

THE GOSPEL OF MARK IN LIGHT OF ITS APOCALYPTIC WORLDVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Gospel of Mark is more than a Life of Jesus; Jesus and his message cannot be understood apart from the worldview against which the Gospel functions and that determines the narratives and discourses in the Gospel. If this worldview is apocalyptic, as suggested in the article, it has consequences for the way the different discourses and narratives are interpreted. An attempt is made to illustrate the main points in the narrative of Mark in terms of its apocalyptic definiteness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the *genre* of the Gospels. The ancient literary *genre* closest to the Gospels is biography.¹ A.Y. Collins² agrees that there are similarities between Mark's Gospel and ancient biography but she is of the opinion that the description of Mark as biography does not do full justice to the Gospel.³ A biography (*Bios*, *Vita* or Life) intends to elucidate an individual's character while Mark's focus is on eschatological events; what Jesus says and does is determined by how he views himself and his purpose.⁴ Jesus is central to the descriptions in the Gospel and for this reason, A.Y. Collin⁵ prefers to speak of Mark as "eschatological history." The various Hellenistic lives written in the centuries around Christ's life are not generic models for Mark,⁶ and Mark does not intend to present Jesus as a

¹ Willem S. Vorster, Gospel Genre, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D.N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:1077-1079; Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² Adele Y. Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Marquette: Marquette University. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 17.

³ Collins acknowledges the influence of N. Perrin & D.C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (Second edition; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1982) on her proposal.

⁴ Cp. David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic. Nottingham: Apollos, 2004), 197.

⁵ Adele Y. Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 42.

⁶ Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context*, 1-38.

model, or to authenticate his life as the source of a tradition as in the case of the lives of the philosophers, or to synthesize diverse traditions about his life. Mark's primary intent is to write history, but then a narration of the course of eschatological events that will lead to the end of the existing order.⁷ Shively⁸ agrees that the Gospel is not an apocalypse by *genre*, but it manifests the characteristics of an apocalyptic outlook. The Gospel is related to the *genre* apocalypse because it employs apocalyptic *topoi* as a set of resources for a variety of persuasive tasks.⁹ The background for Mark's work is Jewish apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Daniel, where eschatological events are put in a narrative frame of the life and career of Daniel, and *I Enoch*.¹⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer overturned the consensus amongst researchers that the historical Jesus was not thoroughly apocalyptic in his worldview and prospects.¹¹ They opined that he was even more apocalyptic than the gospels that were written about his life and teaching, although Schweitzer himself concluded that Jesus was a noble but mistaken apocalyptic visionary who expected his death to usher in the new *aeon*.¹² Jesus believed in and waited for a divine intervention that will inaugurate a new order and a new age, and he expected it to happen during his ministry. It might be possible that he went to his death with the expectation that he is compelling God to intervene when his expectations did not realize.¹³ This view is called consistent eschatology and

⁷ Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context*, 27.

⁸ E.E. Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3.22-30*. (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche; Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 21-22.

⁹ Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3.22-30*, 85.

¹⁰ Cp. also J.P. Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York / Mahwah: Paulist, 1992), 12-18 for a discussion of the apocalyptic-eschatological worldview of the Gospel.

¹¹ For a short overview, cp. D.J. Neville, Moral Vision and Eschatology in Mark's Gospel: Coherence or Conflict? *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127(2) 2008: 61; J.D. Tabor, Standing in the Shadow of Schweitzer: What Can We Say About an Apocalyptic Jesus? *The Review of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion* 2(1) 2007: 8; C.S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 4-13.

¹² H. Wansbrough, *The Lion and the Bull: The Gospels of Mark and Luke* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 99.

¹³ M. Grant, *Jesus* (London: Rigel, 1977), 135; D.E. Aune, T.J. Geddert & C.E. Evans, Apocalypticism, in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (eds. C.A. Evans & S.E. Porter; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 51-52.

influenced New Testament scholarship during the twentieth century.¹⁴ R. Bultmann defined consistent eschatology but he did not defend Jesus' apocalyptic perspective. The purpose of his programme of demythologization was not to strip Jesus' teaching of its mythological trappings, as happened frequently in the nineteenth century, but to understand the mythological elements in terms of its existential meaning. In this way, the mythology inherent to Jesus' apocalyptic teachings encouraged people to live open to God's future, a future that is near for every individual.¹⁵

In the following discussion, a schematization proves effective in sketching the coherence and connectedness of the different parts of the Gospel.¹⁶ The way the Gospel is compiled indicates its eschatological intent, with its beginning, the communication about John the Baptist, Jesus's baptism, his conflict with Satan in the wilderness, the series of parables, the purposeful comparison between Jesus and Elijah-Elisha, the role of the sea, the emphasis on the Son of man, the presentation of Jesus' enemies and the destruction of the Temple, Jesus' death and resurrection, en die pervasive use of δεῖ in the Gospel.

2. MARK AS APOCALYPTIC

2.1 The beginning of the Gospel

Mark begins with the words, Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, words with clear political connotation. Political leaders used *euangelion* in propagandizing their

¹⁴ Jan A. Du Rand, *Die Einde: Die A-Z van die Bybelse Boodskap oor die Eindtyd* (Vereeniging: CUM, 2013), 32-33.

¹⁵ Aune, Geddert & Evans, *Apocalypticism*, 52. Not all the scholars of the twentieth century were convinced that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher who expected the imminent end of the world. C.H. Dodd expresses this viewpoint as realized eschatology, of Jesus coming to fulfill the hope that was created by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, and preaching of a dominion that was inaugurated by his ministry. Those passages that expect a future fulfilment are creations of the early church and its eschatological expectations (Aune, Geddert & Evans, *Apocalypticism*, 52). A third view is put into words by more conservative scholars like G.E. Ladd, E.E. Ellis, and I.H. Marshall, a compromise position first defended by W.G. Kümmel, where the kingdom is in a paradoxical way present and still to come. Jesus' mission was to introduce the kingdom and the signs of his ministry demonstrated the success of his ministry, but at the same time he taught that the kingdom would only be consummated when he will return in the clouds (Aune, Geddert & Evans, *Apocalypticism*, 52). Jan Van der Watt, *Eschatology in John: A Continuous Process of Realizing Events*, in *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents* (ed. Jan G. Van der Watt; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 125 suggests that the eschatological events are a constantly realizing process, which makes the phrase "realizing eschatology" a better choice. Apocalyptic images are also utilized when the evangelists report about predictions about the future, of God's final act of judgment and salvation with the coming of the Son of man (Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 13:24-27).

¹⁶ Cp. also the arguments in Collins, *Mark*, 42-44; N. Perrin, *The Christology of Mark*, in *The Interpretation of Mark*. (Studies in New Testament Interpretation; ed. W.R. Telford; Second edition; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 127-137; Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* (HarperCollins e-books, 2009), 71.

claims that their reigns were legitimate and good news for their followers. In the Roman political world, such claims sometimes took on eschatological overtones, as in a reference to the emperor Augustus in the Priene Inscription:¹⁷

It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: "Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a saviour (*sotēr*), both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (*epiphanein*) [excelled even our anticipations], surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of our god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings (*euangelion*) for the world that came by reason of him ..."

Augustus is the one who brought peace to the whole world and he is the greatest benefactor of all. He is called a god and his birthday is the beginning of the good news; therefore the calendar should begin with his birthday, as coincidentally eventually happened when the Christian world counted Jesus' (presumed) birth year as the beginning of the present era. Augustus is also called the *sotēr*, the one who appeared. The Roman Senate had divinized Augustus' adopted father, Julius Caesar, after his death and this allows Augustus to also receive the title "son of the divine Julius," or "son of God." Augustus is also referred to as God incarnate, Savior of the world, New creation, Bringer of peace, and Good news.¹⁸ Vergil, a famous Roman poet, wrote in praise of Augustus in his *Fourth Eclogue* and says that the birth of Augustus characterizes the renewal of the world and history.

Mark uses the term, *Christos*, to designate Jesus as the Hebrew *mashiach*, the messiah that serves as a royal title. Mark also utilizes "Son of God" several times in his Gospel in relation to Jesus' messiahship, as is the case in Psalm 2, and implicitly in 2 Samuel 7, 1 *Enoch* 37-31, and 4 *Ezra* 11-13.¹⁹ The king of Israel is the son of

¹⁷ Quoted in C.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.

¹⁸ Marius Nel, Konteks(te) waarbinne Apokaliptiese Geskrifte gedurende die Intertestamentêre Periode Floreer het *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 64(3) 2008: 727; John D. Crossan, *The Power of Parables: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 158.

¹⁹ G. Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2003), 292.

God, and the kingdom of God comes through the agency of the son of God, the Messiah.²⁰ The first verse of the Gospel carries eschatological and political overtones of a kingdom that necessarily implies the delegitimization and destabilization of the Roman and Jewish order because it bespeaks the establishment of this kingdom, of the sovereignty of God. The Gospel is thus introduced as seditious and Pilate at the end correctly understood that Jesus threatened the Roman order (Mark 15:12).

2.2 John the Baptist

Mark interprets John the Baptist in prophetic terms; he is the one the prophets had written about, the messenger that will prepare the way, the voice of one crying out in the desert that the way of the Lord should be prepared and his paths made straight (1:2-5).²¹

In the Septuagint, Malachi is the last book with its promise of Elijah who will appear to prepare the way for God's coming as judge. The Synoptic Gospels purposefully paint John the Baptist as Elijah, living in the wilderness, dressing in camel's hair and wearing a leather girdle around his waist (2 Kings 1:8). The impression is created that the entire Hebrew Bible leads to the appearance of John the Baptist.

His baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4) is unique as a once-for-all ritual that prepares the way for the Lord's coming.²² It is not the same as the ritual washing prescribed for participation in the temple worship or the sectarian washing at Qumran as a condition to partake in communal meals.²³ John's baptism may have taken on connotations of a ritual washing in order to prepare for the theophany, as happened in Exodus 19:9-15. In the same way the community at Qumran partook in ritual purification with the view of entering into the company of the Holy One and his angels in communal worship. John's baptism was something

²⁰ B. Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels in the Light of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 205.

²¹ Wansbrough, *The Lion and the Bull: The Gospels of Mark and Luke*, 61.

²² J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139-143.

²³ J.P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*. (Vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:19-99; DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 207; G. Vermes, *The Story of the Scrolls: The Miraculous Discovery and True Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Penguin, 2010), 221-222, 235-236.

of a transition between such precedents and the initiatory rite of baptism that would become the defining mark of the early Christian community.²⁴

The Baptist's vision of God's advent is that it is imminent; interventionist, involving transcendental divine power; and violent, with divine violence of an avenging God who comes punitively against any opposition, whether Jewish or Roman.²⁵ As a prophet John predicts the coming of one stronger than he, one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:7-8). The pouring out and activity of the Holy Spirit will be part of the consummation of the world, as described in Isaiah 11:1-2; Joel 2:28-32; and in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In 1:14, John is arrested, betrayed and handed over (*παραδοθῆναι*), a word found again in the Gospel, usually with Jesus as the object. What happens to John foreshadows what will be the fate of Jesus and his followers, as part of the schema of conflict between God and Satan in the heavenly or unseen realm, and Jesus and his disciples on earth and Satan and his human and spiritual collaborators.²⁶ And since John baptized Jesus, he must have accepted his message of apocalyptic eschatology, his vision of God's imminent and avenging intervention for the Great Clean-up of the world.²⁷ Jesus acts differently from John; he does not act like an avenging presence and he does not look like God's wrath to come.²⁸ Jesus neither denigrates nor agrees with John,²⁹ except his remark in Luke 7:28 that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John.

As John the Baptist represents Elijah, so Jesus is pictured in terms recalling Elijah and Elisha. He preaches repentance (Mal. 4:6), multiplies food, and raises the dead (1 Ki. 17:8-24; 2 Ki. 4:18-37, 42-44; cp. Mark 6:14). Jesus never identifies himself as the Son of God or Messiah in Mark but he accepts the appellation when others use it (8:29; 14:62), as he also accepts the role of prophet (6:4).

2.3 Jesus's baptism

In the baptism scene of Jesus, he alone hears a voice from heaven calling him the Son of God and sees the Spirit coming down and resting on him in the form of a dove. His identity as the Son of God would remain secret until after his death with

²⁴ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 207.

²⁵ Crossan, *The Power of Parables: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*, 120.

²⁶ D.C. Duling & N. Perrin, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Paranesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 301.

²⁷ Crossan, *The Power of Parables: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*, 123.

²⁸ Crossan, *The Power of Parables: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*, 122.

²⁹ Crossan, *The Power of Parables: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*, 123.

even the disciples misunderstanding his real meaning. Collins³⁰ suggests that Jesus' identity is significant because of what it implies for the eschatological event of the coming of the king and reign of God. No one will understand what he is doing and why he would die, that as a result of his battle to establish God's kingdom he would be in conflict with Satan, Satan's demons and human collaborators in the form of Jewish religious authorities and Romans resisting the kingdom.

2.4 Conflict with Satan

After his baptism, the Spirit "drives" Jesus into the wilderness, the abode of the demonical forces. Because Jesus has been commissioned, the Spirit pushes him to get on with it. Satan tempts (πειραζόμενος) Jesus, a word occurring frequently in eschatological contexts, where the faithful is tested in various ways, including opposition by hostile powers both earthly and unseen. At the end, God sends angels to serve Jesus. How the writer knows what happens in the desert is not told.

Jesus does not start with his ministry until after John's arrest when he starts proclaiming τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ consisting of the proclamation that ὁ καιρὸς is fulfilled so that the kingdom of God could come near, and that listeners should repent because they believe in the good news. *Kairos* refers to meaningful time, time with a special content and consequence, and *kairos'* fulfilment implies that history has a specific structure, and in the course of history the time has come for something important to happen.³¹ The content of the *euangelion* is the kingdom of God; in an apocalyptic Gospel like Mark the meaning of "kingdom" must be eschatological.³² "Has come near" can refer to "has come near but has not yet arrived" and "has become present." In the Gospel the meaning is probably between the two possibilities; the kingdom has begun to break into history but it cannot fully arrive until the power of Satan is broken and the righteous rescued from an order that will always suppress them in its present state. To accept Jesus' proclamation implies that one must repent (μετανοεῖτε), which means that one must change one's way of thinking, or one's way of looking at the world. The Gospel wants its readers to look at their lives in the light on the imminent kingdom.³³

³⁰ Collins, *Mark*, 43.

³¹ J.P. Louw & E.A. Nida (eds.) *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*. Vol. 1: Introduction & Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 648.

³² Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, 289-506 argues the case in detail; cp. also W. Willis, *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1987).

³³ F.J. Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and its World: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 233.

After calling his first four disciples, Jesus exorcises unclean spirits who recognize him as the Holy One of God who has come to destroy the evil (1:24). Mark is convinced that it is precisely in and through Jesus' nonviolent mission, voluntary suffering, and ignominious death that God defeats or undoes evil.³⁴ The people in the synagogue exclaim the authority of Jesus' teaching. Demons belong to the unseen world in which humans have no insight but Jesus has. He then cures Peter's mother-in-law, performs many other cures and casts out many demons, but he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him (1:34; cp. 3:11-12). Mark describes Jesus' identity as a secret that he protects.

He then chooses his twelve disciples before his family try to restrain him for people were saying that he is out of his mind, or mentally unbalanced. The scribes are of the opinion that he is in cohorts with Satan and his demons, assuming the apocalyptic dualism of good and evil in a conflict that will determine the future of this world. With his exorcisms, Jesus binds the "strong man," plundering Satan's house, recalling how Melchizedek rescues people from Belial (*11Q13*).

In the next exorcism, the unclean spirit accuses Jesus of tormenting demons, implying that Jesus will execute judgment over evil angels (5:7). The spirit's name is Λεγιών, the largest division of the Roman army consisting of around 6 000 soldiers, and is cast into pigs, unclean animals for Jews but a prized possession for the heathens.

Next Jesus sends out his disciples to preach repentance, cure diseases and exorcise spirits with authority over these unclean spirits (6:7). They do not preach the kingdom because they do not understand it but their preaching of repentance prepares the way for the kingdom and their attack on demons demonstrates God's sovereignty.

Exorcisms occur only in the first half of the Gospel, causing the question to be asked, how does Jesus' struggle with Satan and the demons in the first half fit with the overall story and its dominant plot?³⁵ The two sets of five miracle stories with their allusions to the actions of Moses and Elijah clearly signify that Jesus is engaged in the establishment of the kingdom of God, a reign that leaves no room for

³⁴ Neville, *Moral Vision and Eschatology in Mark's Gospel: Coherence or Conflict?*, 360.

³⁵ Richard D. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (London, Leiden: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 136.

illness, uncleanness, death, or demonic possession. The exorcisms are manifestations of the kingdom of God, as the healings and resurrections.

2.5 Parables

Mark 4 contains several parables but the meaning of these exemplar narratives is limited to those who are initiated. Most assume that Jesus told parables to get his message across but 4:10-12 explains that he uses parables to hide his message, lest his hearers understand, repent, and be forgiven (Is. 6:9-10). Isaiah predicts that Israel will not accept his message, and Jesus expects a similar reaction. This passage is supposed to serve Mark's so-called Messianic Secret. He is of the opinion that the disciples will only understand Jesus' message upon his death. Ultimately, all will understand (4:22). In this way, Mark forestalls premature declarations of Jesus' messiahship that will only be misunderstood until he faces the cross; Mark sees that Jesus' messiahship cannot be understood apart from his passion.³⁶ The disciples lived among various models of messianic expectations in first century Judaism, of which the one of the more important is of the messiah as a divinely anointed military ruler leading Israel to independent rule by defeating its enemies, and raising his followers to positions of influence and power.³⁷

2.6 Sea

He stills a storm (4:35-41), displaying divine power (Psalm 89:9). The sea is a frequent image in apocalypses (Dan. 7:4; 4 *Ezra* 13; Rev. 13), springing from the combat myth.³⁸ By dominating the sea, Jesus acts for God and opposes God's ancient mythological enemy. Mark 6:45-52 echoes Psalm 77:19, originally a reference to the Red Sea miracle. The apostles do not understand because they have not understood the preceding miracle of the multiplication of food, pointing to Jesus' identity as God's eschatological agent and carrying overtones of Moses' work in the desert, as well as of Elijah and Elisha. Like the God of order in the combat myth, Jesus controls the sea.

2.7 Son of man

³⁶ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 201.

³⁷ Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels in the Light of Recent Research*, 127.

³⁸ A.Y. Collins, The Book of Revelation, in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism* (eds. B.J. McGinn, J.J. Collins, & S.J. Stein; New York, London: Continuum, 2003), 197.

The title "Son of man" occurs 44 times in Mark and Bultmann³⁹ already suggested that the sayings could be arranged into three groups. Bultmann⁴⁰ divided these pronouncements into three categories: those that refer to Jesus' earthly activity (2:10, 28); those that refer to his passion (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21a, 21b, 41); and those that refer to his second coming (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). The earthly group applies the title to Jesus when he claims to forgive sins (2:10) and exercises authority over the Sabbath (2:28). The group of suffering Son of man references refers to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection; and the eschatological group refers to the end of time to judge (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). In 8:38, Jesus warns that those who are ashamed of him and his words will find that the Son of man is ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, alluding to Daniel 7:13-14 and with Jesus assuming the identity of the one who judges people at the end of time according to whether they were scandalized by his arrest, trial, suffering, and death and afraid to undergo suffering and death as the price of following him. In 14:61, the high priest asks Jesus whether he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, and Jesus answers affirmatively that people will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven (14:62). The quotation is from Daniel 7 and Psalm 110. As in Daniel 7, the Son of man comes with the clouds of heaven, and as in Psalm 110, the Son of man sits at the right hand of God. The images of the Son of man condemned to death and the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven explain one another. The roles assigned to the Son of man in Daniel 7:13-14 are royal - he will have dominion, glory, and kingship.⁴¹

The apocalyptic Son of man appears in 13:26, when he will come back in clouds with great power and glory following disturbances of the sun, moon and stars. He will send out his angels to gather the elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heaven (13:26-27), a reference to Daniel 7. The eschatological scenario represents the *parousia* with the final separation implied in the dualistic view of humankind divided between those who accepted Jesus and his ministry and those

³⁹ Rudolph Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), 38.

⁴⁰ Rudolph Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition* (First edition. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931); -. *Theologie des Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948).

⁴¹ B. Witherington, B. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 51.

who rejected him.⁴² The *parousia* will come soon: this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place (13:30), although Jesus emphasizes that neither the angels in heaven nor the Son of man knows when that hour will be.⁴³

The Son of man theology contains the concept of Jesus' humility during his ministry, coming to serve others, and his self-sacrifice, coming to present himself as a ransom for others.⁴⁴

2.8 Jesus, his enemies, and the destruction of the temple

Jesus' last journey is to Jerusalem, to confront its authorities (11:1-16:8). His entrance is triumphantly and the crowds take his arrival as the signal of the advent of David's kingdom (11:10). The next day sees Jesus entering the Temple and attacking the system of trade necessary to sponsor the sacrifices at the Temple. Jesus' justification for his actions comes from Jeremiah 7:11, 26, that those in charge of the Temple have turned it into a den of thieves (11:19; cp. also Zech. 14:21). The scene is framed by Jesus cursing a fig tree (11:13-14, 20-21), and obviously symbolizing his condemnation of Israel as signified by the temple authorities, and the resultant destruction of the temple that would follow from their actions. He indicts the temple's administrators for not fulfilling God's purpose with the Temple (Is. 56:7); the Court of Gentiles is so empty and irrelevant to their concern that it serves as a convenient place for the moneychangers and vendors to offer animals for sale as sacrifices.⁴⁵ The priests, scribes, and elders want to know by what authority he acts, and Jesus associates himself with John the Baptist. Jesus knows that the leaders are reluctant to criticize John because the people view him as a true prophet (11:27-33).

This is followed by more clashes between Jesus and the leaders with Jesus prophesying that they would be ousted, demonstrated by his parable about the wicked tenants of a vineyard (12:1-12, alluding to Israel as God's vineyard according to Isaiah 5). Pharisees and Herodians tempt him with the question whether one should pay taxes to the Roman oppressor, and Jesus exposes their hypocrisy for they carry Roman coins bearing the emperor's likeness. The

⁴² Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary*, 13.

⁴³ E. Brandenburger, *Das Recht des Weltenrichters: Untersuchung zu Matthäus 25,31-46* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien, 99. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980), 52.

⁴⁴ Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Historical Commentary*, 52.

⁴⁵ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 216.

implication is that the leaders fail to do that; they accept Roman sovereignty and deny God's sovereignty.

Jesus takes the initiative by asking the Sadducees a question about the resurrection (12:18-27); they do not believe in the resurrection because it is not stated explicitly in the *Torah*. Jesus defends the eschatological view of the resurrection against the Jerusalem leaders. The most important commandments in the *Torah* (12:28-34) and whether the Messiah is David's son (12:35-37) are discussed next.

This is the foundation for the prediction of the Temple's destruction, with Jesus attacking the scribes' usage of their status for prideful purposes (12:38-40); they devour widows' "houses" or provisioning. The next scene sees a widow deposits a tiny amount into the temple treasury. Her contribution amounts to her whole *bios*, all she has, in contrast to the rich giving out of their abundance. This leads directly to Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple. If the episode is seen in this context, the narrative of the widow's contribution to the temple treasury makes a point different from what is normally heard when the widow is used to demonstrate the virtue of generosity and self-sacrifice. Mark's point is rather that the temple leaders abuse contributions, even from those who cannot afford it, demonstrating their unconcern for the values represented by the God of the temple.⁴⁶

Jesus' discourse on the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world is introduced by the example of the widow who gave her whole life (12:44), but it is also framed by the account of another woman whose action in anointing Jesus' body will be remembered wherever the good news is preached (14:9).⁴⁷ The "framing" of the eschatological discourse by the two women, the one who gives her life and the other sharing in the death of Jesus, highlights the fact that 13:1-37 is aimed at the disciples, according to Moloney.⁴⁸ The framing also introduces hope in the face of increasing opposition to Jesus (11:27-28; 12:12-13), and the disciples' inability to understand Jesus' invitation to carry the cross and follow him through suffering and death to resurrection (8:22-10:52).

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and its World: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 240.

⁴⁷ E.S. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 215-217.

⁴⁸ F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: BakerAcademic 2002), 273.

Jesus' criticism of the temple leadership is in the context of eschatological expectations. He crosses the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives with his disciples, where Jesus delivers a discourse about eschatological expectations concerning the Temple (13:9-13).⁴⁹ The *eschaton* is near and the disciples should use the time available to preach the good news, despite persecution by Jewish and gentile authorities (13:9-13). Those who obey and endure to the end will be saved when the Son of man comes back. What is important to remember is to remain ready for the coming of the Son of man, to keep awake (13:37).

2.9 Jesus' death and resurrection

Now Jesus celebrates Passover with his disciples, and during the course of the meal he tells them that he will not drink wine again until that day when he drinks it new in the kingdom of God (14:25). When he is delivered into the hands of the high priest Jesus admits that he is the messiah and refers to the coming of the Son of man at the *eschaton* (14:62).⁵⁰ In this way, the good news is brought into view by framing it eschatologically.

Jesus' death is described in terms that remind of the apocalypses, with darkness covering the land and the curtain before the Holy of holies torn in two. Given Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple, the tearing of the curtain may symbolize that destruction and connect it to the temple authorities' rejection of Jesus and his realization of God's kingdom, along with the idea that access to God is no longer through the temple cult and its sacrifices but through Jesus' death. "... the destruction of the veil is the proleptic destruction of the temple, the cancellation of the cult that had been prophetically enacted by the Markan Jesus in 11:15-16 and explicitly predicted by him in 13:2 ... The positive aspect of the tearing of the curtain is the release of the divine presence into the world".⁵¹ His resurrection is also pictured as an apocalyptic event, as a vindication of Jesus and a foretaste of the *eschaton* (16:6).

2.10 Mark's δεῖ

Mark's frequent usage of δεῖ conveys the idea that God decrees what transpires in the Gospel. Several times δεῖ is used in key events, and it changes the perspective so

⁴⁹ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1993).

⁵⁰ Cp. S. Dowd & E.S. Malbon, 'The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience.' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125(2) 2006: 295.

⁵¹ S. Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 162.

that it can be called end-time events foreordained by God. For example, 8:31 declares that Jesus must suffer, die, and rise from the dead; 13:10 declares that the good news must be preached to all the nations; 13:14-16 declares that no one should delay fleeing from Jerusalem when they notice certain signs coming true; and 14:31 explains that Peter thinks he also must die.

3. SYNTHESIS: MARK AS AN APOCALYPTIC GOSPEL

If the evangelist utilizes an apocalyptic worldview consisting of a dualism demonstrated in Jesus' battle against enemies in the visible world representing the real enemies existing and functioning in the unseen world, as the discussion of the various elements of Jesus' ministry according to Mark suggests, it has implications for the interpretation of the episodes provided by Mark.

Jesus confronts and battles Satan and his demons, the unclean spirits, because he has insight in this unseen world. And only the inhabitants of the unseen world, the angels, demons, and God, really know and understand who Jesus is and why he battles with the unseen forces. Not even his disciples have this insight until after his death and resurrection. His expectation of eschatological events corresponds with those pictured in apocalypses, with its use of typical signs of Hebrew and Ancient Near Eastern theophanies like wars, earthquakes, famine; suffering and persecution of the initiated; disturbance of heavenly bodies; a general resurrection; and a separation between the elect and the wicked ending in a final judgment and post-mortem rewards and punishments to satisfy the demands of the theodicy. And the inhabitants of the earth are depicted in typical apocalyptic fashion in dualistic terms, of those acceptable to the Lord because of their obedience to the Lord's Son, and the people who do not please God, with the rich finding it nearly impossible to enter the kingdom (10:17-25).

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