactor always fares poorly in form history. He is readily characterized as “collector,” and there is little inclination to concede to him any real share in the composition of his work, save in the matter of minor details.<sup>119</sup>

Marxsen appreciated the role Mark played as the original evangelist. It was Mark who consolidated the oral tradition, while Matthew and Luke only had to reshape what Mark had created.<sup>120</sup>

[T]hough it may be too much to describe him as the “theological center” of the New Testament, his considerably central position among the theologians of primitive Christianity should not be overlooked. Though till now the influence of his successors may be greater than his, we may still inquire whether it is not Mark who deserves the greater attention.<sup>121</sup>

The era of form and redaction criticism was brought to a close by a new, purely narrative approach.

There has been a steadily growing awareness among scholars that, for all the insights they have afforded us, form and redaction criticism have tended to deprive the Evangelists of reputations for competence as narrators and their story-lines of coherence and integrity and that this tendency does them injustice.<sup>122</sup>

The study of the Gospel as literature was pioneered by the Markan Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, first under Norman Perrin and then Werner Kelber, whose insightful book, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, appeared in 1979.<sup>123</sup>

This book is designed to introduce the reader to a single coherent story, Mark's story of Jesus' life and death. From a literary perspective the reader is therefore advised to approach the Markan story as he or she would any other story: to read the whole story from beginning to end, to observe the characters and the interplay among them, to watch for the author's clues regarding the plot, to discern the plot development, to identify scenes of crisis and recognition, and to view the story's resolution in the light of its antecedent logic.<sup>124</sup>

The literary approach came to be called narrative criticism. “As a subdiscipline of Gospel research, narrative criticism has surged to the fore in the 1980s in a way reminiscent of redaction criticism in the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>125</sup> This term was coined by David Rhoads.<sup>126</sup> “The value of looking at the plot, the characters, and the conflicts in Mark's Gospel seems patently clear. After all, Mark is a story, and a very good one at that.”<sup>127</sup> In contrast to the fragmentation of the Gospel in form and redaction criticism, narrative criticism restored the unity of the text, though at the expense of any historical foundation. “We know

how to take the text apart to analyze it; adding narrative criticism to our study is an opportunity to reaffirm the original achievement of Mark in creating a unified story."<sup>128</sup> The Gospel of Mark, viewed from the narrative perspective, bears no resemblance to the hodgepodge of pericopes posited by the form critics. Rather than pearls on a string, it is like a brilliant mosaic of colorful pieces expertly placed by a skilled artist. Everything is exactly where it is supposed to be.

The author has not simply collected traditions, organized them, made connections between them, and added summaries; the author has told a story, a dramatic story, with characters whose lives we follow to the various places they travel and through the various events in which they are caught up.<sup>129</sup>

David Rhoads was a teacher in the Department of Religion at Carthage College. He invited a colleague, Donald Michie, in the Department of English, to discuss the Gospel of Mark in his New Testament Introduction course as a story. This collaboration led to their book, *Mark as Story*, in 1982.<sup>130</sup> They were joined by Joanna Dewey in the Second Edition in 1999 and the Third in 2012.<sup>131</sup>

When we enter the story of the Gospel of Mark, we enter a world of conflict and suspense, a world of surprising reversals and strange ironies, a world of riddles and hidden meanings, a world of subversive actions and political intrigues. And the protagonist—Jesus—is most surprising of all.<sup>132</sup>

They define the plot of Mark as follows: "Mark's story is unified around one overall goal: Jesus struggles to establish the rule of God in the face of obstacles and opposition."<sup>133</sup> Narrative criticism seeks to understand the Gospel as a story, regardless of whether it is true, and regardless of the precise way in which it is true. The story of Jesus functions as fiction, quite aside from whether or not it is true. "Whatever value may be assigned to 'true stories,' that is, as stories intended to evoke responses that are in keeping with the true will of God."<sup>134</sup> Powell notes the difference in handling mythological and supernatural elements with previous scholarship as follows:

Narrative criticism deals with this problem in exactly the opposite manner than did Bultmann's program for demythologizing. Bultmann attempted to abstract moral or philosophical truth from texts by translating the mythological framework into categories of existentialist philosophy. Narrative criticism regards the meaning of texts as inseparable from the form in which it is expressed, and so embraces the story (myth and all) as a world to be entered and experienced.<sup>135</sup>

## Critical Regression

It is interesting to note how the critical study of the New Testament has developed in reverse logical sequence. It began as an attempt to reconstruct the life of Jesus. This historical criticism was followed by an attempt to reconstruct, not the life of Jesus, but the story of Jesus in the life of the church. Form

criticism was followed first by redaction criticism and then narrative criticism, which studied the story of Jesus itself. It is as if at each stage scholars concluded that they were not yet ready to study the Gospel from a given point of view and then retreated to a more basic question. If the study of the Gospel had unfolded in logical sequence, scholars would have begun with the story of Jesus, which is the only evidence at hand, then sought to trace its literary origins, including any oral tradition it may have been based on, and finally, having determined that the story was based on an actual person, attempted to study his life. Only then, if one were convinced of his spiritual importance, would we adopt the Christian faith. This critical regression, as we may call it, is the result, to be sure, of the fact that theology preceded critical study, which began with the goal of modernizing Christian faith. Only through necessity has criticism been forced to retreat to ever more basic positions.

The study of the Gospel having now regressed to the narrative stage, we may be excused if we ask a still more fundamental question: *Is* this the story of Jesus, or is it really the story of something else? We will refer to this approach as reality criticism, which may be defined as the search for the literary reality of the Gospel, that is, what the story is really about. By literary reality I mean the story world, domain of discourse, or frame of reference. The narrative reality is what we read, the surface story as it were. The interpretive reality is the reality which emerges through the process of interpretation. Successful application of this methodology depends on determining the correct interpretive context in which to understand a given episode in the narrative. If the interpretive reality differs appreciably from the narrative reality, then there is a reality crisis in the work. If the interpretive reality is primary, as in *Pilgrim's Progress*, the narrative may be superficial and the symbolic meaning obvious. If the narrative reality is primary, then the surface story may work so well that the underlying meaning evades detection. In the Gospel of Mark, of course, the narrative reality is sufficiently dominant that the interpretive reality has remained hidden for two thousand years. That the narrative was not of primary importance to Mark, however, may be seen in the stylistic inadequacy of the narrative, which many have found disjointed and lacking in literary polish. Later Gospels are an attempt to improve the narrative. The extent to which later evangelists were aware of, or cared about, the interpretive reality, is unclear. Eventually, of course, the story of Jesus took on a life of its own, and any hidden meaning was forgotten. Although many different interpretive realities might be suggested, this book proposes a specific solution in which the interpretive reality, not the narrative reality, corresponds to the external, historical reality. In the narrative reality, the story of Jesus is the *culmination* of salvation history. In the interpretive reality, the story of Jesus *incorporates* salvation history. History is found in the interpretive, not the narrative, reality. In Mark, myth is history, and history myth.

Beginning with the Gospel of Mark has one important advantage, namely, that we are dealing with the only real evidence there is. We do not have evidence of any oral tradition which, by its nature, ceased to exist when it was

spoken. We do not have any written document which contains the oral tradition. What is known as Q, a collection of Jesus sayings, supposedly copied into Matthew and Luke, did not survive, if it ever existed. We do not, of course, have any direct evidence of Jesus himself. Hence, we have no actual evidence of the presumed prehistory which forms the basis of non-narrative criticism. The only actual hard evidence we have is the Gospel of Mark, the earliest and most basic account of the story of Jesus. Is it not reasonable to start with the evidence itself and not speculate about what came before it? Should we not try to understand Mark's Gospel as a literary work related to first century Jewish Palestine, *i.e.*, how it resonates in that environment? Should we not examine the cultural and historical environment in which the story is set? Can we not for once defocus on Jesus, the central character in the story, and refocus on the background of the story? The preoccupation with Jesus has always been theologically driven. Instead of trying to understand Jesus, should we not first try to understand the evidence? Is this not a reasonable way to proceed?

The narrative perspective frees us from the presumptions of previous critical research. If the Gospel is understood as a story like any story, and is to be appreciated within the context of the times which it describes, then the social, religious, and political aspects of the Gospel must be explored to understand it. The narrative perspective may have an historical dimension, one, however, which does not simply track the presumed prehistory of the Gospel as defined in historical, form, and redaction criticism. Even Norman Perrin, the redaction critic, recognizes that, "The gospel of Mark was an apocalyptic drama written in the wake of the wars with Rome."<sup>136</sup> Kelber states cogently:

The Roman-Jewish War and the destruction of the temple provide the broad historical backdrop for the Gospel of Mark, and the reader may keep these events in mind in reading the Gospel. There may be a connection between the loss of the national center and Mark's writing the story of Jesus. In any case the story he tells appears to be both meaningful and intelligible when read against the background of Israel's searing tragedy.<sup>137</sup>

Rhoads notes as one of the issues which narrative criticism should explore: "How best can we use our knowledge of Mark's time—the culture, social conflicts, the Roman-Jewish War, and so on—to inform our interpretation of Mark's narrative, without historicizing the story?"<sup>138</sup> By "historicizing," he means taking the story literally. The narrative perspective does not preclude exploring the story as *figurative* history reflecting these issues. Price says pointedly that "the 'literary' study of the gospels has served from the first as a diversionary route of escape from engagement with the troubling questions of genuine historical criticism."<sup>139</sup> This is too negative. The history which underlies the narrative can be uncovered, without reverting to a possibly outdated methodology. Moreover, the trend of recent scholarship is to view Christian origins in terms of early Judaism, and not as a unique "Christian" phenomenon.<sup>140</sup> This is the interpretive reality. The method employed is not

the comparative mythology of the myth method, but rather a sort of comparative historiography.

## Markan Milestones

Three main milestones have marked the journey of Markan scholarship. The first came early in the nineteenth century with the discovery that the Gospel of Mark, long consigned to obscurity, was actually the first Gospel written, the one upon which later Gospels depended. This gave new meaning to the study of Mark. As Bultmann explains:

When Synoptic criticism reached the conclusion that Mark was the oldest Gospel and that it also lay behind the structure of Matthew and Luke, the critics, happy about their conclusion, quickly and readily jumped to another, and found in Mark's presentation of the life of Jesus—'perhaps with some adjustment in detail'—the actual course of historical events.<sup>141</sup>

This view prevailed throughout the "Life of Jesus" era. It was brought to an abrupt conclusion with Wrede's book.

It was Wrede's work on the Messianic Secret which did most to call into question this traditional attitude which went far beyond what could be established by a cautious analysis of Mark...Wrede's work constituted a quite annihilating criticism of a seemingly clear picture of historical development in Mark.<sup>142</sup>

Mark's Gospel was downgraded by another supposed discovery, namely that Mark had merely edited oral tradition which he spliced together rather arbitrarily. Both Mark's perceived theology and his alleged methodology meant that his Gospel could no longer be used to reconstruct the life of Jesus.

The third milestone came with the advent of narrative criticism when such authors as Kelber, Rhoads, and Michie introduced the novel idea of reading Mark's Gospel as a story of Jesus, and no longer as the life of Jesus, or as the story of Jesus in the life of the church. The liberation of the Gospel as a narrative, like any narrative, from the bonds of previous constrictive scholarship, allows us to move forward with an analysis of the Gospel in terms of what it must have meant to its original readers in its original appearance. It may be hoped, therefore, that this book will represent a fourth milestone in Markan study, one which reveals that the Gospel of Mark, in addition to being the story of Jesus, is also in a figurative, interpretive sense, the story of Israel. Without a grasp of this interpretive reality, research on Mark is bound to falter.

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78. *War* 2.13.5 (261-263).

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80. Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. I *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 36.

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90. *Ant.* 18.3.2 (62).

91. *Ant.* 18.3.4 (65).

92. *Ant.* 18.3.4-5 (65-84).

93. *Ant.* 20.9.1 (200).

94. *On Matthew* 10.17.

95. *Against Celsus* 1.47.

96. *Letters* 10.96-97.

97. *Claudius* 25.4. *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit.* The Latin means "due to the instigator," not "at the instigation of." Van Voorst, *Jesus*, 31.

98. *Annals* 15.44.

99. Van Voorst, *Jesus*, 52.

100. *Trypho* 8.3.4.

101. *Contra Celsum* 2.26.

102. *Contra Celsum* 2.27.

103. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

104. Ehrman, *Exist*, 5.

105. Ehrman, *Exist*, 34-35.

106. Ehrman, *Exist*, 1.

107. Ehrman, *Exist*, 2.

108. The only reference to the historicity of Jesus I heard in seminary was the offhand comment by a New Testament professor that no one doubted that Jesus existed "physically."

109. Van Voorst, *Jesus*, 7.

110. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 1, 28.

111. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.16, 4.20, 4.45, 6.43. The dead man was raised from the tomb of Achilles, and is presumably the hero himself.

112. In response to the author's inquiry on this issue, Peter Gandy responded, "If in my studies I had found evidence of a 'nuclear' Jesus, then that is the position I would have taken, with the usual caveats that we can know nothing about such a person as all we have are layers of accretions." Personal correspondence, June 10, 2009.

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116. Fawcett, *Myth*, 30.
117. Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* New Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 2.
118. Willi Marxen, *Der Evangelist Markus. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, 1956).
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120. Marxsen, *Mark*, 19.
121. Marxsen, *Mark*, 216.
122. Howard M. Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark and the Miracle from the Cross," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 16.
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125. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), vii.
126. David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 412.
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132. Rhoads, *Mark*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1.
133. Rhoads, *Mark*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 73.
134. Powell, *Narrative*, 99.
135. Powell, *Narrative*, 120, n. 7.
136. Perrin and Duling, *New Testament*, 256.
137. Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 14.
138. Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism," 426.
139. Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 224.
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