MARK: A MESSIANIC POST-WAR GOSPEL

by

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ABSTRACT

JENNY PURI BEAUMONT. MARK: A MESSIANIC POST-WAR GOSPEL.
(Under the direction of DR. JAMES D. TABOR)

The Gospel of Mark, understood as our earliest post-70 CE early Christian/Jewish writing, can provide a new interpretive lens for setting forth the parameters of an understanding of spirituality for Mark's community in a new era in which Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple no longer hold center stage. The thesis explores the answer to the question: How does Mark propose the Markan Community follow the Jesus movement? Following the trail within the gospel itself with a lens of the post-70 CE setting of the Gospel of Mark, I analyze the text by applying a post-70 CE context to understand Mark's vision of a way forward for the Jesus' movement. Although Markan scholarship focuses on Christology or the rejection of the temple, I show that Mark uses the issues within Mark 11 and Mark 12 culminating in Mark 13 as an organizing focus for the followers of the Jesus movement. Mark provides a parallel proposal for Jesus' followers—primarily addressing how one remains faithful to the God of Israel in the post-War period while addressing directly addresses a whole series of issues that emerge because of the Temple's demise and the shattering of the social function of Pharisees and priestly Sadducees in the homeland after 70 CE. Mark's Jesus forces a radical reinterpretation of core Jewish issues and practices that could be seen as a universal new Covenant for the followers of the Jesus movement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John"—the most casual student of Christian texts recognizes the four gospels of the New Testament in their current order. What is less known is that scholars consider Mark, the second of the four canonical gospels, as the earliest written. In fact, both Matthew and Luke incorporate Mark as their main source in constructing their subsequent versions of the Jesus story.[1] Most scholars place Mark's authorship around the years 66-73 CE, however, there is significant internal evidence to suggest a post-70 CE date—which would make it the earliest surviving example of a Christian text written after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.[2] Indeed, I think it can be accurately stated that our gospel of Mark is the earliest *text* emerging from this post-War period more generally—whether one is looking at "early Christian" or Jewish materials. I use these terms advisedly, as "Christian" and "Jewish" are very fluid terms, when, as Paula Fredriksen puts it "Christians were Jews."[3] At a minimum, the Jesus movement in its various diverse manifestations was flowing out of a thoroughly Jewish milieu, so "Christian" texts, historically at least, should be understood as part of the broad stream of varieties of "Judaisms" of this period.

This singular fact is worth noting. If one poses the question at the core of my thesis: How does one follow the God of Israel in a time when Jerusalem has been conquered and the Temple

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[1] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) offers basic introductory discussions and analysis of the background and provenance of each Gospel as well as their interrelationships reflecting the basic mainstream academic approaches and results.

[2] Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 38.

[3] Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). It should be noted here that Mark never uses the term "Christian."

that was the center of Jewish faith is no more—Mark is our *earliest* surviving response. I am convinced that this was the core concern for Mark and his community, as it was for all forms of "Judaism" emerging from the devastating destruction of 70 CE. What other Jewish movements and sects of the time proposed as their own way of moving forward—without Jerusalem and the Temple—are quite varied, but the singular challenge they all faced should be recognized.

According to Joel Marcus, Mark indeed "arose in part as a response to the Jewish War."[4] Although I don't want to overstate my thesis, I am convinced that "in part" might more accurately put that Mark arose primarily as a response to the Jewish War. Much attention has been given to the theology of Mark—particularly his views of Christ and his understanding of salvation, whereas the political and social disruption of all aspects of Jewish life and faith that followed the disaster of the First Jewish-Roman revolt (66-73 CE) have been neglected or in some cases even just ignored—as if Mark dropped from heaven as a theological exposition with no political, social, or historical contexts. It is readily acknowledged that Jewish groups such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Dead Sea Scroll group—whether we use the label Essene for them or not—faced a similar and parallel challenge. How does one live a Jewish life without Jerusalem and its Temple as its center? What about the issues of ritual purity, atonement, and keeping the commandments (*mitzvot*) of the Torah, when so many of them involved Jerusalem and the Temple? Set in this wider context, the Jesus movement, of which Mark is our earliest example beyond the letters of Paul, which date to the 50s CE, is fully a part of these streams of late Second Temple Judaism—even more so since it offers a narration of the story of Jesus—a Jewish figure wholly embedded within the Jewish world of the 30s CE.

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[4] Joel Marcus, "The Jewish War and the Sitz-Im-Leben of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 3 (1992): 441–62.

Before 70 CE, the movement, in both its homeland and diaspora manifestations, looked to Jerusalem as its center with James the brother of Jesus, and the Jerusalem apostles providing leadership (Galatians 1-2).[5] After 70 CE, everything was transformed. Emerging out of this traumatic disaster the gospel of Mark offers the followers of Jesus a way forward in a post-War situation of reconstruction and recovery.

I argue in this thesis that the gospel of Mark, understood as our earliest post-70 CE early Christian/Jewish writing, can provide a new interpretive lens for setting forth the parameters of an understanding of spirituality for Mark's community in a new era in which Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple no longer hold center stage. Further, emerging, out of the broader contexts of late Second Temple Judaism, are the issues that Mark's community is working out based on his presentation of the teaching of Jesus. Those teachings touch on many of the same issues the Rabbis who eventually produced the Mishnah, in precisely the same period, were beginning to address. Such matters as animal sacrifice and atonement, ritual purity, Sabbath observance, and how both Jews and Gentiles might keep the *mitzvot* or "commandments" of the Torah in a post-War situation are front and center. I am further arguing that this post-War reading of Mark allows us to weave together a cluster of core Markan themes, making sense of them not as disparate issues, but as a more singular whole. In other words, what is often read as "Markan theology," is in fact our first broad proposal for following the God of Israel in a new world order—retroactively set back in the life of Jesus in the 30s CE.

My work focuses on the sociological and historical contexts of the Gospel of Mark. First, I will analyze current scholarship on Mark, exploring the text by applying a post-70 CE perspective to understanding the Markan Community and Mark's vision of a way forward for the

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[5] See John Painter's pioneering work, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999).

Jesus movement. Next, after some background on the Gospel of Mark and a discussion of the post-70 CE destruction of Jerusalem, I examine specific passages from the gospel to flesh out the details of Mark's vision of the future for Jesus followers worldwide. Some of the major texts I examine in this regard are:

- Mark 1:2-5: John the Baptist offers forgiveness of sins as the eschatological "Elijah" figure who enters his "Temple" and offers a new kind of purification.
- Mark 1:22: Jesus teaches with authority, not as the scribes—i.e. the rabbinic religious authorities.
- Mark 2:1-12: Jesus claims authority to "forgive sins" outside the Temple system; Jesus later gives his life as a "ransom" for sins (10:45).
- Mark 2:18-23: Jesus offers "new wineskins" as a metaphor for issues of ritual fasting as practiced by the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
- Mark 2:23-28: Jesus redefines Sabbath observance—and "commandments" more generally, declaring the Son of Man as the new authority (i.e. Moses) thereby clarifying the intent of the law—laws are for people not people for laws.
- Mark 7:1-23: Jesus' exposition on ritual purity and defilement including a catalogue of thirteen prohibitions.
- Mark 11:15-26: Jesus' teaches about a house of prayer for all people.
- Mark 11:12-14; 12:1-12: Jesus curses a fig tree and addresses its withering, and offers the parable of the mismanaged vineyard being given to "others."
- Mark 12:28-34: Jesus interacts with the "wise scribe" addressing the Shema, keeping the commandments as more than all "burnt offerings and sacrifices" and teaching that to understand this is to be "not far from the Kingdom."

- Mark 13: Jesus and the disciples during events leading up to the destruction of the Temple and the Son of Man returning in the clouds of heaven.
- Mark 14: 62-72: Jesus' declaration to Pontius Pilate regarding the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

These and other texts of Mark layout a cluster of interwoven themes regarding ritual purification; baptismal and mikveh initiation; fasting; Roman taxation; Sabbath observance; Temple sacrifice; redefining how to live in faithfulness to the God of Israel, whether Jew or Gentile, in a post-War situation, as the new covenant people.

I begin with a survey of current scholarship on Mark, my contribution to that work, and the argument for applications of these post-70 CE perspectives. The thesis concludes with a proposed answer to the question: How does Mark propose following Jesus as the Christ to his readers in the new post-70 CE world? The main body of the thesis is the analysis of these biblical pericopes and narratives that demonstrate a unified proposal for a way forward for the Jesus movement. Some of my guiding questions include: How might they understand ritual purity without the Temple? Who might be the models of covenantal faithfulness for them without the Temple structure and Jerusalem as their center? Mark's Jesus directly addresses a whole series of issues that emerge because of the Temple's demise and the shattering of the legal, social, and economic function of Pharisees and priestly Sadducees in the homeland and the diaspora after 70 CE.

DISSOLUTION AND REBUILDING

The scholars upon whom I chiefly rely reflect a span of New Testament research, from the pioneering work of S.G.F. Brandon and Lloyd Gaston to the premier Markan scholar of our time, Joel Marcus, whose massive two-volume commentaries on Mark in the Anchor Bible Series were published in the first decade of the 2000s. Gaston and Brandon directly emphasize the role that the fall of Jerusalem played in the emergence of early Christianity. They both argue that it was the prime event shaping the formation of our Gospels.[6]

What do we know about Mark's community and other sectarian groups in the first-century CE? Mark's community adapted to the shifting sands of the political, social, and theological influences in the late first century CE. As followers of the Jesus movement, Mark's community sought to define themselves amid military occupation and dangerous political storms. Of course, Mark's community was not the only one to face radical shifting after the Temple's destruction. In the first century CE, the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots were active Jewish sects who sought a new way forward, reacting to the repercussions of the events of 70 CE. Marcus expresses it well:

> " . . . after the destruction of the Temple, however, the situation changed drastically; the priest and Levites lost their power base and rapidly faded into obscurity, whereas the Pharisees emerged from the ruins of the war as the dominant Jewish party and took over legislation and enforcement of the law.

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[6] Gaston, Lloyd. *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) and Samuel G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of AD 70 on Christianity*, 2nd edition (London: S.P.C.K., 1957)

> Matthew's near-equation of scribes and Pharisees probably reflects this post-70 situation.[7]

The Qumran community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, often identified with the "Essenes" as described by Josephus and other classical authors, also faced disruption after 70 CE. Most scholars speculate that they hid their writing in the caves around Qumran, precisely because of the Tenth Roman Legion sacking nearby Jericho after the destruction of Jerusalem. The Pharisees were more successful in recreating a new center for the religion without Jerusalem and the Temple as its center. The Pharisees emerged as the creators of what would become "rabbinic Judaism" with its "emphasis on Jewish law and ritual on the one hand, and its ability to adapt and develop on the other."[8] The response of the Pharisees, who faced a similar crisis under the leadership of Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai, has been well documented by the various works of Jacob Neusner.[9] The Zealots fled in the capture of Jerusalem and like the Sadducees did not return. The Zealots had a military version of Judaism similar to the apocalypticism of the Qumran group, both of which became moot after the triumph of Roman military power.

The question of when those addressed as Mark's community moved from a sect of Judaism to a distinctively separated "Christian" community is an example of this complexity and is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, careful attention to terms and categories will help define the discussion. I use the term "Markan community" in a very general sense, to refer to readers of that Gospel and group that addressed therein. These believers certainly understood that

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7 Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 524.

8 Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1991), 15.

9 Jacob Neusner, First-Century Judaism in Crisis: Yoḥanan Ben Zakkai and the Renaissance of the Torah (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

Jesus was a Jew, and that the issues he addresses are Jewish issues. The extent to which they saw themselves in continuity with the various streams of Judaism after 70 CE is difficult to determine. For my purposes, the new set of circumstances that challenged other Jewish sects in that critical decade of the 70s CE sets the stage for a deeper look at Mark. For purposes of limitation, this thesis focuses directly on the Gospel of Mark rather than on the extensive more general scholarship on the "parting of the ways."

"The parting of the ways," one of the perennial contemporary debates for scholars of early Christianity, encapsulates how and when the followers of Jesus and surviving forms of Judaism, whether in the homeland or the Jewish diaspora, after 70 CE, began to separate into distinct sects or religious groups.[10] Paul was an influential figure in the Jewish diaspora. Although Paul has historically been seen as an opponent of Judaism, who proposed its replacement with some form of the new religion of "Christianity," there is a current trend among New Testament scholars to understand him as a Jew who understood his mission and message on Jewish terms.[11] Those Jewish terms were within the broader parameters of Jewish messianic apocalypticism and its prophesied Gentile mission.

For the Jewish sects of the time, transitions and changes were gradual and more complex than some scholars have allowed. Schiffman argues that the split was easier and more distinct for Christians than Jews. Christians began to see Jews as "the other," as evidenced in the Gospel of John by the late first or early second century (John 8:39-50; 9:22). The separation for Christians was firmly planted in the emerging belief that Jews were responsible for the rejection of Jesus

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[10] James D. G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians the Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[11] David Clausen, *Meet Paul Again: for the First Time: Jewish Apostle of Pagan Redemption* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021), offers a comprehensive overview and exposition of this area of recent New Testament studies.

and his execution—particularly evident in texts touching on "blood guilt," such as 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 and Matthew 27:25. For the Jewish community, separation may have been more gradual. The early rabbis of the post-70 CE period, referred to as the *Tannaim*,[12] sought to define Jewish observance in the new situation. By the time of Paul's writings in the 50s, the Jesus movement had begun to open itself to Gentile adherents so that after 70 CE the non-Jews most likely outnumbered the Jews. However, the Temple was still standing, Jerusalem was the worldwide focus of the Jewish people, and his expectations of an imminent *Parousia* or "return" of Christ in his lifetime, provided a totally different "world" in which Paul had to operate from that of the author of Mark. For the rabbis after 70 CE, the Jesus movement was not a Jewish sect with misguided views about who was the Messiah, but a mostly "Gentile" movement that claimed to be the "true Israel," replacing the Jews as God's covenant people (Romans 9:1-13; Philippians 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:32).[13] The Romans also played a role in the separation when they exempted Christians from the *fiscus Judaicus*, a tax the Romans imposed on all Jews throughout the empire after the 66-73 CE revolt.[14] As we will see, this issue of paying taxes, which is addressed to Jesus in Mark, might well be a reflection of this very issue, along with Jesus welcoming of "tax collectors" who were despised as collaborators with the Roman occupiers, into his inner circles (Mark 12:13-17). Schiffman emphasizes that Judaism was not a monolithic religion but a "collective religious, cultural, and legal traditions and civilization of the Jewish people as developed and passed down" through generations."[15]

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[12] The tannaim refers to the rabbinic religious leaders whose writings will eventually the Mishnah approximately 10 BCE – 200 CE.

[13] Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 154

[14] Ibid, 155.

[15] Ibid, 1.

BACKGROUND ON MARK

Before analyzing the Gospel of Mark as a post 70 CE writing, there are a few things to layout about the book's authorship, themes, and structure. The writer of Mark is unknown and the name attached to the text is late—well into the second and third centuries. Although there is no shortage of theories about the writer's identity none of them are definitive and we should best classify the text as "anonymous." The writer is often associated with John Mark, who is mentioned in the book *Acts of the Apostles*. According to the *Acts of the Apostles*, John Mark lived in Jerusalem and would have known members of the Jerusalem church: Jesus's apostles, as well as his mother and brothers (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). Although this is a traditional view, scholars, including Joel Marcus, reject these theories of authorship and argue that the author is unknown. I agree with Marcus and others that the author remains unknown, yet we can know some things about him. The author is an adherent to the Jesus movement, proclaims Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and appears to be writing for people who already know the basic narrative and arc of the story.[16]

Key themes in Mark include the emphasis on Jesus' humanity, the centrality of the cross and the call to suffer and serve others, the "Messianic" secret in which Jesus' identity is only gradually disclosed to those within the story; the utter failure of the disciples, and the proclamation of the kingdom of God being imminent. The language is often sparse, urgent, and direct. The disciples are depicted as totally lacking understanding and Jesus is often exasperated with them.[17] This gospel of sixteen chapters is short in contrast to Matthew with twenty-eight

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[16] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*,18-21.

[17] Mark's frustration with and diminishing of the disciples may reflect Mark's opposition to the failed Jerusalem-based church of James and Peter with its proximity to and focus on the Jerusalem

and Luke with twenty-four. The plot is tightly constructed, filled with themes of mystery, pathos, conflict, and irony.

Mark's early audience would know the immediate consequences of the destructive and powerful force of the Roman Empire in the wake of the Roman-Jewish War (66-70 CE). Apparently, some had even lived through it—as they are directly addressed in Mark 13:14-23. Mark's gospel echoes the Roman imperial context with undertones of the gospel that provide courage and comfort to the Markan community that is suffering from violence. Although we know of the persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero in 64 CE, and Mark's readers may have lived through such, it is just as likely that the various references to sufferings in Mark are referring to persecution in Judea and the Galilee (Mark 8:34-9:1; 9:9-13; 10:35-45). Indeed, Mark 13:9-13 appears to offer encouragement to Jesus followers in the context of the Roman destruction of the city of Jerusalem. He assumes his readers recognize key characters known to the Jerusalem church, such as Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross—and his sons Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). The audience was most likely the remnant, the ones who survived the persecution. They might have betrayed their faith or broken under pressure. Mark is penning a new way forward to a post-70 CE faithful community without the benefit of Jerusalem or the Temple. Their community is living between two important ages: the apostolic and post-apostolic ages. Some scholars place the writing of the gospel in Rome, in part because of the mentions of persecutions. However, Achtemeier and others have posited Syria as the place of penning, close to Jerusalem, because of Mark's criticism of Jerusalem and the Temple establishment.[18]

Temple. By the time Mark was writing the leaders of the Jerusalem church were likely dead and the community scattered into the diaspora.

[18] Paul J. Achtemeier, "Mark, Gospel of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, (London and New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4:541–557.

The reader will notice that Mark writes with an urgent voice. Things are happening "immediately" or "straightway," with the use of the Greek word *euthus* appearing forty-one times in the compact gospel. Mark begins with the declaration that "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15) and structures his narrative to fulfill the claim that the world is changing and will not ever be the same again.[19] Mark's use of intercalation to compare and contrast stories gives more depth to his narrative.[20] One such intercalation will be covered later in this work: the pronouncement of the Temple failing intercalated by the cursing of the fig tree and the withering and dying of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14; 20-21).

The Gospel of Mark uses the term "Son of Man," yet the first line of the Gospel declares: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Many scholars center on the theological implications of Jesus as "Christ." Although the interpretation of Christ is part of the Gospel, there are other considerations. The title, "Son of Man" which appears first in Mark chapter 2, is a term that Jesus applies to himself. According to Achtemeier, Mark's Jesus is designating three actions in his self-referencing: "current activity," "coming suffering," and "future return in glory."[21] By the time Mark was writing, "Son of Man" most likely had come to be understand in the light of the figure in Daniel as an eschatological title. In Daniel 7:13-14, the "Son of Man" has royal implications that also hint at the type of king Jesus would be in the Gospel of Mark—a suffering king. Jesus predicts his passion, death, three times. The term will

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[19] Quotations from Mark and other biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

[20] Intercalation is a powerful literacy tool that interrupts a narrative to tuck a shorter, seemingly unconnected pericope into the larger narrative for comparison and juxtaposition.

[21] Achtemeier, "Mark," 551.

enter into this thesis when we look at the themes of enthronement and "coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62; 13:26-27).

Granting that New Testament scholars have emphasized the similarities between Paul's early letters and Mark on any number of theological issues, Marcus stresses that although Mark has access to Paul's writings, Mark's influence was a broader one. [22] Mark has not written in the style of Paul or imitated his writing and vocabulary. It should be noted that Mark was writing at least twenty years after Paul. During those twenty years, there were enormous changes within the Jesus movement with the deaths of Peter, Paul, and James, as well as the destruction of the Temple and the upending of the lives of those following the way of Jesus. Mark's focus on the Temple is notable. Paul is not concerned with the Temple or its operations—unless the account in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 21 is historical—but even then, Paul is accommodating there to James and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. When Paul visits James, Peter, and the other apostles and disciples in Jerusalem, the gatherings appear to be of the believers themselves, not in the Temple or its precincts (Galatians 1-2). Paul's radical and imminent apocalypticism led him not so much to oppose the Temple or anticipate its demise but to expect an imminent P*arousia,* second coming*,* in which all such issues would become moot with the heavenly glorification he expected for those in Christ. In contrast, even though Mark remains thoroughly apocalyptic, he writes for the post-War generation that must pick up the pieces with the leading apostles dead and following the shattering and scattering of the central anchoring of the movement that James and the Jerusalem Church had provided.

Although we are not able to identify the author of Mark by name, there have been many attempts to posit some kind of contextual situation for the community he addresses. As noted

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[22] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*,73-75.

earlier, some scholars have argued that Mark was writing to an audience in Rome—to a community of Gentiles. However, scholars such as Wardle, agree with Marcus, that the community is most likely closer to Jerusalem and the homeland. Internal details from the gospel suggest "geographical proximity to Jerusalem" in the Jewish diaspora and perhaps Syria. [23] Marcus concludes that Mark's community was mainly Gentiles and located "somewhere close to Palestine."[24]

With uncertain authorship and a proposal for a location in Palestine, what can we know about Mark's community? Mark's community was a product of Judaism and evangelized by people who were by "birth and upbringing" Jewish.[25] According to Brandon, the Markan community's outlook on the Jesus movement was essentially framed by Jewish concepts and influenced by Jewish practice. However, there is no evidence that it was a deeply rooted, nor geographically separated community like that of Qumran. We can deduce that Mark's community was swimming in the same social, religious, and political waters as Paul, the Sadducees, Pharisees, the Zealots, and the Essenes. These sectarian groups had a common history, a shared set of sacred texts, and interwoven experiences. Most of our labels and classifications, such as "Christian," "Jewish" "Judeo-Christian" or "Gentile Christian," are too slippery to be of much use. What we know is that the historical Jesus lived and taught as a first century Jew, and Mark's community is clearly familiar with a host of terminology and practical issues that are particular to "Judaism." For example, references to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the Exodus (Mark 12:16); reciting the Shema and keeping the commandments or *mitzvot*

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[23] Timothy Wardle, "Mark, the Jerusalem Temple and Jewish Sectarianism: Why Geographical Proximity Matters in Determining the Provenance of Mark," *New Testament studies* 62, no. 1 (2016): 78.

[24] Joel Marcus. "The Jewish War," 441–62.

[25] Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, 21.

(Mark 12:28-34); and questions about ritual purity and Sabbath observance. James D. G. Dunn cautions against a simplistic moment in time when the parting of the ways occurred. Instead, it was an "ever-widening rift" that has been traced by various historians in its main parameters, though it was likely not "complete" until well into the late first and early second century."[26] In Mark's time, the issues were emblematic of an iterative process, one of fluidity and change by those who looked to the God of Israel, Moses, and the Prophets—including Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. It is clear the Markan community was not fully separated from Judaism and yet, it was not integrated either. They were in transition, as we will explore further by examining some of the concrete issues they faced.

So, to summarize, the catastrophic defeat of Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction has not been given sufficient attention as an essential historical lens through which much of Mark can be read. The desolation of Jerusalem had a profound impact on the Jewish people, including the followers of Jesus. The Roman legions invaded Israel, reigning down devastation throughout the villages and towns of Galilee overwhelming Jerusalem until the city and the Temple were destroyed. The images and stories of enslavement and crucifixion were emblazoned in the corporate memory creating epoch-making effects on the community—and we have the eyewitness first-century account of Josephus's *Jewish War* as perhaps our best way of capturing the times that Mark is seeking to address through casting the Jesus story as proleptically through incorporating the key post-War issues. Mark's is the first "narrative prototype"[27] to address the myriad of issues facing the Jewish/Gentile Church after 70 CE—Mark's community is very much a product of the overthrow of the Jewish state. Furthermore, in response to the conflict,

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[26] Dunn, *Parting of the Ways*, 3; Schiffman, *Text to Tradition*, 153.

[27] Schiffman, 18.

Mark presents a new way forward for a post-70 CE community—a faithful community, open to Gentiles, but with largely Jewish perspectives, but forging out, if not entirely, a vision of things without the stability of the cultural and religious center of the city of Jerusalem with its Temple. Mark narrates the life and teaching of Jesus to describe a way to follow Jesus, the heavenly messiah, but still very much "on earth," in the post-War reconstruction of the shattering of Jewish sectarian groups. As such, it appears to be our first post-70 CE Jewish text of the period—as well as the earliest proposal for the Jesus movement itself in that critical period.

The shortcut phrase, the "Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE," inadequately captures the impact of the world-altering event. The attack was a destruction of the heart and soul of Judaism. All forms of Judaism in the late Second Temple period were shaken to their foundations. B.H. Streeter in 1924 says this: "It is impossible for us nowadays to realize the shock of AD 70 to a community in which Jewish and Gentile members alike had been reared in the profoundest veneration of the immemorial sanctity of the Holy City and the Temple."[28] With the reality of sectarian Judaism and military occupation as integral to the narrative, Mark's attempt to sketch a path forward for followers of Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of God" should be viewed in those political, social, and religious contexts. The post-war reality played out in the pages of Mark. The series of affirmations demonstrate new Christian practices, innovations, and insights that must have provided guidance in uncertain times. Although Mark is intensely apocalyptic, and he and his followers expected the "End of the Age" within a generation of the 70 CE disaster—the community had to construct a way forward in the new world it began to experience.

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[28] B.H. Streeter. *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1930), 516.

THE TEMPLE, BAPTISM, AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Throughout the gospel, Mark uses story and narratives to show how the followers of Jesus can be faithful without the Temple structure or the authority that was centered there. In the first words of the gospel, Jesus is named both Christ and "Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Jesus is given a title reserved for kings and rulers—"the anointed one" or "Christ." This new title sets up the Jesus movement to see that the new order is in direct opposition to the power of the Roman Empire. Mark is setting the stage for a new kingdom. The terms anointed one or Christ would have been familiar to the readers and Mark's community. Mark's Jesus, as "anointed of the Spirt," resonated with texts in Isaiah such as 11:1-5 and 61:1-2. The mission of Jesus is linked to the career of John the Baptist who is the "Messenger" of Malachi—preparing the Way as well as the "Voice" crying in the desert with the same message (Mark 1:2-3; Malachi 3:1-4; Isaiah 40:3-5). Jesus joins John's movement in response to his preaching of a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" and is baptized himself (Mark 1:4-11). Thus "baptism" or ritual immersion in the waters of the Jordan River, now serves as the new means for forgiveness of sins based upon repentance and faith in the message of the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). John declares that this baptism in water points to Jesus and who succeeds and supersedes him, who will baptize "in the Spirit" (Mark 1:8; Isaiah 61:1-2).

Despite this declaration that the immersion in water would be surpassed by baptism "in the Spirit"—Jesus, in one of his final declarations the last week of his life, separates those who are faithful to God and those who are not based on whether they considered John to be a true Prophet or an imposter. Jesus's claim to authority is solidly connected to that of John—as being the inaugurator of this new "Way."

Further, following the declaration in Mark by Jesus that some of his disciples present would not "taste of death until they see the Kingdom of God coming with power," John is explicitly identified, despite his death, as the Elijah figure of Malachi who would come and "restore all things" (Mark 9:1-13). It appears evident that the vision of Moses and Elijah in the vision Peter, James, and John had on the Mountain—often called the "Transfiguration," was both a prefiguration of the kingdom coming in power as well as a declaration that the revelation from Moses to Elijah—the era now marked off by the destruction of the Temple—was superseded. Jesus as a new Moses is the "Beloved Son" whom one is now to "Hear," and John the Baptist is the final Prophetic "Elijah" figure, who has come into his Temple, and is "refining" or purifying a new "priesthood," thus inaugurating a new era (Malachi 3:1-2; 4:5-6).

The significance of this baptism of John lies in its location outside the Temple structure, without regard to the Temple cult—no Temple authority is recognized or necessary. Thus Jesus points back to John, and those who accepted John's baptism, as the watershed event and determining factor as to who would be part of the new "Temple" not made with hands. Mark 1:4-11 presents the issues of baptism, purity, and the Temple authority in the voice of John in the wilderness:

> 'Behold, I sent my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' (Mark 1: 2-4).

Malachi also speaks of a messenger who is preparing the way of the Lord, combined with Isaiah's voice crying in the wilderness.

> See, I am sending my messenger to *prepare the way* before me, and the Lord whom you seek *will suddenly come to his Temple*. The *messenger of the covenant*

> in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? (Malachi 3:1-2 emphasis mine).

Mark's Jesus quotes Malachi as John is offering forgiveness of sins that would normally be accessed only through the priests and religious authorities in the Temple in Jerusalem. Mark's Jesus sees himself as the one sent to Israel with the hallmarks of a messianic figure dotted throughout the Gospel of Mark: the title, the anointing, and acting through the spirit echoing a messianic message.

Following Jesus' baptism and return from the time in the wilderness, Mark's Jesus heals the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 immediately raising the controversial issue of the authority to forgive sins—something again, in the old order, that happened only through the priests in the Temple:

> 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" (Mark 2:1-11).

In the Torah, God forgives through repentance and sacrifices, especially on the Day of Atonement.[29] Here Mark's Jesus, a layperson, not trained as an agent of the Temple, stands for the Temple system. Jesus is more than the Temple. Mark's Jesus brings a novelty to healing, forgiving, and interpreting the laws.

In the next pericope, Jesus attacks the Temple cult and those who are keeping it running. Herod's Temple in first-century CE was the re-construction of the Temple destroyed during the Babylonian exile. Herod the Great had committed to rebuilding it with grandeur and superb beauty. Neusner in *First Century Judaism in Crisis* gives a vivid picture of a bustling Temple and city, yet Herod was neither loved nor admired for rebuilding the Temple.[30] Herod gained no gratitude from his subjects due in part to his addition of Greek-style sporting events, gladiatorial contests, and horse racing in area arenas.[31] Herod was isolated from all of the parties in Jerusalem – Jews saw Herod as a Roman and to the Romans he was Jewish. Herod's commitment to Hellenizing Jerusalem while influencing the running of the Temple polluted his relationship to his Jewish subjects and tainted the Temple he built.

From that vantage point, Mark sees the scribes and Pharisees as persistent enemies of Jesus. Mark has Jesus begin his ministry in Capernaum opposing the authority of the Temple and substituting his own: "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). Mark gives authority to Jesus and summarily removes it from the Temple establishment. As Jesus' ministry continues, Jesus soon clashes with the scribes again, deepening the sense of superiority over the Temple establishment. In the

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[29] Gaston, *Fall of Jerusalem*,77.

[30] Jacob Neusner, *First-Century Judaism in Crisis*, 21-28.

[31] Diamaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 71.

healing of the paralytic, Jesus asserts that he is healing to ensure the scribes and Pharisees will know that he has the power to forgive. The issues present themselves in this one pericope – authority and power to forgive:

> 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? 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 (Mark 1:21-31).

The paralytic man is pronounced healed without the rituals of the Temple and forgiveness without the priests and scribe's involvement. Mark's Jesus is proclaiming authority that has resided with the Temple structure. For Mark, this is the first example of many outside the Temple structure in Jesus' public ministry.

In Mark 2 Jesus challenges the observance of the Sabbath as a central example of loosening and binding the Torah in terms of its proper observance by challenging the authority of the Pharisees and Sadducees:

> One sabbath he was going through the grain fields; 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 2:23-28).

The self-attribution of the Son of Man reminds Marks's audience of the kingly role in Daniel 7. Mark then links the passage to consider whether it is permissible to save or kill life on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4). Mark's narrative choices have his community thinking back to remember what Jesus has done in the past, thereby building interpretive directions for this major Jewish observance around Jesus and his declarations.

In the face of the challenge of the Pharisee, Jesus also responds by alluding to Genesis and the creation of the Sabbath by aligning himself with David which "accentuates Jesus' kingly role."[32] Jesus is centering his authority into the beginning of time with the reference to Genesis and to the Davidic line with the example from David. It is worth noting that the Genesis and David references are pre-temple examples – Jesus is *bypassing* the temple structure altogether, to a time before the temple apparatus. Marcus suggests that the wording in this passage suggests that the disciples are plucking grain to clear a road, perhaps to make a way for Jesus, similarly to the clearing preparing for a royal visit. Jesus declaring himself "Lord of the sabbath" implies that Jesus' disciples would be part of this new order—this new community structure. The Sabbath, and the enforcers of the Sabbath, have no claim on Jesus' disciples. In a post-70 CE landscape,

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[32] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 245.

Jesus is laying a foundation of a new religious and community structure within the context of Roman occupation.

PURITY AND DEFILEMENT

Mark tackles a myriad of purity laws in chapter 7 as he addresses the issues of defilement—one of the central concerns of Second Temple Judaism, along with Temple sacrifice and Sabbath observance. Mark turns to the interior of a person for that which defiles. Controversies between Jesus and his followers, emerge once more with the Pharisees regarding various traditions of ritual purity. Mark separates the Jesus community from those other forms of Judaism that echo Temple ritual devotion in individual homes, table fellowship, and use of the household *mikveh*, which are explicitly mentioned in Mark's parenthetical explanatory opening:

> For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing (literally. "baptisms") of cups and pots and vessels of bronze (Mark 7:3-4).

Mark's Jesus is marking an explicit separation or break from the Pharisees and elders in the practice ritual purity. What is ritual purity and how does it relate to the Jesus movement and to the Gospel of Mark? For this discussion, I rely on the work of John P. Meier.[33] The role of purity laws and *Halakah* (observance of Torah commandments) is formidable and rigorous. In the context of late Second Temple Judaism, the purity laws had chiefly to do with participation in the Temple cult.

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[33] John P. Meier. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus,* Volume 4: Law and Love. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Meier argues that Mark 7:1-23 is the most "sprawling" pericope to examine in order to get at the heart of understanding Jesus' views on purity. Before we explore Mark 7:1-23, we will lay the foundation with a discussion of purity laws in the Torah. Meier specifies four categories of impurity: ritual impurity, moral impurity, genealogical impurity, and lastly a general array of prohibited food or dietary restrictions.[34] Ritual impurity is neither sinful or evil, rather it concerns the normal and regular cycles of life – childbirth, menstruation, disease, sexual activity, and death. These natural activities and processes were transitional moments, a liminal space, that "connected with the conferral or diminution of life." God, or the divine, does not undergo birth, death or sickness. Meier says this about holiness: Holiness, in all its fullness, belongs to God no one else. The essence of mortality, death, blood, and sex, are the antitheses of God's holiness. In this sense, God's non-mortality, might define holiness as the very "God-ness" of God. The ritual impurity laws created a separation between these human activities and the "realm of the divine." Participation in God's holiness varies depending on "how closely they approach God in the ritual worship of the Temple and in obedient living of the covenant."

Ritual purity laws were created and maintained to protect humans from being in the presence of the holy where the extreme examples of the impurity were separated from the presence of God and from the Temple. Although this type of impurity was a natural state and did not reflect the physical cleanliness of a person, it was considered to be highly contagious. A person could regain that purity by immersion in a pool or ritual bath or a mikveh.

Unlike ritual impurity which was not sinful or wrong, moral impurity was "willful, high-handed rebellion against God's will for his people as expressed in the Torah." Especially grievous moral impurities are called abominations. The remedy for moral impurity is more

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[34] The following summary with its quoted materials are from Meier. *A Marginal Jew:* 344-351.

complicated as the impurity is visited upon the Temple or land. The impurity can be removed when the offender is cut-off or removed from the community or by rituals such as "atoning sacrifices par excellence of Yom Kippur." Moral impurity, unlike ritual purity, was not thought to be contagious.

According to Meier, genealogical impurity came about in the time of Ezra when the land of Israel was declared "holy seed,"[35] thereby assuring that the land would not be defiled by gentile seed through marriage. Genealogical impurity continued to be a topic of debate in the intertestamental and rabbinic periods. Prohibited food and dietary restrictions are the last type of impurity to explore. The food laws do not regulate the amount or the context for eating the foods; rather they strictly prohibit them. Meier proposes that a violation of the food laws would move a person toward a moral impurity because of the pronouncement of an abomination, like the moral impurities of murder, idolatry, and incest. The violation of the food laws must be so egregious and inconceivable that there is no remedy for the transgression to "regain one's status as ritually or morally clean."[36]

These impurity laws are part of the social and religious structure of Jewish families and villages in first-century Palestine. For our work here, it is essential to note that the views on ritual purity were not static; instead, they were part of a rigorous debate in the sects of Judaism. Mark entered in the middle of that debate as a religious leader and author of the first gospel inserting himself into this complex area of diverse Jewish views that come to us from a four-hundred-year period (200 BCE – 200 CE).

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35 Ezra 9:2.

36 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 349.

The Temple's destruction influenced the application of the ritual purity laws. A large number of ritual purity rules ceased to be meaningful or practical after the destruction of the Temple. Meier notes that in the wake of the Temple's destruction, some sects were shifting the emphasis on purity into the realm of personal religious practice and individual life thereby expanding the laws. The Tannaitic rabbis sought to "compartmentalize ritual and moral purity in clearly separate realms" of life. In practice, those lives were not as clearly defined. The push and pull of contrition and expansion resulted in the shifting landscape in regard to the purity laws in the last decades of the century.

. Beginning with the teaching about the washing of the cups (Mark 7:5) and following with the teaching about defilement (Mark 7:15), Mark shows a new way for followers of Jesus to understand holiness. The scribes and Pharisees question why all of Jesus' followers do not wash their hands. The word here for "washing" is immersion, dipping, or "baptism." Jesus is setting up a larger more important teaching on ritual purity in the next pericope. The washing of cups and containers brings to mind moral codes rather than ritual cleansing. As previously discussed, Mark's Jesus is not referencing or deferring to the teaching of the elders or to the Temple, but to the "heart" as the measure of closeness to God as contrasted with "defilement" or impurity" (Mark 7:6).[37]

The focus is not on the outside—whether cups and hands, but on an inward lack of defilement. Here there is no Temple, no holy city, and no ritual "washing" or "baptism" that would define holiness. Mark's Jesus quotes Isaiah in labeling as hypocrites those who "honor me (God) with their lips, but their heart is far from me (God)" (Mark 7:6). In this context the

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[37] Joel Marcus points out that "heart" is used in the sense of mind, intent, or volition, *Mark 1-8*, 216.

teaching refers to ignoring the core intent of a commandment thereby, violating the spirit of the law.

Mark continues the theme of the Temple purity laws and practice.

> And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him . . . And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on *into the toilet—cleansing all foods*. And he said, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man (Mark 7:14-19).[38]

The Greek word *anthropos*–referring to a human being, is used five times in this section of Mark. Purity or impurity originates from the human person, not the ritual impurity laws or the Temple related traditions that declare a person either ritually defiled or clean.

> [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts,
> fornication, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit,
> licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil
> things come from within, and they defile a man" (Mark 7:14-23).

This catalog of thirteen traits of moral behavior and attitudes constitutes what in Jewish tradition is called the *yetzer hara*, "the evil inclination," that is, the inner "enemy of God" lodged within the human heart. For Mark it is a corrupting force that suffocates the truth and the life from

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[38] The phrase in italics is commonly translated "Thus he declared all foods clean" and put in parenthesis as a Markan editorial gloss. I have modified the phrase in italics to read more literally based on discussions with Dr. James D. Tabor. The literal Greek, is "cleansing all foods," referring in context to the pursing of the body of any external contaminants which pass into the latrine. It has nothing to do, given the context, with eating certain kinds of foods that were consider unkosher in Jewish law. That is another kind of prohibition—not related to "ritual purity" of this type.

tradition and turns a person into the enemy of God.[39] Mark's Jesus is saying that there is a moral failing that is from the heart. Marcus notes that the imagery of "coming from within" suggests excretion especially given the reference to the latrine in the previous verse.[40]

The only thing that "defiles" during this interim time without the Temple, is what comes from within. This concept of understanding purity and defilement stands out starkly when viewed through the lens of the destruction of the Temple. How could Mark instruct a community of Christians in the art and practice of holiness without a Temple, by proclaiming the old ways of ritual purity? Without the Temple, Mark proclaims a new way of reconciliation through Jesus by turning the focus of purity inward. From within a person is defiled and from the spirit, a person is made clean. Righteousness is not outside the person, but within. This pericope "cuts the ground out from under the system of ritual impurity."[41] Mark in this is a specific place in his gospel shifts the focus to the "heart as the true source of impurity"[42] making a new way forward for the Markan community.

Mark's community was not alone in addressing these issues of the role of the Temple. According to Wardle, The Qumran community had separated from Jerusalem over concerns of priestly oversight and legitimacy. Conversely, the Pharisees participated in the Temple while the Sadducees "became Temple insiders."[43] Although the three sects had areas of disagreement, they

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39 Marcus, *Mark 1-8,* 460.

40 Ibid, 455.

41 Ibid*,* 456.

42 Ibid.

43 Timothy Wardle. "Mark, the Jerusalem Temple and Jewish Sectarianism: Why Geographical Proximity Matters in Determining the Provenance of Mark." *New Testament studies* 62, no. 1 (2016): 68.

were each drawn to Jerusalem and did not venture far from Jerusalem or from the center of their religious identity.

Wardle argues that Mark was part of Jewish sectarianism, situated in and around Jerusalem, focused on the same halakhic concerns causing other Jewish sectarian movements challenges. T.C. Gray explains the centrality and role of the Temple in Mark's gospel:

> The Temple plays a vital role in the plot of Mark's gospel and is deeply connected to the story of Jesus. It serves as the stage for the Markan Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities, and moreover it is the vital reference point for the narrative portrait of Jesus' identity, mission, and eschatological message.[44]

[44] T. C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark* (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 198.

Last Days of Jesus—The Demise of the Temple

The final chapters of Mark's gospel, preceding the Last Supper, arrest, trial, and crucifixion, are all carried out during his daily activities in the Temple during the last week of his life. The buildup and the drama make it clear that Mark wants to center his entire climactic presentation of the teachings of Jesus *in the Temple courts*. These activities are not only "in the Temple," but primarily *about the Temple* and its demise. The obvious intentionality on the part of the author is hard to miss.

Mark's narrative becomes detailed with action and plot as Jesus enters Jerusalem and the Temple proper in chapter 11, where three pericopes, when seen together, punctuate Mark's proposal. Mark's Jesus curses an unproductive tree in 11:14 and shuts down all economic trading in the Temple for the entire day according to 11:15-18. Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees calling the Temple a den of robbers in 11:17 and highlights the validity of John's baptism as a sign of God's new order of things—something the Temple authorities had rejected in Mark 11:27-33. Each of these pericopes is not merely an individual story, but a connected whole that unifies Mark's opposition to the Temple demonstrating the power of a new kind of post-Temple piety for the Jesus movement. Next, we will look at each of these points of narrative to analyze Mark's message to his community.

The cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14) is interrupted by the cleansing of the Temple:

> 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 (Mark 11:15-19).

Jesus accuses the religious establishment, who ran the Temple commerce, of making the Temple, not a holy and sacred place, but conversely a place of thieves and robbers – a powerful accusation aimed at the Temple authorities. Marcus observes that the "den of robbers" refers in that period to a "den of brigands."[45] The term *brigands* was used by Josephus for members of the revolutionary Jewish group that was "operational leading up to the revolt against the Romans in AD 66-74."[46] Mark uses the cursing of the fig tree to represent Israel to chastise Israel for not bearing fruit—essentially a metaphor for the destruction of the Temple. Mark's Jesus calls the Temple not a place of purity and holiness, but moral impurity—the impurity of violence. No amount of ritual cleansing will cleanse their hearts. Mark calls his community to be a "house of prayer" rather than a violent "den of brigands."

In the following chapter, Mark tightly clusters four more important teachings for his community: the Parable of the vineyard, paying the tribute to Caesar, the "wise scribe" who is the only one commended for understanding in the entire gospel, and the widow's offering of but two copper coins. As the disciples leave the Temple, Mark's Jesus tells a parable about a

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45 Joel Marcus, "Jewish War," 449-451.

46 Ibid, 449.

vineyard owner who entrusts his land to the tenants. The tenants beat the enslaved people and the vineyard owner's son, thinking the land would belong to them:

> 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.' [7] 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 (Mark 12:5-12).

Even the scribes and Pharisees saw that the parable meant that Jerusalem's Temple and Holy city would be "taken away" and given to others. And those "others" are clearly the followers of Jesus who inhabit a new realm of holiness, forgiveness, and purity, outside the Temple. The imagery of the cornerstone demonstrates the shifting that Mark's community would have witnessed. Mark's community looked back and saw that the Temple would be taken away—the Temple and Jerusalem would no longer be entrusted to the current caretakers—simply because Herodian Temple would no longer exist—and the "vineyard" would be put under the care of others.

Mark then, seemingly abruptly, moves to the heated issue of paying tribute to Caesar, with its well-known response by Jesus "'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,

and to God, the things that are God's'" (Mark 12:28-25) might possibly be a reflection of the post-War tribute of the *fiscus Judaicus* tax that Rome put upon all Jewish inhabitants after the Revolt—but I am not convinced that is the case. It seems, in context, with some of the other "testing questions" in chapters 11-12, to show, rather, the "wisdom" of Jesus in besting his enemies and opponents while delighting the crowds. Jesus leaves the group with a clever ambiguous reply as Jesus threads the needle between claims of God's sovereignty and Caesar's rule.

A few verses later Mark introduced the center of the new way of life for the Markan community—the wise scribe. The great commandment in the Torah is the Shema—quoted verbatim and in full—affirming to Israel that the Lord our God, the Lord is One—and one must love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Mark 12:28-30). And the second is to love one's neighbor as oneself. However, the context of these declarations of Jesus is to a Jewish scribe who then grasps Jesus' fundamental message: to affirm that God is one and there is no other but God, and to love God and to love one's neighbor—*is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices* (Mark 12:32-33). This wise scribe is the only one commended for spiritual understanding in all of Mark when he understands that to love God with all one's being and love one's fellow human being as oneself is "more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices"— a direct statement made in the Temple itself. Jesus declares that given his insight he is "not far from the Kingdom of God"(Mark 12:34). From a post-70 CE perspective, this pericope is at the heart of the Markan teaching to the Jesus movement.

That this climatic declaration is followed immediately by the commendation of the widow's offering is of particular importance and directly related to the demise of the Temple—

especially following the insight of the wise scribe. And Mark's Jesus says that her offering of two copper coins, totally unnoticed by—and forgotten—by his disciples, is more than all the lavish offerings brought to the Temple from Jews of all nations during the Passover festival: "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" (Mark 12: 41-44). The widow has no man for protection—neither father nor husband. She has no money, which might buy her some influence in the culture. And she is a woman in a highly patriarchal culture. At first, this generous offering from the widow to the temple might be seen as an example of the rightful place of the temple in mediating the sacred – providing a way to be closer to God. A second look exposes the offering as a contrast to the temple system. The widow's offering, two copper coins, is not the prescribed temple offering for a poor person. The widow is not following the guidelines of the temple priests; her offering would have been of little consequence to the temple leaders, as such, the widow stands as an outsider to the temple, not harmonious with it, just as Mark's community is outside the temple system.[47] Gaston suggests the historical context as significant for this series of stories in Mark, namely that the dark hour in which it was written, that the war with Rome was underway and apocalyptic hopes based on the Hebrew Prophets of the Kingdom of God bringing deliverance and salvation from Roman oppression had slipped away.[48]

According to Marcus, some of the prophecies of the Mark 13 reflect the experience of the Jewish War: "The Jewish War had a profound effect on Mark's community," as seen in Mark 13

[47] My thinking around this is based on a conversation with Dr. Kent Brintnall 4/27/2022.

[48] Gaston, *No Stone on Another*, 78.

through a series of eschatological prophesies set in the time that Jesus was still with his disciples teaching, preaching and healing. As Jesus and his disciples exit the Temple grounds and ascend the Mount of Olives to the east of the city, they begin to talk about the beauty and of the buildings—"Look Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (Mark 13:1). This is perhaps the sharpest juxtaposition in the entire gospel of Mark—highlighting the failure of Jesus' followers to grasp the meaning of what Jesus had just said about the Temple and its eclipse—both the insight of the wise scribe and the offering of the widow are valued more than the pageantry and display. The persecutions of the community are written in the present and add intensity to the narrative.

Mark also addresses the Kingdom of God in an in-between time—between the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the *Parousia* of the "Son of Man coming in the clouds" (Mark 13:26-27). Mark's narrative echoes overthrowing the world order in Daniel 7:13-14 "behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man" Mark instructs the budding Christian community to expect the coming of Christ, the Messiah.

> But in those days, after that tribulation, 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. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And 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. "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 say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place.

> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mark 13: 24-31).

Mark's community is living between those times—the Temple devastated and defiled by the Romans—and the cosmic judgment of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

The full manifestation of the Kingdom of God is present in "seed" or germination form, with Jesus' followers remaining vigilant and observant of all they have been taught in the interim: "Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:22). The followers of Jesus, the people of the way, are the remnant of Israel to whom the "nations" are drawn in, as Isaiah envisions, "In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11: 10).

FOLLOWING THE GOD OF ISRAEL IN A NEW POST-TEMPLE ERA

Mark's gospel offers a path for a change of direction to a religion of inward spiritual piety that supersedes that of ritual and sacrifice mediated from the external Temple. For Mark, salvation is above all else the victory on the scale of cosmic powers. Like other Jewish apocalyptic teachers, Mark sees Jesus's mission as "clearing the earth of demons."[49] According to González, apocalypticism is a dualistic cosmic and religious perspective that sees the present as the beginning of the final struggle between cosmic forces of good and evil. In Mark we see reference to Daniel, providing more textual evidence for the apocalyptic perspective including the title "Son of Man" often used in Mark.[50]

The first tenet for Mark is to follow the God of Israel and God's commandments—love the Lord (Yahweh) your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Mark's new community is instructed to follow the God of Israel. The primary confession of Judaism, the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone," as we mentioned previously, is quoted by Jesus and its implications are readily grasped by the wise scribe. Mark also referred to the oneness of God more obliquely in the earlier account of Jesus forgiving sins: "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Mark 10:11-18 frames the centrality of the God of Israel for this community: "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.'" Jesus is not even to be addressed as "Good Master" though he *has been given* authority

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[49] Marcus, *Mark 1-8,* 72.

[50] Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970. 20-60.

to represent God on earth—but "No one is good but *God alone* (Mark 10:17-22). Further, to inherit eternal life one must "keep the commandments"—citing from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deut 5), but also sacrifice everything to follow Jesus.

Mark's community is one that affirms the Shema, as they have no need for the Temple, its sacrifices and offerings, or any aspects of ritual purity, either connected thereto or expanded to everyday life between market and home. They are the "elect" that will be saved when cosmic judgment comes upon the whole world with the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:27).

The second tenet of Mark's community is that something new has been created – a new way. Mark posits Jesus' superiority in authority and teaching over opposing forms of Judaism. The metaphor of the old and new wineskins is tucked into a question regarding fasting and provides a defining way forward for the Jesus movement. The new wine is unfit for the old container as the new Jesus movement is unfit for the Temple-centered practices. Jesus' response to the question is in the rabbinic style of countering with another question:

> Jesus said to them, 'The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they?' …. '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'(Mark 2:19, 22).

The new wine, unfermented, would expand in the fermentation process and typically burst older skins. The new wineskins were subtle enough to stretch to accommodate the new as it aged. The word for pour in this passage is the Greek *ballei*, meaning to throw. Marcus points out the forceful nuance that supports "radical newness."[51] The compound form of the verb is used in

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[51] Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 234.

1:12 as forceful action of the spirit. Jeremias notes that this image of new wineskins is a good one for the new age and is echoed in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QSa2:17-20 and 11QTemple 19:11-21:10).[52] The new wineskins and the old wineskin hold the same substance—yet, the container is different. Perhaps Mark is leaving the possibility open that the new way, new wineskins, are needed that hold a similar substance, but the new way does not destroy the previous version.

Additionally, instead of a Temple with its sacrifices and offerings ensuring purity and atonement, Mark offers Jesus as the suffering servant who gives his life "as a ransom of the many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus is the sacrifice that supersedes the sacrifices at the Temple. For Mark, God does not require a sacrifice. The taking up of the cross is akin to the sacrifice of the heart. Those who want to follow the way must take up a cross and similarly become the least in order to receive exaltation.

Mark's third tenet is that Jesus is the Messiah, the king who will ascend to his place in God's kingdom. Mark's community will wait for the return of the Messiah. Jesus looked to the scriptures, especially Daniel 2:44 to understand his role. Mark's Jesus, the Messiah, was central to bringing about the Kingdom of God. What Jesus did and said in Mark's Gospel showed that he felt that he was the mediator of the expected kingdom. Liberation would come through Jesus the Messiah through whom God would restore the people of Israel.

The core focus of Mark's new spiritual insight and "wisdom" is captured by the wise scribe who is "not far from the Kingdom" given his insight that the heart of the individual is more important than sacrifices and offerings. The commendations of "not being far from the kingdom" shifted the focus from purity laws to the first and second commandments. Mark points his community to a new way where Jesus as "Son of Man" inaugurates a kingdom on earth

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[52] Ibid.

where servant leadership and sacrificial living are valued—so that whoever losses a life gains it (Mark 8:35-36). These teachings are in contrast to the Temple-focused piety. The new way created is framed by Jesus' commendation of children (Mark 10:15), who without baptism or sacrifice are the example of the entering the kingdom of God. Along with the wise scribe and the poor widow, the Kingdom of God moves along different and opposite paths from the old religious establishment that held sway until 70 CE when it was "taken away."

The Gospel of Mark offers transformed views on the Temple, sacrifice, purity laws and traditions, and the singular priority of the Shema for faithful practice, with Jesus as the exalted heavenly messiah whose suffering and death provide a model for the community. Mark proposes a vision that finds the Jewish focus on the city of Jerusalem and the Temple not only superseded but also obsolete in the life of God's faithful messianic community. Instead, the gospel writer puts forth a new way of faith, new wineskins, as the old understanding becomes irrelevant in the post-War context. Mark's criticism of the Temple, the affirmation of the Shema as central to religion, and the claim of an inward Temple propose a new version—a new way for followers of Jesus. Mark provides Jesus' followers with a pathway to understand the Temple, sacrifice, and purity laws and traditions, while affirming the Shema and proclaiming Jesus as the exalted heavenly messiah whose suffering and death provide a model for the community.

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