CHAPTER TWO

EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNBELIEF OF JESUS' OPPONENTS

The character group that forms the most consistent and unified opposition to Jesus in Mark's narrative is, of course, the 'religious leaders,' a group which consists of several distinguishable subgroups corresponding to several of the better-known expressions of first century Judaism: scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, elders, Sadducees, as well as the so-called 'Herodians'[31]. More recent studies have supported this observation and have sought to examine and clarify the literary features of Mark's characterization of the Jewish religious leaders, together with the development of the theme 'unbelief' in the narrative.[32] In general there is agreement among such studies that Mark's primary concern in his description of the religious leaders is to indicate that, in spite of their division over particulars of first-century Judaism,[33] "at the most elementary level, [he] leads the reader to look upon the various groups of authorities as forming a united front, responsible for effecting the death of Jesus."[34] Hanson argues that, as a single character group, they receive a broad-stroked, level characterization in the narrative and indicate the same basic, consistent traits, all of which set them at odds with Jesus' identity and mission.[35] As Rhoads and Michie illustrate them, they are:

> Thoroughly untrustworthy characters…. The opponents have no faith, are blind to the rule of God and are hardened against Jesus. Ironically, they think of themselves as guardians of God's law, but unknowingly they are God's enemies, because their use of authority and their narrow legalism runs contrary to the way God rules. They are self-serving, pre-occupied with their own importance, afraid to lose their status and power and are willing to destroy to keep them. As those who "think the things of men," they echo Jesus' depiction of the gentiles, as great ones who "lord over" people. In the characterizations of the story, the authorities embody the opposite of Jesus and illuminate his character through contrast.[36]

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[31] J. S. Hanson, *The Endangered Promises Conflict in Mark* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 156.
[32] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 73-100, 117-122; Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," 57-95; Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 127-299.
[33] Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 159.
[34] Kingsbury, "The Religious Authorities," 44-45; Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders," 270-72; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 117.
[35] Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 159.
[36] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story,* 117-18.

From the very beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, his work was beset by potential rejection from various combinations of these religious leaders. The scribes form the basis for the initial comparison voiced by the crowd[37] in the synagogue upon hearing Jesus' teaching (1:22); they dispute with him and refuse to accept his identity in his Galilean ministry, on one occasion, alone (2:6), as well as with the Pharisees (2:16; 3:22; 7:1, 5) and once with Jesus' disciples (9:14).[38] Moreover, they are listed among the Jerusalem groups actively participating in the events which were to bring about Jesus' death, both in Jesus' predictions of the passion (8:31; 10:32-34), as well as in the passion narrative itself (11:18, 27; 14:1-2, 43, 53; 15:1, 31-32).

The Pharisees appear most frequently in the Galilean section of the Gospel. In the series of controversial stories in 2:1-3:6, they refuse to accept Jesus' authority and dispute with Jesus regarding the matter of the Jewish law (2:16-17, 18-20; 24-28: 3:1-6), leading them to conspire with the Herodians to 'destroy' Jesus (3:6), and by way of attacks in 7:1-13 and 10:2-9. [39] They also demand a sign from heaven to authenticate his ministry (8:11-13). In the Jerusalem section they are sent by other authorities with Herodians to trap Jesus with the question about taxes (12:13-17), but otherwise do not play a role in Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. The chief priests are almost always mentioned as part of the core group working to bring about the death of Jesus in Jerusalem, along with the elders and the Scribes (8:31; 11:27-33; 14:43, 53; 15:1), or with the scribes only (10:33; 11:18; 14:1-2; 15:31-32), instance being with the 'whole council' (14:55) and on two occasions alone (14:10-11; 15:3).[40]

The hostility of Jesus' opponents appearing in Mark's composition of the events, demonstrates a clear motif of unbelief. In this chapter, several passages which deal with the theme of unbelief will be examined, in the following order: the

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[37] Throughout the narrative, 'the crowd' plays a significant role as witness to the events that occur. The term is used in the Markan narrative some thirty-eight times and refers generally to the mass of the poor and dispossessed (Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 156). Crowds from audiences for his teaching and are the object of his compassion, but Mark never describes crowds turning to Jesus in repentance and belief, as the Gospel requires (1:15).
[38] Hultgren, *Jesus and His Adversaries*, 154-56.
[39] Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 156.
[40] I. H. Marshall, *ST. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 9-12.

unbelief at Capernaum, underscoring the rejection of Jesus by the scribes (2:1-12); the hostility of Nazareth (6:1-6), which indicates the rejection of Jesus' family; the question of authority (11:27-33) that indicates the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders, as well as the mocking action (15:27-32) coincided with the rejection by them both, that is both the Jewish religious leaders, as well as the Jewish people in general. We do thus infer that, in the Markan narrative, Jesus was rejected by the whole nation of Israel. To be more specific, I am concerned with the following matters: What is the nature of the opponents' unbelief in Mark's Gospel? What is cause of the unbelief? What is the relation between the linguistic expression 'hardness of heart' and the motif of unbelief? Finally, what is the predicted result of the unbelief? The answers to these questions provide a foundation for perceiving the theme of unbelief.

2.1 UNBELIEF OF THE SCRIBES IN CAPERNAUM (2:1-12)

In Mark 2:1-12, the scribes are the first to appear in conflict with Jesus, and it is in connection with them that Mark first evaluates such opposition in terms of unbelief.

The issue in Mark 1:16-4:34 is how people respond to Jesus: who is for Jesus and who is against Jesus? First Mark defines the one pole: the wildly enthusiastic crowds who are for Jesus without reservation (1:16-45). Next, Mark defines the other pole (2:1-3:6): the dislike of Jesus on the part of the religious leaders who are against Jesus. This hatred is expressed in extreme terms (they want to kill Jesus in 3:6).[41] Thus, Mark demonstrates the range within which responses to Jesus will fall. Having done this, Mark then differentiates the response more carefully.

In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus' healing by means of a forgiveness formula sparked the controversy with the scribes over Jesus' right to act on behalf of God. Jesus healed a paralytic, to demonstrate that he, as the Son of Man, did not only have authority to completely forgive sins upon earth, but indeed more particularly, the authority to forgive the paralytic. The scribes,[42] however, rejected Jesus' words of

[41] R. V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament. Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 128.
[42] Tolbert (Sowing the Gospel, 139-40) draws attention to the fact that it is in this

forgiveness as blasphemy, because “Who, but God alone, can forgive sins?” The scribes’ words accurately reflect the Jewish conviction that forgiveness of sin was the exclusive prerogative of God. Whatever the purpose of the compositional pre-history, the present literary structure of 2:1-12 serves to contrast plainly the faith of the paralytic and his friends with the controversial unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

2.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

In 1:14-15, the passage ending the prologue and introducing Jesus’ ministry, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and called for the people to respond with ‘repentance and faith in the gospel.’ Mark 1:16-3:6 demonstrated the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus’ authoritative teachings and actions. This section also indicates the two general responses to Jesus’ assertion. The enthusiastic response of the disciples who left everything to follow (1:16-20; 2:14) and the crowd that searched Jesus out (1:32-33, 37, 45; 2:2; 3:7-8), was contrasted with the hostility of the Jewish authorities whose hearts were hardened toward Jesus (3:5-6). Mark has indicated in 2:1-3:6 that they did not want to believe in Jesus’ identity, which was evident from his divine actions. They did not understand the relationship between Jesus’ authority and his miracles. Thus, when Jesus announced the forgiveness of a paralytic’s sins, they assumed that Jesus was blaspheming (2:7). Due to the hardness of their hearts, the opponents failed to believe through the evidence of Jesus’ divine actions, that he was indeed the Son of God (cf. 2:10; 3:5), and they consequently refused him (3:6).

2.1.1.1 Literary Composition in Five Controversial Stories

Mark 1:40-45, where Jesus heals a man with leprosy, serves as an introduction for the passages that follow in 2:1-3:6. “The pericope’s specific content involving Jesus’ ministry and the Mosaic Law (1:44), helps set the thematic stage for following conflict narratives in 2:1-3:6 involving issues of the Law.”[43]

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scene that the scribes are first introduced into the Gospel. Their first response to Jesus is to accuse him of blasphemy in their hearts (2:6). It is the charge of blasphemy that the high priest and the Jewish leaders will later level at Jesus to condemn him to death (14:63-64). It is important to note the irony of the situation in 2:1-12. Here the scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy, because he dares to pronounce a man’s sins as forgiven, whereas they have assumed that their “authority” is from God by virtue of their acquired status within the society.

[43] R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34 A (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1989),

The section from Mark 2:1-3:6 contains five controversial stories (the healing of the paralytic, the eating with tax collectors and sinners, the question about fasting, plucking grain on the sabbath, and the man with the withered hand). Mark himself has gathered these stories in order to indicate how Jesus' authority was rejected by his opponents. His insistence on his authority leads to his rejection and ultimately to his death, a fate foreshadowed in 2:20 and 3:6.[44] Thus, this section is not simply a collection of conflicting stories, but an expression of Jesus' authority and the refusal of his antagonists to understand it.

In the *Markan Public Debate*, Dewey examines in detail how the rhetorical form of this section (2:1-3:6) serves to underscore the nature and shape of the authorities' unbelief. She indicates a "tight and well-worked-out concentric and chiastic[45] structure,"[46] which she represents in the following way:[47]

A 2:1-12 *The healing of the paralytic*
B 2:13-17 *The call of Levi/eating with sinners*
C 2:18-22 *The saying on fasting and on the old and the new*
B' 2:23-27 *Plucking grain on the sabbath*
A' 3:1-6 *The healing on the sabbath*

Dewey observes the following structure markers:

1) The first and last stories, A and A' (2:1-12; 3:1-6), both involve the unusual mixture of healing and unbelief. A restorative healing narrative is disrupted by controversy over Jesus' actions, and concludes with the completion of the healing and a reaction by those present.[48] They are introduced with an identical phrase: Kai eiselqwn palin eij (2:1; 3:1); in each, Jesus takes

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73.
[44] M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1991), 83.
[45] Some scholars believe that a chiastic structure can be formed on different levels and principles. However, that debate is beyond the scope of this section. Here, I merely indicate how the order of motifs in the first part of an expression can be mirrored in the second. In other words, what is in A is the same in A' and what is in B is the same in B', placing C centrally.
[46] J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980),110.
[47] J. Dewey, "The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1-3:6," *JBL* 92 (1973): 394-401. esp. 394.
[48] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate, 109;* idem., "The Literary Structure," 394.

the initiative in the controversy (2:8; 3:4) and then turns to the person to be healed and speaks to him; each contains a reference to the hearts of the opponents (2:6; 3:5); while each healing is restorative in nature with overtones of resurrection.[49]

2) B and B' are related, first, to A and A' in parallel ways: A and B both have to do with sin and sinners; B' and A' with violation of the sabbath. B and B' evince a close parallelism, especially in the central section of each, which concerns eating: Jesus eating with sinner violates Pharisaic law, as David also ate that which was not lawful. Moreover, each concludes with a logion in the form of a general proverb (2:17, 27-28).[50]

3) Finally, C sets itself up as the central of the chiasm through its uniqueness in form and content among the stories. Unlike the others, it has just two halves, the question and answer concerning fasting (2:18-20) and the sayings on old and new (2:21-22); there is no indication of setting, and the opponents are not specified.[51] Yet it relates to B and B' in its concern for eating, and to A and A' its suggestion of death and resurrection.

This section certainly clearly emphasizes the nature of the rejection to Jesus, which serves on the story level to generate tension and move the story forward, and on the discourse or rhetorical level to underscore the sharp distinction between Jesus and his opponents.[52] As Dewey rightly suggests, viewing this series of controversies as an organic whole serves to impress on the reader that "the opponents objected to Jesus' activity as a whole, as well as to the messianic claim, which was the basis of Jesus' action."[53]

Marcus rightly indicates that even more important is a linear development of opposition in the controversial story in which the opponents first question Jesus silently (2:7), then question his disciples about him (2:16), then question Jesus

[49] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate,* 111-12.
[50] Dewey, "The Literary Structure," 398: Dewey notes that the story of David's eating the bread of the presence may actually have more to do with the controversy over Jesus' eating with sinner.
[51] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 119.
[52] Dewey expresses this in a nice analogy: "Mark 2:1-3:6 might perhaps be compared in musical terms to the statement, early in a musical work, of a major theme which then hangs ominously over the composition, but which comes to dominate the music much later in the piece" (*Markan Public Debate*, 119).
[53] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate,* 119.

about his disciples' behaviour (2:18, 24), then seek a legal reason for condemning him (3:2), then plot his murder (3:6).[54] The final note of the Pharisees' intention to exempt Jesus from the increasing effect of his action emphasizes the close connection between Jesus' activity and his ultimate death.

Mark is probably using this collection, "to indicate how the authority of Jesus was rejected by the Jewish authorities**….** [I]t is this refusal to accept Jesus' authority, which leads to his rejection and ultimately to his death, a fate foreshadowed in 2:20 and 3:6. This chapter, therefore, is not simply a collection of 'conflicting stories', but a demonstration of Jesus' authority and the refusal of Jewish religious authorities to recognize it."[55] From the first to the fifth controversial stories (2:1-3:6), the opponents' unbelief, stemming from the hardness of their hearts, appears as hostility toward Jesus, which gradually escalates and intensifies.[56]

In the controversy stories, the authority and power of Jesus is actually illustrated. This being so, there is a sort of irony that these people did not want to accept Jesus' authority, although he carried out miracles, which should grant him authority, yet he received all the acknowledgement of the crowds on the basis of what he did. This fact confronts us with the question: Why could they not believe in his power? They are deaf, blind and hardened. Thus, "they may look and look, yet perceive nothing; they may listen and listen, yet understand nothing" (4:12).

2.1.1.2 Literary Composition in Mark 2:1-12

Mark 2:1 is clearly a new section of the Gospel. There is a distinct break between 1:45 and 2:1. In 1:45 Jesus is in the country unable to enter the city openly. Now at 2:1 Jesus returns to the city of Capernaum. The contrast emphasizes an entirely new beginning.[57] The chiastic arrangement of hook-words between 1:45 and 2:1, serves to tie both narratives thematically together.[58]

1:45 ton logon(wste mhketi… eiselqein(

[54] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 214.
[55] M. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 83.
[56] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story,* 53.
[57] Cf. J. Weiss, *Das älteste Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 53-54.
[58] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 67.

2:1-2 eiselqwn... wste mhketi... ton logon

Thus, 2:1-2 accomplishes two functions in terms of the narrative of Mark. "From the abrupt shift in settings from 1:45, from the hook words and other ties to Mark 1, the hearer knows that there has been a definite break in the narrative, together with a certain connection to what preceded."[59] Like the previous chapter, 2:1-12 describes a notable healing. Now, however, as Jesus' antagonists, the scribes entered the scene and along with them come controversy and polemic, which dog Jesus until the end of Mark's narrative.

Regarding structure, this story has an approximate chiastic structure. It has the structure of a miracle story: the account of the man's complaint, his cure by Jesus, and finally the demonstration of his restoration as he walks, carrying his mat. However, in the middle of this we have a conflict about Jesus' authority to forgive sins. The healing episode may be outlined in the following way:[60]

A Introduction: narrative setting (2:1-2)
  B Spiritual healing (2:3-5; airomenon / krabatton / legei tw paralutikon)
    C Controversy (2:6-10a)
  B' Physical healing (2:10b-12a; egeire / krabatton / legei tw paralutikon)
A' Conclusion (2:12)

The Markan readers are familiar with Mark's convention of breaking up a story by interweaving a second, seemingly unrelated, story into the middle of it.[61] A good example is found in 2:1-12. There are two stories in this structure: the central controversial story and the surrounding healing story. This surrounding story may be used to stress the central story, to compare or contrast it with the surrounding

[59] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 68.
[60] Cf. N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (Doubleday: The Anchor Bible, 1999), 219-220.
[61] Edwards refers to Mark's A-B-A literary convention as a sandwich technique. This technique occurs some ten times in the Gospel: Mark begins story A, introduces story B, then returns to and completes story A (e.g. 2:1-12; 3:20-35; 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11, 17-31, 53-72; 15:40-16:8). Cf. J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narrative," *NovT* 31 (1989): 193-216. It is possible that this middle section has been added to an original healing story in 2:1-5a and 11-12. However, since it is typical of the Markan style to place one story together with another, it is possible that he is responsible for this juxtaposition.

narrative, to hold opposite ideas in tension.[62] On the other hand, it describes the parallel between physical healing and forgiveness of sins, on the other, it sharply contrasts the attitude of those seeking help and those questioning in their hearts. The paralytic and his friends display 'faith' (5a), while the attitude of the scribes is identified as 'unbelief.' "The frame-interposition technique in effect also brackets the theme of opposition to Jesus within the already established theme of his popularity." [63] The opposition is made know to the reader/hearer through objections of the scribes in 2:6-10.

To summarize: we may accordingly conclude that the analysis of the literary structure of 2:1-12 prove the judgment made by Hooker:

> Even though it falls into two sections, it cannot be split in two as the form-critics demand, because its two themes are intertwined and the whole point of the stories is that we find forgiveness where we expect healing and vice versa. The faith of the paralytic's four friends and the words spoken of him by Jesus in response to that faith stand in contrast to the disbelief of the Scribes and the words of Jesus to the paralytic, which are occasioned by that disbelief.[64]

The division is not as generic as between the miracle and controversy, or between healing and forgiveness; it represents a thematic one between faith and unbelief.

2.1.2 Exegetical Perspectives on the Portrayal of Unbelief

In previous discussion, we examined the literary structure of the passage as a whole and noted how the duplicate framing verses around the central controversy section (2:1-12) serve to establish a contrast between the faith of the paralytic and of the questioning scribes. We shall now look more closely at the unbelieving response of the scribes.

2.1.2.1 Honour and Shame

The basic model of honour and shame in the first –century Mediterranean can aid us in recognizing the controversy between Jesus and the unbelieving scribes in Mark 2:1-12. The episode describes Jesus together with the scribes in conflict

[62] C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84.
[63] J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 73.
[64] M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark. A Study of the Background of the Term 'Son of Man' and Its Use in St. Mark's Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1967), 85.

that involve competition over honour. The immediate reason for the conflict is the act of healing by Jesus involving the paralytic.

In the ancient Jewish world, the honourable person was one who put in a great effort to stay within the boundaries of the law.[65] He was the person who always adhered strictly to different maps of purity, that is, he kept the fences around the law. Thus, the honourable man was the one who kept the proper attitude and behaviour as defined by purity rules in the society. According to this understanding of honour, to show courtesy to shameless persons makes him a fool, because it was foolish to show respect for boundaries when a person acknowledged no boundaries. In Mark 2:1-12, the scribes considered Jesus as a dishonourable man, because he showed courtesy to the paralytic who was regarded as a shameless person by the official guardians of the law in his day. Hence, they could not believe in the fact that Jesus, who was a shameful man, was acting with the divine authority

Furthermore, the scribes thought that God was dishonoured when Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive the paralytic's sin. In the eyes of the scribes, to claim divine authority implied a lessening of the authority of God, for in the Jewish context, the Messiah or any other eschatological figure could not have authority over forgiveness of sins. It was God's privilege. Therefore, because Jesus' deed was classified as first-degree dishonour, that is, blasphemy, the scribes rejected to believe in Jesus' authority.[66]

In contrast to the viewpoint of the first century Mediterranean, in the kingdom of God the honourable man was not the one who had the proper attitude and behaviour in terms of society as defined by purity rules of the temple, but the person who repented his sins and believe in gospel (1:15). He no longer allows himself to adhere to the boundaries of the law. The shameful person in the new kingdom was evaluated in a radically different manner than in the society. He was the person who would always see Jesus through the eyes of the purity rule of the temple as interpreted by the official guardians of the temple, and refuse to believe

[65] B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 59.
[66] Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 60.

in Jesus' divine authority. Anyone outside this new kingdom, who were ashamed of Jesus' word and deed, will be shamed by God (cf. 8:38)

2.1.2.2 The Scribes' Unbelieving Rejection

For the first time, the narrator tells the reader/hearer about the faith of those who came for healing.[67] While Jesus was teaching, the four men carrying the paralytic, having found that they were unable to enter the house, climbed onto the roof, dug through and lowered the paralytic down (2:3-4). Jesus saw their faith. It is not the faith of the paralytic alone, but that of his four companions as well, that mattered. The symbolic action of bringing the paralysed man into the midst of the crowd, into the very heart, means that this man who, because of his handicap would normally be regard as an 'outsider'-that is a sinner, has now become an 'insider.'[68]

Jesus' response is surprising; instead of the expected word of healing, he says, "My son, your sins are forgiven"(2:5).[69] In the synoptic gospels, the forgiveness of

[67] Cf. J. H. Donahue, S. J. and D. J. Harrington, S. J., *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 98. Mark relates faith to miracle in different ways. In 2:1-12; 5:34 ("your faith has made you well"); 9:23; and 10:52, faith precedes healing. But in 9:23 Jesus says that all things are possible to the one who believes, and in 11:23 he speaks of the faith that can move mountains. Conversely, when faith is absent, as at Nazareth, Jesus can do no mighty work apart from a few healings, and he marvels at the unbelief of the people there (6:5-6). In these Markan miracles faith is not so much a precondition for healing (see 1:34; 6:5-6), but rather it dramatizes the willingness of suffering people to break through physical and social boundaries in order to approach Jesus.

[68] Anne Dawson, *Freedom as Liberating Power. A Socio-Political Reading of "Authority" Texts in the Gospel of Mark* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz. 2000), 137.

[69] Sickness is the consequence of the sinful condition of all men. Mark does not tell us whether the paralytic was supposed to have led a particularly sinful life, but we do know that the common view regarded physical misfortune as the result of sin (cf. John 9:1-3). However, the point in our current story is not primarily the connection between sin and sickness; instead it is the inseparable connection between healing and forgiveness within the general ministry of Jesus. Consequently, in Mark 2:1-12 Jesus grants the paralytic something of both healing and forgiveness. The fact that the paralytic is healed and forgiven his sins implies that he will be accepted within his community, and that he therefore belongs to Jesus' new community, in other words, that he will inherit the Kingdom of God (cf.1:15). The forgiveness of sins makes him stand in the right relationship with God in the Kingdom (cf. 1:14-15).

sin is very analogous to the forgiveness of debts (Matt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4).[70] Debt-making people were poor, that is, they could not defend their social status, because debt threatened loss of land, family, and livelihood. Thus forgiveness contained significance of restoration, a return to self-sufficiency and to one's position in the society.[71] Jesus' response was surprising, apart from the omission of the expected word of healing, which intends to make it clear that Jesus' healing has gone beyond physical restoration alone, the response has at the same time also included the conveying of divine acceptance. Thus, physical recovery (new life) may be seen as evidence of the forging of a new relationship of the recipient with God in His kingdom.[72] Nevertheless, the scribes, having formed the basis of their unbelief, did not want to be aware of his actions, even where the new life was given. Their unbelief was to refuse to acknowledge Jesus' authority as proved by his miracle.

The passive formulation of afientai in 2:5b, is ambiguous and leads the reader/hearers to a certain interpretive involvement: was Jesus making a declarative judgment about an act of God, or else personally exercising the divine prerogative? The passive voice of the verb allows one to conclude that the sins are forgiven either by God or by Jesus.[73] If the verb is interpreted as the divine passive,[74] the declaration would be very much like the task of the High Priest, who according to Lev 4:26-31, had power to declare God's forgiveness on the basis of repentance and sacrifice.

In this connection, some scholars interpret the scribes' response in 2:7 as a rejection to Jesus' violation of the cultic domain[75] or to his granting of forgiveness without demanding compensation for sins. However, even though Jesus'

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[70] Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 188.
[71] Cf. John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament. Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 57-73
[72] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 89.
[73] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 125.
[74] J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1971), 11.
[75] E. Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation Between Cult and Gospel* (London: Oliver& Boyd, 1961), 26; L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 77.

pronouncement was an encroachment of the cultic rule, Mark clearly states that through the scribes' question, "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7; tij dunatai afienai amartiaj ei mh eij o qeojÈ), what they are indeed responding to is Jesus' implicit claim to have the capability to forgive sins, for which the power belongs to God.[76]

Since Jesus did not act as a priest and command the paralytic any sacrifice for the forgiveness of his sins, he was not proclaiming forgiveness based on the rule of the Law.[77] Furthermore, since Jesus he did not promise the man forgiveness at the end of time on the grounds of penitent action, but spoke of forgiveness as an event which has been fulfilled in the present (afientai) without ceremony, he was plainly not acting in a prophetic-symbolic capacity. And it was not expected that the Messiah, or any other eschatological figure would have authority to grant forgiveness of sins.[78] Therefore, the only conclusion left was that Jesus was himself exercising this divine power (cf. Ex 34:6f; Isa 43:25f; 44:22).[79]

This is important, since where the scribes' unbelief becomes apparent is in their evaluation of Jesus' implied claim to act in God's stead. Given their own theological presuppositions, only two responses were open to them. They could either believe that Jesus' divine forgiveness was evidence of the present declaration of eschatological salvation, which was expected to bring in its train forgiveness of sins (Isa. 33:24; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18),[80] or else they could regard his proclamation as a conceited act of blasphemy and thereby making him worthy of death (Lev. 24:11, Num 15:30; cf. Mk 3:6; 14:64). In selecting the later the scribes draw the wrong conclusion. Instead of recognizing Jesus' divine authority to forgive and instead of recognizing the in-breaking of God's reign in his healing of the lame (Isa. 35:6), they accused him of blasphemy, thus condemning

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[76] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme,* 184.
[77] Apart from the act of absolution on the Day of Atonement, not even the chief priest could forgive sins, or give promise of such, whether individually or corporately (J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002]), 78). Only God can forgive sins (Ex. 34:6-7; Ps 103:3; Isa. 43:25; Mic 7:18).
[78] H. J. Klauck, "Die Frage der Sündenvergebung in der Perikope von der Heilung des Gelähmten (Mk 2:1-12 Par)," *BZ* 25 (1981): 223-48.
[79] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme,* 184.
[80] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme,* 185.

themselves.[81]

Jesus is accused of blaspheming because he declared the forgiveness of the paralytic's sin. In the Jewish tradition, even the Messiah, who would destroy the godless in Israel, crush demonic power, and protect his people from the reign of sin, could not forgive sins; but forgiveness of sins was God's option alone.[82] Thus, they sensed in Jesus' announcement of forgiveness an affront to the majesty and authority of God, which was for them was in nature corresponding to blasphemy.

Through employing the word blasfhmei (2:7),[83] Mark emphasizes the aggressive, and hence also the ironic, nature of the scribes' comment.[84] It is clear, then, that while they rightly conclude that God alone can forgive sins, they refuse to accept that Jesus to whom they are raising objection is the very one who has divine authority as God's own Son. Evidence of the authorial nature of the word here is provides in the observation that "the very charge with which the whole series of controversy stories begins is precisely that with which the long quest to condemn Jesus is concluded - blasphemy (cf. 14:61-62)."[85]

Mark points out that the scribes' reaction is not motivated purely by a justifiable concern for the honour of God.[86] The use of the terms outoj outwj (2:7) is

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[81] S. Dowd, *Reading Mark. A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel (*Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 24.
[82] W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 75; W. Wessel, "Mark" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible,* Vol 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 633.
[83] See. L. W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1989), 41: "Blasphemy is mentioned in five Markan passages. Here and in 14:64 Jesus is accused of blasphemy by the scribes and the high priest respectively. In 7:22 blasphemy is blamed on of the evil things that come from human hearts. In 3:28-29, Jesus warns his critics about blasphemy 'against the Holy Spirit' (probably meaning the rejection of the gospel message, see note on these verses). And in 15:29, people blaspheme Jesus on the cross. So the reader is left to decide who is guilty of blasphemy—Jesus (twice accused) or those who opposed him (in 3:28 and 15:29)."
[84] S. H. Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 218.
[85] Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 218.
[86] Marshall, *Faith as a Them*, 185.

probably meant to signal a deep-seated contempt for Jesus.[87] Similarly, the description of the scribes: dialogizomenoi en taij kardiaij autwn in 2:6 indicates not a spirit of genuine inquiry but "a volitional rejection to the truth because of their hardened heart (3:5)."[88]

Although the word dialogizontai may denote a either positive, negative or neutral action in general Koine usage, Mark exploits only the verb's negative potential by repeatedly contrasting those who discuss and the topic of discussion, with Jesus and his teachings and actions.[89] Thus, the scribes' discussing that Jesus is blaspheming (2:6, 8) is countered by Jesus' statement and action (2:8-12); the disciples' discussing that they have no bread (8:16) is described by Jesus as lacking understanding and having a hardened heart (8:17); the disciples' discussing who is greatest (9:33-34) is corrected by Jesus' teaching to the twelve about being last and servant of all (9:35); and the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders' discussing the origins of John's baptism (11:31) is revealed as lacking faith and fearing the crowd (11:31-32) that esteems Jesus (11:18).[90] Thus, the word dialogizontai "is a bed word in Mark; it suggests doubt, lack of faith, even hostility (cf. 8:16f; 9:33; 11:31)."[91]

Also, in Mark 2:7, the scribes debate in their heart with two unspoken questions beginning Ti and Tij: "Why does this fellow talk like that?" (Ti outoj outwj laleiÈ; "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (tij dunatai afienai amartiaj ei mh eij o qeojÈ). These questions probably can be understood as indicating that "Jesus was not accused of claiming to be God, but of blaspheming against God by claiming to do what God alone could do."[92] In other words, Mark is describing Jesus in terms of Israel's singular God, an appropriate highlighting for

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[87] M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 121; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1957), 195.
[88] Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 116.
[89] B.M.F. Van Iersel, "Locality, Structure, and Meaning in Mark," *LB* 55 (1983): 44-54.
[90] P. Danove, "The Narrative Rhetoric of Mark's Ambiguous Characterization of the Disciples," *JSNT* 70 (1998): 30 in 27-43.
[91] P. Carrington, *According to Mark, A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960),167.
[92] Guelich, *Mark*, 87.

this context, if the phrase, eij o qeoj, reflects the wording of Deut, 6:4 LXX.[93] Mark intended the response of the scribes to Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness to be seen as a manifestation of unbelief and rejection, in contrast to the faith of the paralytic and his friends (v. 5). The **s**cribes' silent accusation of blasphemy in 2:7 meant that for the first time in the story the death of Jesus came faintly into view.[94]

Even though the scribes debated in their heart, Jesus knew that they were debating among themselves and responded with a riddle: "which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up! take your met, and walk?'" (2:9) By means of this its sequel, Jesus confirm his fundamental assertion to divine authority and yet, by doing so insisted his divine authority and avoided immediate accusation for blasphemy. According to Marshall, the riddle was set as a trap for the scribes. He argues in the following way:

> If they say forgiveness is easier, then Jesus' performance of the more difficult healing would automatically prove his capacity to do the lesser deed too. If alternatively they say healing is easier, then they must concede that Jesus has already done the more difficult thing, which the man's physical recovery would ratify. And if, in an attempt to avoid such a conclusion, they should say both works are of equal difficulty, they would then be unwittingly concurring with the fundamental truth Jesus is seeking to convey. For the question cannot be answered in the either/or terms in which it is framed. Since both the healing of lameness and the forgiveness of sins are eschatological works of God,[95] they are both as equally easy to God as they are equally impossible for humans (cf. 10:26f, note eukopwteron in v. 25).[96]

In view of this, when Jesus declared a word of healing and a word of forgiveness with equal ease and when the legitimacy of both are confirmed by the healing of the paralytic, it was a clear demonstration that he had the prerogative to do what God alone could do.

In this sense, the healing is ordered as proof of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. Mark's logic seems to be that if Jesus' word of forgiveness was blasphemous, then the word of healing would ineffectual, because God would not honour the word of a blasphemer, and in any case the root of the man's condition, his sins,

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[93] Guelich, *Mark*, 87.
[94] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 186.
[95] Cf. Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8, 34; Zech 13:1; Ezek 36:25-27.
[96] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 186.

would not be remedied. As a result, the effectiveness of the healing word may be used to validate the authority of the declaration of forgiveness. In this way the miracle serves as a refutation of unbelief and as a renewed summons to repentance and faith. If the charge of blasphemy is unjustified, then according to the scribes' own theology God must be enacting his prerogative in this Son of Man.

The scribes' unbelieving rejection must also be engaged at a deeper scriptural level, and Jesus did exactly this through his declaration that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:10).[97] In Mark, Jesus uses the term 'the Son of Man' as a self-descriptive title (especially see 9:41). The term 'Son of Man' occurs twelve times and offers the key of Jesus' self-disclosure to his disciples.[98] Most of them took place after the story at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30), while both 2:10 and 2:28, in contrast to the other saying, portrayed the Son of Man's authority on the earth in matters of God's established prerogative.[99]

The juxtaposition of the phrases 'on the earth,' 'Son of Man,' and 'authority' recalls Daniel 7 in the reader/hearer, in which God transferred divine power to 'one like a son of man,' that is, a human-like figure, who was given the authority to rule earthly nations at the eschaton.[100] In Mark's Gospel, the Son of Man is however, not described as a judge of sinners like Daniel 7 and *The Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 45:3; 46:4-6; 50:1-5 etc.), but as a forgiver of sins.[101] According to Mark, the heavenly God remains the fundamental Forgiver, but at the climax of history he has handed his authority for forgiveness over to the 'Son of Man,' who carried out his gracious will on the earth. The healing story was not intending to

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[97] The designation of the Son of Man raises a plethora of critical matters, which cannot be dealt with here. The origin and meaning of the phrase remains one of the most debated issues in gospel research, while there are many recent monographs devoted to it (Marshall, Faith, 187n. 1). On the special issues related to 2:10, 28, see C, M. Tuckett, "The Present Son of Man," *JSNT* 14 (1982): 58-81and D. J. Doughty, "The Authority of the Son of Man (Mark 2:1-3:6)," *ZNW* 74 (1983): 161-81.

[98] Lane, *Mark*, 98: "Chs. 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33; 14:21 (twice); 14:41 refer to the necessity of suffering for the Son of Man; Chs. 8:38; 13:26; 14:62 focus upon the parousia glory of the Son of Man; Ch. 9:9 anticipates the resurrection of the Son of Man while Ch. 10:45 defines the redemptive purpose of his incarnate life."

[99] Guelich, *Mark*, 89.

[100] Marcus, *Mark*, 223.

[101] Marcus, *Mark*, 223.

lawfully prove Jesus' position as Son of Man, but rather to set up that he, who calls himself the Son of Man, possessed the authority to forgive.

Jesus' healing of the paralytic was more than an exhibition of mercy to a miserable man. The restoration of the paralytic in his whole person was a sign of the kingdom of God having drawn near (cf. 1:15).[102] The paralytic exemplified the accomplishment of God's promises, as declared in Isa. 35:6 and Jer. 31:8. The declaration that God's rule had come near his people was surprising. The crowds praised God (2:10). This did not imply that all people thanked God for sending Jesus. Even though they were astonished and said 'we have never seen anything like this," they did not believe in Jesus as the Son of Man. Besides this, the scribes rejected Jesus who as the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins.

The narrator begins to develop the hint of controversy between Jesus and his opponents who are here the scribes, the official teachers and interpreters of Jewish law and traditions.[103] With the Judaic knowledge regarding the forgiveness of sin, Mark indicates that the authority of Jesus is greater than of the Messiah whom the Jewish people envisaged. Therefore, in Mark's intention, the rejection of Jesus by the scribes was portrayed as objection to the authority of God.[104] The issue lies at the centre of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in Mark's Gospel.[105] The reaction of the scribes does not imply that they have understood otherwise. They do not believe in Jesus' conviction that he can speak for God. Jesus was exercising the divine power, but in a veiled

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[102] H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Reiden: Brill, 1965), 262: "In his announcement and granting of remission of sins, Jesus indicates what man's essential distress is. This does not consist in his transient lot in life, with its many vicissitudes, but in his alienation from the living God, in his life in sin and guilt. It is from this that man must be redeemed, and it is from this that Jesus does in fact redeem him!"

[103] Guelich, *Mark*, 87: "Of all the charges levelled against Jesus in 2:1-3:6, this one is the most serious, because the Law pertaining to blasphemy called for the death penalty (Lev. 24:15-16) and it was invoked at Jesus' trial (cf. Mk 14:64). Yet the call for Jesus' death does not surface until 3:6 in the last of this series of conflict narratives. Thus the opening (2:1-12) and closing (3:1-6) narratives of this controversy section underscore the magnitude of the conflict."

[104] Guelich, Mark, 87; Gundry, Mark, 116; G. H. Twelftree, "Blasphemy" in *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot Mcknight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove & Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 76.

[105] Guelich, *Mark*, 86.

way that could be recognized unambiguously only after the resurrection.[106] By encouraging this retrospection to the exorcism at Capernaum in 1:22-28, the narrator invites the reader/hearer to understand the scribes' reaction to Jesus in 2:6-10 as exacerbated by opposition and unbelief.

2.1.3 Summary

The hermeneutical key to the healing story lies in the double-sided portrayal of faith and unbelief. Through his stylistic composition of 2:1-12, the implied author demonstrates a contrast between the faith of the paralytic and his companions, and the unbelief of the scribes. Faith receives pardon and healing, while unbelief leads to an overt clash with Jesus. Their faith consisted of a simple response with wondering like the crowd, but a profound conviction that if they can contact Jesus, the paralytic will recover. Through faith, the paralytic, who is labelled as a sinner and unclean man in his society, receives the forgiveness of his sins. By contrast, the unbelief of the scribes does not consist merely in failure to understand the significance of Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness; rather it resides in their attempt to avoid the full of Jesus' possession of divine authority with by accusing him with blasphemy.

In fact, Mark 2:1-12 introduces a series of controversy stories (2:1-3:6) in which the reader understands the depth and seriousness of the official objection to Jesus, despite his awesome reputation with the people in the flanking material (1:45; 3:7). In these controversy stories, there is both a concentrative collection of the five accounts, with the opening and ending stories reflecting each other in structure, content and theme, and an internal linear progress, in which there is steady accumulation of forces rejecting Jesus and intensification of objection from silent hostility (2:6) through to plotting his dearth (3:6).[107]

The combination of 2:1-12 and 3:1-6 implies a direct link between the Jewish religious leaders' rejection of Jesus' divine authority and the plot to kill him. Their unbelief was more than mere doubt and a failure to understand Jesus. It is an active, even murderous, rejection to Jesus as a bearer of the kingdom of God.[108]

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[106] Lane, *Mark*, 98.
[107] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.
[108] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.

It is remarkable to observe that, in the line progression we find not so much a steadily deepening of hostility toward Jesus, as an increasingly overt expression of an hostility that appears at its most profound from the very beginning, in that it is the charge of blasphemy that finally seals the condemnation of Jesus (2:7, 14:64). From their first emergence (2:1-12), the unbelieving scribes harboured in their hearts the conviction that leads to Jesus' death.

According to 3:5, the ultimate cause of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus was their hardened heart. Due to the fact that their hearts are hardened, they may ever seeing Jesus' miracles and hearing his teachings, but never understanding (3:5; 4:12). The opponents who reject Jesus and kill him act, on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1). Thus, Jesus' remarkable words and deeds may not lead the scribes to faith, but to rejection of and unbelief in him. Nevertheless, Mark 4:11-12 mentions a divine hardening that ensures that the outsiders (which indicates the Jewish religious leaders in Mark's narrative) "may be ever seeing, but never perceiving, and ever hearing, but never understanding."[109]

2.2 THE UNBELIEF AT NAZARETH (6:1-6)

In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus encounters unbelief in his own hometown. The implied author does not specifically choose the Jewish religious leaders for censure, but usually tells more about the response of the majority of people. However, it should be considered that the action occurred in the synagogue, which the implied author frequently associates with the religious leaders (1:21f; 3:1; 12:38 cf. 13:9), and their presence in the Nazareth synagogue is no doubt to be presumed.[110] Even so, in this story Mark probably wants to describe a more on-going repudiation of Jesus than solely by the scribes and Pharisees. There are various indications that he felt that the response of Jesus' home-town as a whole would serve as an appropriate metaphor for the foreshadowing of the final rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem, by the entire nation.[111] The story at Nazareth

[109] I will deal with the relationship between "hardness of heart" and unbelief in next section.
[110] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.
[111] R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 188, 191; T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (New York: Cornell University, 1963), 138; R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1972), 117; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish*

thus foreshadows what will happen to Jesus at the end of the Markan story, and portrays a source of unbelief.

2.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The literary composition indicates that the problem of faith versus unbelief is the essential point of the whole story.[112] Mark concludes his second major section of his story (3:7-6:6) with the rejection of Jesus, just as he ends the first major section (3:6).[113] In 3:1-6, the reader/hearer encounters the first clear opposition to Jesus with a hint of a coming conflict (3:6). Here again, there is a rejection of him on the Sabbath in a synagogue (cf. 3:1-2; 6:1-2).

After the introductory verse, the description falls into two sections. The first section (6:2b-3) illustrates the unbelieving response of the people in synagogue and ends with the narrator's evaluative commentary: "and they took offence at him." The second section (6:4-6) deals conversely with the negative effect this reaction has on the action of Jesus, in that only a 'few' are healed, and it also ends with an evaluative commentary: 'and he marvelled at their unbelief.'[114] The second section consists of two sets of rhetorical questions suggested by the people in the synagogue and a proverbial saying of Jesus. The rhetorical question is a dramatic device much used in the Markan narrative to emphasize the drama and engage the reader/hearer by putting responsibility on him to discover the answer,[115] while proverbs include summarized knowledge with a challenging aptness to the situation in view.[116]

Mark makes two points of linkage with the previous narrative (Mark 5). First, the emphasis on the woman's faith in 5:25-34 and Jairus' faith in 5:35-43 provides a

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Territorial Doctrine (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 239; D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (London: Pelican, 1963),123; E. Best, *The Temptation and The Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965), 119.

[112] E. Grässer, "Jesus in Nazareth (Mk. VI 1-6a). Note on the Redaction and Theology of St. Mark," *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 1-23, esp. 16.

[113] E. Schweizer, *The Good New according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971), 122.

[114] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 191.

[115] Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as Story*, 49-51; H. C. Kee, *The Community of the New Age. Studies in Mark's Gospel* (London: SCM 1977), 117.

[116] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 191.

startling contrast regarding unbelief among Jesus' home-town people.[117] Second, the unbelief of the mourners who laughed contemptuously at Jesus' perspective on the girl's difficulty (5:40) was quite similar to the rejection of Jesus by the town's people.[118]

Through the descriptive comment "Jesus left there" (6:1), the implied author establishes a tight link between the Nazareth story and the previous story (5:21-43). In the Jairus story, Jesus responds vehemently to a manifestation of unbelief from the mourners who laugh contemptuously at his perspective on the girl's difficulty. He expels them from the house (5:40). The use of the strong verb ekballein which is sometimes translated in Mark's Gospel to describe driving out demons (cf. 1:12, 43; 11:15; 12:18), emphasizes the intensity of the rejection of Jesus, and of the unbelief, and implies that the banishment of unbelief is an important part of his offensive on Satan's kingdom.[119] Immediately after, the motif of unbelief is repeated by the collectivity in the Nazareth.

It is not accidental that the following passage deals with the mission of the disciples (6:7-13), in which they rehearse their post-Easter task (13:10).[120] This mission is forestalled in 3:14, thus emerges as a result of the rejection of Jesus by his home-town people, and also follows an analogous path, combining both rejection (6:3, 11) and acceptance (6:5b, 13). It is also important that Mark sandwiches the story of the passion of the Baptist between the sending out and the return of the disciples (6:14-29).[121] In the light of Mark's comment in 1:14, the audience can easily grasp the threatening parallel between John's destiny and the fate awaiting Jesus as opposition intensifies, as just foreshadowed in 6:1-6.

In 6:10-12, the motif of unbelief is mentioned again. These verses manifest that the disciples will experience hostility and their preaching will be rejected by the villagers. In this situation, the disciples were to shake the dust from their feet, as

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[117] Guelich, *Mark*, 307.
[118] V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher. A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 34.
[119] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 179.
[120] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 189.
[121] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 189.

a testimony and warning to the villagers,[122] after which they should go elsewhere. There are two kinds of rejection: the rejection of the disciples' message by the villagers and the rejection of the disciples themselves. In other words, the villagers' rejection is the rejection of the declaration of the good news (cf. 1:14-15). They are warned about the coming judgment as the result of such a rejection,[123] since the shaking off the dust from their feet (6:11) may be perceived in the light of the Jewish custom of carefully removing the dust from both clothes and feet before re-entering Jewish territory.[124] The importance of the act here is to emphasise the point that the village or town, which rejected them, is no longer to be regarded as part of the kingdom of God (cf. 1:15), to announce at those who do not accept the message must now answer for themselves to God.[125] By this action, they dissociate themselves from the pollution of those lands and their ultimate judgment.[126] The action is a gesture of judgment symbolizing the termination of any further contact and communication with the place, and denying any further opportunity to listen to the message of salvation or experience the ministry of healing and deliverance.[127] The action is also a prophetic act designed to judge the unbelieving villagers.[128]

In Mark 6:12, the implied author concludes the passage with a brief statement of the disciples' actions. Their preaching was one of the two tasks they were sent to do at their calling (3:14). Their proclamation of repentance places them in line with both the Baptist's message and Jesus' message (1:14-15cf. 13:10) for salvation. Thus, in the first-century context, Jewish people who did not heed the disciples rejected the gospel of salvation, and the result was the warning of judgment, that is, shaking off the dust.

Consequently, Mark 6:1-6 echoes not only the unbelief of the mourners in 5:40, but also the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders at the end of the

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[122] Lane, *Mark*, 208; Hooker, *Mark*, 157; Taylor, *Mark*, 305.
[123] Lane, *Mark*, 209
[124] W. W. Wessel, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary VIII* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 667.
[125] Wessel, "Mark," 667.
[126] Lane, *Mark*, 209,
[127] J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zürich: Bensinger/ NeukirchenVluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978, 1979), 31.
[128] Lane, *Mark*, 209.

previous section (3:1-6).[129] Furthermore, the passage foreshadows not only the Jewish people's rejection of the disciples' message but also the opponents' rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem.

2.2.2 Exegetical Perspectives on the Portrayal of Unbelief

The Nazareth story demonstrates the inherent character of unbelief and its result. The portrayal of the Nazareth's rejection of Jesus would seem to be a literary device in service of the polemic against Jesus' antagonists, which is founded in the narrative that involves some intrinsic tensions. The rejection of Jesus by the synagogue congregation is described as conscious and deliberative, and therefore a culpable response to Jesus' teaching and healing activity.

2.2.2.1 Unbelieving Response of the Town's People

Jesus' teaching in 6:2 is probably meant to embrace both wisdom and power in 6:3. The narrator makes it clear that there is no real doubt among the people as to the objective virtue of Jesus' activity - it astonishes them. Nevertheless, the synagogue congregation failed to show a response of faith to Jesus' teaching and healing. Due to their usual familiarity with Jesus, and perceiving Jesus simply a local person like themselves, they were unable to accept his divine teaching and miracles. Their unbelief lies not in a failure to understand the quality of Jesus' word or the reality of his miracle; it lies rather in a refusal to admit the true source of this wisdom and power (6:2) and to accept the unique identity of the one who manifests them (6:3)

The people of Nazareth, surprised and antagonistic, ask five questions which display their opposition of Jesus. The five questions are framed in the following way:

> Where did this man get all this? (6:2a) [130]

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[129] The rejection, here by family and friends, also echoes the earlier rejection by the religious leaders that concludes the first subsection of the gospel (3:6). Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 187.

[130] The early Jews educated their children at home. The father was responsible for his children's religious training and often taught his son domestic duties, such as tending sheep (1 Sam. 16:11) and working in the field (2 Kgs. 4:18), as well as a trade. Both parents (Prov. 1:8; 6:20) were obliged to instruct their children. In Jesus' time the synagogues were still the main educational centers for the Jews, though by then the scribes were being replaced by rabbis. The many local synagogues, both within and outside of Palestine, insured intimacy with the Law

(poqen toutw tauta()
What is this wisdom that has been given to him? (6:2b)
(tij h sofia h doqeisa toutw()
What deeds of power are being done by his hands! (6:2c)
(ai dunameij toiautai dia twn ceirwn autou ginomenaiÈ)
Is not this the carpenter? Is he not the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?(6:3a)
(ouc outoj estin o tektwn(o uioj thj Mariaj kai adelfoj VIakwbou kai VIwshtoj kai VIouda kai SimwnojÈ)
Are not his sisters here with us? (6:3b)
(ouk eisin ai adelfai autou wde proj hmajÈ)

The first three questions deal with Jesus' behaviours, and each one features a contemptuous outoj. The forth question deals with Jesus' occupation and part of his family background, and features another contemptuous outoj. The fifth question deals with the rest of his family background. Dividing the questions in this way, Gundry argues that the first two questions confirm the origin of the authority of Jesus in Mark's intent, and the last three questions miss the point that Jesus has a new family over whom he presides (3:31-35).[131] Guelich argues that this common knowledge of who Jesus really was led the town's people to reject the alternative that God might be using him in any special way.[132]

The three interrogatory clauses in 6:2 all concern the source of Jesus' words and miracles. The question Poqen toutw tauta represents the general question, while the next two question define tauta as his wisdom[133] and power.[134]

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for those unable to travel to Jerusalem. Jesus, who was taught by the rabbis (Lk. 2:46) and in turn taught in the various synagogues (Matt. 4:23), often criticized the scribes according to the standard of the ideal scribe, who should disclose both old and new elements from his store of knowledge (Matt. 13:52)"-Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 307.

[131] Gundry, *Mark*, 290-92.

[132] Guelich, *Mark*, 310.

[133] J. Goetzmann, "Wisdom," *NIDNTT Vol 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 1029-30; Over all acquired and transmitted wisdom, however, stands the wisdom, which is given as a gift by God to Solomon (1 Ki. 3:5-14). Reflected here is not only the longing of a later generation for the splendour and security of Solomon's reign, but also Israel's conviction of the transcendence of Yahweh over the other gods. It is equally comprehensible that wisdom was expected in the hoped-for messianic king (Isa. 11:2). When "this generation is confronted with the Queen of the South who came from the ends of the earth in order to hear Solomon's wisdom, the implied rebuke is corroborated with the comment, "Behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt 12:42; Lk. 11:31; cf. 1 Ki. 10:1-10;

According to Guelich, 'wisdom and power,' which characterize Jesus, are attributed to the future Davidic Messiah in Isa. 11:2.[135] Isaiah's wisdom language is repeated in *Psalms of Solomon* 17:23. In the larger context of both Isaiah and the *Psalms of Solomon*, however, the Davidic Messiah's wisdom was used not only to rescue Israel, but also to destroy its foes.[136] In fact, through characterizing his work as wisdom and power, which are epithets used of God and Messiah, Mark implies that they recognize a correspondence between Jesus' actions and words, and those of God.

The Primitive Stereotypes in the First-Century Mediterranean

Yet, despite the evidence, they refuse to draw the logical corollary and admit God's agency. What prevents them from accepting the conclusion suggested by the astonishing evidence emerges in 6:3: they cannot reconcile the extraordinariness of his wisdom and power with the unmistakable ordinariness of his vocational training and his local family origins.[137] Both of which amply imply humble background circumstances, which according to established standards of judgment, forbid the possibility that God is active in his ministry.

In the first-century Mediterranean, such a person would always perceive of himself/herself through the evaluation of others.[138] After all, honour needs a grant of reputation by others, and therefore what others tend to understand, is very important.[139] Furthermore, such a person requires others for any kind of

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2 Chr. 9:1-12). This can be understood most easily by thinking of the heavenly Wisdom whom men despise: in Jesus this wisdom has finally appeared.

[134] Cf. O. Betz, "Might," *NIDNTT Vol 2,* 603. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is powerful in speech and action (Lk. 24:19). His miracles are called *dunameis*, for in them God's rule on earth begins to have a powerful effect, and the fight against the devil is carried out on the level of human existence (Matt. 12:22-30; Mk. 6:2). Jesus is the mightier one who, as God's representative, subdues the strong man, i.e. the devil (cf. Mk. 1:8 with 3:22-30). Jesus' miracles are worked by a power within himself (Mk. 5:30).

[135] Guelich, *Mark*, 309

[136] Marcus, *Mark*, 374.

[137] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 192.

[138] G. M. Forster, "The Dyadic Contract: A Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Peasant Village," *American Semantics* 4 (1961): 1184 in 1173-1792.

[139] J. H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss Honor. The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms," in *Modeling Early Christianity. Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context*, ed. P. F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995), 143; B. J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus. The Kingdom of*

significant being, since the impression he has about himself has to be indistinguishable from the self-perception held and portrayed through the significant others in his family or village.[140] According to Malina & Neyrey, the following can be seen to represent the primitive stereotypes whereby first-century Mediterranean people comprehend themselves or others.[141]

1) *Family and clan*

Such a person is not known individually, but in terms of his/her family (Mk. 2:15-19; 6:3). People know him/her through knowledge of the parents and clan.

2) *Place of origin*

People might be known in terms of their place of birth, and depending on the public perception of this place, they are either honourable or dishonourable (Mk. 2:24; 15:21).

The term patrida used in 6:1 signifies literally 'fatherland,' and refers to the specific region where a person family lived, in Jesus' case Nazareth and its surrounding area.[142] This comes from the first-century Mediterranean social norm that geographical origins and inheritance prospects determine who an individual is and what his abilities will be. Like many of the ostensible geographical references in the Gospel, Nazareth in this context is intended to signal social rather than geographical information.[143] Honourable people derive from and are rooted in honourable location, region, and poleis.[144] Thus a person's role and status in society should be considered in relation to a function of such noble regional connections. To know someone means to know his roots, ancestry, and genealogy. Honourable families, moreover, derive from honourable soil and live in honourable regions. The converse is equally true. Dishonourable persons

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God in Mediterranean Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 126.

[140] B. J. Malina & J. H. Neyrey, "First-Century Personality: Dyadic, not Individualistic," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 73-74.

[141] Malina & Neyrey, "First-Century Personality," 74-75.

[142] The reader acknowledges that Nazareth was Jesus' hometown based on 1:9, 24.

[143] Marlina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 212.

[144] Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul. An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 24.

indicate dishonourable families, low-quality locales, and disgraceful *poleis*. Nathanael's question in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out Nazareth?" (ek Nazaret dunatai ti agaqon einai) demonstrates the first step in determining honourable or dishonourable origins.[145]

On the other hand, when Paul presents himself as "a Judean, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem]" (Acts 22:3), he pulls out all the honourable stops, since Tarsus was no dishonourable region (Acts 21:39), and Jerusalem was the major city of Judea and site of Israel's temple. The people of Nazareth already knew Jesus' birth status and honour rating. Every family, village or city would therefore be quite predictable, and so would be the individuals who are embedded in and share the qualities of family, village or nation.[146] The people of Nazareth understood Jesus as someone who is not merely exceeding expectations but rather is overreaching himself.

3) *Inherited craft-trade*

Mediterranean people were known in terms of trade, craft or occupation. The people had fixed ideas of what it means to be a worker of leather, a landowner, a steward, or a carpenter (cf. Mk. 6:3). Since the persons have no control over ancestry and parentage, they tend to understand their responsibilities and the relative positions of clans and families, as well of individual members in them, as ordained by God.[147]

The people's reflection on Jesus' status is as a local boy whose mother, brothers and sisters are present in their midst: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" (6:3). According to the people of Nazareth Jesus was a local boy and they knew no reason why he should have turned out to be any different from the rest of his family. The reference to Jesus' family by the home-town's people could mean that his relatives are contributing to the general unwillingness to

[145] Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul*, 24-25.
[146] Halvor Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place: Transformations of Place and Power in the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible*, ed. John J. Pilch (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 194.
[147] Malina & Neyrey, "First-Century Personality," 76.

acknowledge him as divinely sent (6:3).[148]

The town's people are put off, because Jesus is a carpenter. In the first-century, the Jewish people had a high regard for manual labour, but some distinguished between the scribes, who devoted themselves to the study of the Law, and the labourer, who worked with his hands. "According to Sirach 38:24-34, the wisdom of the scribes depends upon the opportunity of leisure to study, while the artisan is too much engaged in business to become wise."[149] As a result, "the artisans did not sit in the judges' seat, nor did they see the determinations of the courts, but they work only at night, while during the day they only talk about their labours."[150] In first-century Mediterranean society, designating Jesus as a 'carpenter' was not particularly complimentary and could have been regarded as an attempt to discredit him.[151] Accordingly, they were unable to accept that Jesus, as a carpenter, could perform divine works.

Son of Mary

The phrase 'son of Mary' (o uioj thj Mariaj)[152]may reveal one reason why Jesus' words were not immediately accepted by the town's people. In a Jewish context, the father's name was usually used to identify the son, even when the father was dead (see e.g. the son of Joseph in *b. Yoma* 38b).[153] In contrast with the Jewish custom, Jesus was identified by his mother's name, rather than by his

[148] Hurtado, *Mark*, 89.
[149] Garland, *Mark*, 233.
[150] Garland, *Mark*, 233.
[151] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 171. The outspoken detractor of Christianity in the second century, Celsus, scoffed that the founder of the new religion was nothing but "a carpenter by trade" (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.34, 36). R. MacMullen, indicates that occupations such as weavers and carpenters betrayed plebeian origins and were grist for "the range of prejudice felt by the literate upper classes for the lower" (*Roman Social Relation: 50 B.C. to A.D. 384* [London: Yale University Press, 1974], 107-8, 138-41). This judgment should not be unduly pressed, however. The snobbery of the elite patrician minority cannot be assumed of the broader populace as a whole, most of whom, like Mark's readers presumably, were also working-class people.
[152] The narrator uses many appositive comments to describe characters in the story. Many of these identification are prosaic, but some are noteworthy (R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 120. Mark 1:1, with its clear identification of Jesus as Christ and the Son of God, offers the reader vital information.
[153] T. Iran, "'Man born of Woman…' (Job 14:1): The Phenomenon of Men Bearing Metronymes at the Time of Jesus," *NovT* 34 (1992): 23n. 3 in 23-45.

father's name.[154] What did the employment of the mother's name in this context imply? According to Stauffer, as the opponents identified Jesus as the son of his mother, that is, as being illegitimate, they were slandering him (cf. Jud. 11:1-2) and perhaps were harking back to rumours that the situation of Jesus' birth was doubtful.[155] This aspersion would correspond to the trend in later Jewish traditions to describe Jesus as a fatherless child (see. e.g. Origen *Against Celsus* 1. 28-32, 39, 69; *b. Sanh*. 67 a).[156] However, Meier provides strong arguments against any interpretation that this 'flip comment' suggests any moral scandal related with Jesus' birth.[157] According to him, it only conveys a meaning of familiarity. Klostermann's response to the charge of illegitimacy is the declaration of Jesus' virginal conception, so that God becomes, in a more or less literal meaning, his father (cf. Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:34-35).[158] However, Mark gives no explicit indication of knowing this tradition.[159]

McArthur argues that 'son of Mary' represents 'an informal descriptive' rather than 'a formal genealogical' way of identifying Jesus by his well-known mother, because his father was presumably long since dead (e.g. Jud. 11:1-2; 1 Kgs 17:17; Luke 7:12; Acts 16:1; 23:16; Gal 4:21-31).[160] According to him, whatever the answer, 'son of Mary' need not be a cruel insult. However, Mark 6:3 comes closer to being a genealogical formula than the parallels quoted, because of the broad list of other male family members.[161] In this context, the town's people refer to Jesus as Mary's son, because his father is no longer alive and they are articulating their familiarity with his mother, who remains there.[162] This seems to be the most likely, because the allusions of his brothers and sisters insist that he is simply 'a local boy.'[163]

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[154] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 244.
[155] E. Stauffer, "Jeschua ben Mirjam (Mk 6,3)," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, eds. E. Ellis & M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 124.
[156] Marcus, *Mark*, 375.
[157] J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 222-27.
[158] E. Klostermann, *Das Markuseuangelium* (Tübingen: Verlag J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 55.
[159] Marcus, *Mark*, 375.
[160] H. K. McArthur, "Son of Mary," *NovT* 15 (1973): 55 in 38-58.
[161] Marcus, *Mark*, 375.
[162] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 225-26.
[163] D. E. Garland, *Mark*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 232.

Kinship

In the ancient Mediterranean context, ascribed honour derived from kinship, that is, birth into a family. Progenies had the same honour as parents, for honour derived from birth ("like mother, like daughter," Ezek 16:44; "like father, like son," Matt 13:55).[164] They were made admirable by connection with equally commendable kinfolk and families. To know a person implied to know his roots and ancestry. Being born into an admirable family makes one honourable, because the family is the repository of the honour of past illustrious ancestors and their obtained honour. One of the most important purposes of genealogies in the New Testament is to describe a person's honour line, and thus to locate them socially on a level of eminence (cf. Luke 3:23-38). The converse is equally true. A dishonourable person demonstrates a dishonourable family, low-quality region and *contemptible poleis*.[165]

Jesus' home-town people's hostile questions about his family and origin point to the same thing: How can he insist on special honour as a prophet and a divine being, if he is but a carpenter and Mary's son, if his family includes ordinary brothers and sisters in the village, and if his origins are in a peasant village in Galilee? (cf. John 7:40-42)[166] It is almost as if they confess on their own behalf that nothing this good can come out of Nazareth (cf. John 1:46).

The home-town people knew Jesus from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16), and their very familiarity with him was a hindrance to knowing him truly, for it made it all the more hard for them to see through the veil of his ordinariness.[167] Due to their ordinary knowledge that Jesus was only a local yokel the home-town people rejected the alternative that God might be using him in a particular way.

The last sentence of 6:3 demonstrates the rejection of Jesus by the town's people along with his teaching; kai eskandalizonto en autwÅ The term eskandalizonto translated as "they were offended" (NIV, NRSV) is reflected in

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[164] Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 28.
[165] B. J. Malina & J. H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul. An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 24.
[166] Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 28.
[167] C. E. B. Grandfield, *The Gospel According to St, Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 193.

other versions: “are repelled” (Mof), “fall away” (RSV), “stumble” (ASV), “fell foul of him” (NEB). “The idea conveyed by the Greek verb is that of being offended and repelled to the point of abandoning (whether temporarily or permanently, the word does not specify) belief in the words (cf. Lk. 8:13) or one’s relationship with Jesus (14:27, 29).”[168] The verb is important in Mark, appearing in 4:17 and 9:42-47, where it translates as to be caused to commit apostasy—to abandon allegiance to Jesus after beginning as a disciple.[169] Here, however, it is used of outsiders, and is translated as means to be prevented from becoming a disciple. The Nazarenes are like the seed that fell beside the path; they never take root.

2.2.2.2 Jesus’ Reaction to Unbelief of the Nazareth

Jesus responded to the question of unbelief by aphorism, of which there were numerous parallels in the Jewish and Greek literature[170]that Jesus cited: “only in his home-town, among his relatives and in his own house, is a prophet without honour” (6:4). This indicates the unbelief of the Nazarenes but does not offer an excuse. Through comparing Jesus to the prophets who were dishonoured and rejected among their own nation, Mark elucidates that Jesus was also rejected among his family.[171] Jesus has come like a prophet and was rejected like a prophet (e.g. 2 Chr 24:19; 36:15-16; Neh 9:26 Jub 1:12). “The saying intimates that he will suffer the inevitable fate of a prophet, while the martyrdom of the prophet John the Baptist will soon be described (6:17-29).”[172] Jesus’ rejection by his own home-town foreshadows his rejection by his nation, a rejection that will be concluded in Jerusalem.

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[168] Wessel, “Mark,” 665.
[169] Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 60; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 173.
[170] In the extra-canonical form, the Oxyrhynchus papyri say of Jesus: “A prophet is not acceptable in his own country, neither does a physician work cures on those who know him” (Translation by J. J. Jeremiah of Pap. Ox. I, 33-36 in E. Hen Necke & W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, vol. 2 [London: Lutterworth Press, 1963] I, 109). It also emerges in *the Gospel of Thomas*, “No prophet is acceptable in his village, no physician heals those who know him” (The translation of GT 31 is from A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel according to Thomas* [Leiden: Brill/New York: Harper, 1959], 21).
[171] J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 133: “By announcing that his fate as a prophet is to be rejected by his people… [w]ith a rhetorically potent progression Jesus intensifies his rejection as a prophet: He has been dishonored not only by his ‘home town’ but also by his own ‘relatives’ and even by his own ‘house’ (family).”
[172] Garland, *Mark*, 233.

Mark 6:4 is related to 3:21 and 31-35 in that both texts imply the fact that Jesus' physical relationship to his own *patris* proves to be a stumbling block for the family to understand Jesus for who he truly is.[173] In rhetorical terms, this scene is a recapitulation of previous scenes in which the inability of his family to comprehend is interconnected with the doubt of the town's people who observed his mighty works in the synagogue.[174] In 6:4, the addition of 'house' further indicates the irony of being rejected at home. Not only in his home-town, but also in his own home, Jesus was rejected. In doing this, Mark emphasizes Jesus' rejection not only by those who know him slightly, or knew about him, but also by those who knew him best, namely his family.[175]

The word 'kinsmen' in 6:4 is perhaps to be taken as an allusion to a wider circle of Jesus' kin than those just known in 6:3. Accordingly we should understand the speaking in 6:4b as referring to groups of ever diminishing size—Jesus' wider kinship group and the members of his own household.[176] Mark insists that the rejection of Jesus contains not only his own home-town, but also the members of his own family.

Jesus' Usual Family

In first-century Mediterranean society, a person was known in terms of his/her family. For example, Simon is 'son of Jonah' and James and John are 'sons of Zebedee.' By knowing the parent or kin, one knows the person's identity. In Mark 6:3, the Nazarenes define Jesus' identity by reference to his physical family, while in Mark 3:31-35, Jesus identifies his family on the basis of response to his message rather than biological family. The rejection by those who have most reason to perceive Jesus correctly is contrasted with the call of those who are around him as his true family (3:31-34). This passage presents Jesus' view of a new family of faith in which spiritual kinship and not physical relationship

[173] Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark. A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 192. According to John 7:5, Jesus' own brother did not believe in him during his ministry, and we hear of only James coming to faith after his death and resurrection (Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 174). We saw in 3:19 that opposition to Jesus would infiltrate his chosen circle of apostles; here, too it infiltrates his own home. Once again (3:31-35) Jesus' family is outsider and he is a stranger in his own.
[174] Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 35.
[175] Gnilka, *Markus* , 31.
[176] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 195.

becomes the pivotal foundation of the family.[177] His physical family's alien relationship with him shows in their position 'outside' the house in contrast to the circle around him (3:32), as well as in his own identification of those around him as his spiritual mothers and his brothers (3:34).[178] At this point, Jesus' physical family had no part in his ministry and no special benefit in the Kingdom which was coming.[179] Nevertheless, this is not to say that Jesus sets out here to intentionally dishonour his natural family. The resolution of this narrative tension is found in the legitimating norm of 'doing God's will.' When he places the honour of God above that of his family, Jesus does not dishonour his family, which is indicated at the same time to be even more honourable.[180]

Those around him whose action reflected acceptance of him and his message about the kingdom (1:14-15), had become members in the family of faith, in view of their new and bonding relationship of "doing the will of God." (3:35; cf. 10:29-30).[181] God was calling persons to a new loyalty that could lead to the renunciation of the requests of their biological family, which failed to take account of "the will of God" (to qelhma tou qeou). One's ultimate loyalty is obligated to God, who is Father of a new divine family, and becoming a member of the new family is open to all persons regardless of physical family, social position, and place of birth.[182] The faith forms a fellowship in which the common practice of the will of God unites a man closely to Jesus and allows him to know another as brother, sister or mother (cf. Ps. 22:22; Heb 2:11-12). Jesus creates a divine new community, which was usually called as the family of God. But, those whose hearts are hardened cannot understand and accept the identification of the new family.[183] To see the presence of God and enter his family, the people need faith.

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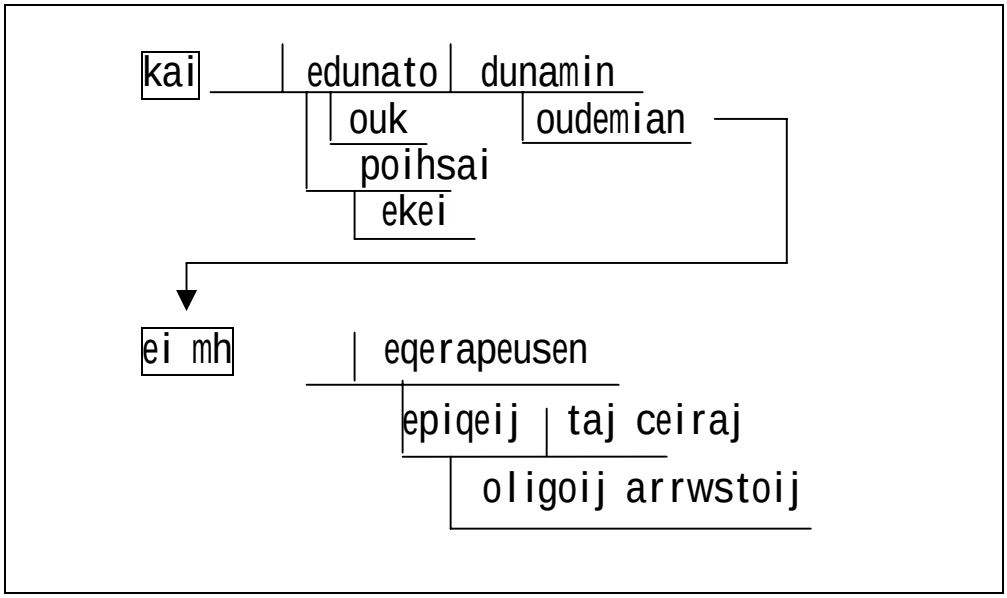
[177] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 159.
[178] Marcus, *Mark*, 285.
[179] Painter, *Mark*, 75.
[180] D. M. May, "Mark 3:20-35 from the Perspective of Shame/Honor," *BTB* 17, no 3 (1987): 86 in 83-87.
[181] Guelich, *Mark*, 185.
[182] Garland, *Mark*, 131.
[183] Cf. J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the king. Dynamic of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* [Leiden: Brill, 200], 191-362. Birth was, of course, the most important way of becoming a member of a family. The New Testament also uses this image to say how a believer becomes part of God's family (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; Jan van der Watt, G. Malina, and S. Joubert, *A Time Travel to the World of Jesus* [Halfway: Orion, 1996], 21). For more detail, see

The Nazarenes' Unbelief

The Syntactic Structure of Mark 6:5



Mark concludes the episode by reporting that because of the unbelief in his home-town, Jesus cannot do anything there expect lay hands on a few sick individuals and heal them. In 6:5-6 Mark uses the same dichotomy of a positive and negative picture as seen earlier between 6:2 and 6:3. The beginning declaration that, "He could not do any miracle there" (ouk edunato ekei poihsai oudemian dunamin) in 6:5a is immediately followed with, "except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" (ei mh oligoij arrwstoij epiqeij taj ceiraj eqerapeusen) in 6:5b. The construction oudemij … ei mh is found frequently in New Testament Greek, including again in Mark 10:18, as a way of stating a limited exception to general rule which thereby adds emphasis to the rule (cf. Matt 11:27; 17:8; Jn 14:6; 1 Cor 1:14 8:4b; Rev 2:17).[184]

With such a comparison, Mark 6:5 constitutes a very strong, though qualified, proclamation. The reason for the qualification is no to mitigate the implication of 6:5a that Jesus was rendered totally impotent by the Nazarenes' unbelief, but to emphasize forcefully the hampering effect of unbelief on Jesus' mission. At the same time the verse introduces the important fact that those few individuals who demonstrate real faith toward Jesus experienced healing even in the midst of

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chapter 4 in this thesis.

[184] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 194.

such hostility.[185] Jesus' inability to do any major healing in his home-town was not his responsibility, but due to the Nazarenes' unbelief.[186] Their antagonistic attitude and opposition was rooted in their unbelief. They saw only a son of Mary, only another one of the village children who has grown up and returned for a visit. Their unbelief lies not in a failure to understand the quality of Jesus' teaching or the realism of his healing, but in a refusal to accept the true source of wisdom and power.

Jesus worked and spoke according to God's will (cf. 3:35; 6:2). His words and deeds were declaring the salvation within the kingdom of God. Thus, those who do not believe in this intrinsic authority in his work could not experience God's redemptive work on their behalf.[187] The unbelief limits the reception of help readily available from Jesus.[188] Their unbelief meant not only their personal rejection of Jesus, but also prevented his providing them with what God was doing through him.[189] The greatest obstacle to faith is not the failure of God to act, but the unwillingness of the human heart to accept the God who condescends to us, only in the son of Mary.

2.2.3 Summary

The Nazarenes in Mark 6:1-6 are faced with crisis of identification crisis. Jesus' words and miracles astound them and point toward a mandate from God (6:2), but his biological origin, humble family circumstances and vocational background depart radically from conventional expectations of what a divine emissary should be like. Hence they refuse to respond in believing with proper confidence.

In spite of his teachings and miracles, his home-town people understood him as simply a son of Mary, whose brothers were known by name and whose sisters lived among them (6:2-3). His immediate family misinterpreted Jesus as a person possessed by Satan (3:20-22; 31-32), and now his town's people and kin's people rejected him outright. Their unbelief consists not in a failure to understand

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[185] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 194.
[186] A. Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospel* (London: SCM, 1941), 43; van der Loss, *The Miracles of Jesus*, 192; Lane, *Mark*, 204.
[187] Guelich, *Mark*, 311.
[188] J. Painter, *Mark's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1997), 97.
[189] Guelich, *Mark*, 312.

the potential implication of Jesus' ministry; it is not some kind of predetermined blindness. Rather, it consists in a conscious refusal to surrender established standards of judgment in the face of clear evidence that God's ruling power is demonstrated in Jesus' words and deeds.

Mark emphasizes the seriousness and fault of the Nazarenes in various ways. While not expecting ready acceptance in his family and kin (6:4), Jesus also does not expect such persistent hostility and he marvels at their unbelief (6:6). So powerful is this unbelief that it succeeds in upsetting Jesus' best intentions and he cannot expand kingdom power to the degree he has hoped to. This is not because God 'fails,' but happen when humans are limited by their own rigidity. "According to the self-same rule by which Jesus granted everything to faith, he also denied everything to unbelief."[190]

This episode is not just the description of the rejection of Jesus in his hometown, it is also, as expressed in discussing 5:21-43, foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders that culminates in his crucifixion. In other words, this rejection by his own home-town and family anticipates the rejection by the larger group of his own people, his nation. The unbelief will ultimately lead to Jesus' death in Jerusalem. In the next section, we investigate the attempt of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem to convict him of death.

2.3 THE UNBELIEF OF THE AUTHORITIES IN JERUSALEM (11:27-33)

After cursing the fig tree, Jesus enters the temple and the court of the gentiles (11:15-19). There he drives out the sellers and buyers, overturns the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those selling doves, allows no one to carry anything through the area, and proclaims that God's house, which has been turned into a den of robbers, is meant to be a house of prayer for all the nations. With the cleansing of the temple still fresh in their mind, the authorities confront Jesus the following day.

Mark's description of this conflict focuses on a clash of authority.[191] From the

[190] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 195.
[191] Most scholars have considered this pericope as a controversy story. E.g., Gundry, *Mark*, 656; E. P. Gould, *The Gospel according to St Mark. International*

outset Jesus is described as having authority unlike that of the scribes (1:21-28). His authority is announced in response to the scribes in 2:1-12, is reaffirm in 2:23-28, is questioned by the Pharisees in 8:11-13, and is finally questioned by the chief priests, elders, and scribes in 11:27-33. In 11:27 Jesus returns to the temple and he and his disciples walk around within its area. The members of Sanhedrin challenge him to declare the source of his authority, which gave him the right to do 'these things' (i.e. in the temple). Jesus does not answer their question. Rather, he counters with a question of his own. Jesus asks his challengers the source of John's authority. Faced with quandary, the Jewish religious leaders refuse to commit themselves: "We do not know." Recognising their response as side-stepping, Jesus concludes the discussion with the words: "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." In the conflict, the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus' authority is related with their failure to understand John the Baptist's authority. This statement implies that the Jerusalem authorities were the original, or at least the main source of the conflict.

2.3.1 Literary Composition and Structure

This is the first among a couple of other controversial stories, in which Jesus meets rejection from various sources.[192] In this one, the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who make up the Sanhedrin, bluntly interrogate him about the source of his authority. Their challenge to Jesus' authority recalls readers to the issue, which was raised in 3:22-30 by the scribes who came from Jerusalem.[193] However, the story also connects with 11:1-10, in which Jesus first entered Jerusalem and the temple. By putting the incidents in this particular order, Mark implies that, had the religious leaders understood the significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, they would have had no need to ask about his authority as expressed in his action as he does in the temple.[194]

This pericope has a number of literary features in common with 2:1-12. In both episodes, Jesus responds to the Jewish religious leaders' censure with riddling

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Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 217; Hooker, *Mark*, 270; Lane, *Mark*, 412; Schweizer, *Mark*, 236; Taylor, *Mark*, 468; W. L. Knox, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospel*, Vol I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 85.

[192] Hooker, *St Mark*, 270.

[193] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 451.

[194] Hooker, *The Gospel of Mark*, 271.

questions;[195] both record the religious leaders' reasoning (dielogizonto) among themselves; in both narratives, Jesus' authority is the core issue. Both present a larger cycle of controversial stories, which further demonstrate the unbelief emphasized in the initial story.[196] In 2:1-12 and 11:27-33, Mark describes the antagonists' unbelief in their reaction to Jesus' authority. In 2:1-12, his authority is indicated in his forgiveness of sins, while in 11:27-33 his authority is indicated in his sovereignty over the temple. In both narratives, Mark demonstrates that their disbelief lies in their conscious refusal to accept the clear connotation of what they perceive rather than in misunderstanding of the truth.

Mark places the event after the cleansing of the temple (11:15-19) and before the parable of the vineyard (12:1-12).[197] Through this composition, Mark gives the true reason why God's judgment will come upon the Jewish religious authorities, which the symbolic action of the cleansing of the temple and the parable of the vineyard imply. If they persist in rejecting Jesus' authority, they are not able to avoid the imminent judgment.

Myers has noted a near identical five-step pattern to the two narratives, which surround the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:1-12.[198] The pattern is shared by the controversy narratives 11:27-33 and 12:13-17 and involves: 1) Jesus being approached by religious/political opponents; 2) They challenge him with a question concerning authority; 3) Jesus poses a counter question, challenging the opponents to reveal their own views and loyalties; 4) The opponents respond; 5) Jesus answer the original question accordingly.[199] Here, we have another example of Mark's sandwich technique in which parable is intended to help us

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[195] "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? (2:8-9); "John's baptism was it from heaven, or from men?" (11:30).

[196] Cf. Dewey, *Public Debate*, 55, 63f, 152-67; M. J. Cook, *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 34, 48f; Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as a Story*, 53.

[197] All of the synoptic gospels place the event at approximately the same location in the outline of their narrative. In Matthew and Mark, the cursing of the fig tree stands between the cleansing of the Temple and the question on authority. In Luke, the fig tree parable is absent. In Mark and Luke the parable of the vineyard immediately follows the question on authority. In Matthew, however, the parable of two sons appears between the two.

[198] Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 305.

[199] Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 160; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 306.

read each of the controversy dialogues that surround it and vice versa.[200]

2.3.2 Exegetical Perspective on the Portrayal of Unbelief

In view of 11:18, the interrogation of Jesus in this story has to be understood as an attempt by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders to secure grounds for action against Jesus. In 8:31 Mark presents the view that these three groups reject Jesus and put him to death. "This means that their coming to Jesus now is to be viewed as part of their malicious plot to eliminate him as a threat to their own authority (11:27)."[201] Jesus' prediction of rejection by the entire official leadership of Israel is now beginning to be accomplished, and we should think of this as quasi-official delegation.[202] They challenge Jesus to present his credentials: "By what authority are you doing these things?" (11:28). Therefore, their emergence here, following the reaction of the opponents to Jesus' activity in the temple (11:18), echoes of the passion prediction of 8:31 and foreshadows a threatening tone for the future development of Mark's narrative.[203]

2.3.2.1 Two Questions (11:28)

The opponents implicitly recognize that Jesus has acted with authority in the temple, but their intention is to use this as means of incriminating him (cf. 12:13).[204] The two questions that the religious leaders pose in 11:28 have a slightly different focus (kai elegon autw\ en poia exousia tauta poieijÈ h tij soi edwken thn exousian tauthn ina tauta poihjÈÀ. The 'what' (poioj) question inquires as to the nature of Jesus' authority (prophetic, messianic, etc.), and the 'who' (tij) question as to its ultimate source (human, divine, Satanic).[205]

Poioj (11:28) here probably does not differ from tij (cf. 12:28); Gundry's suggestion that we think of different types of authority which might have been claimed (prophetic, priestly, royal and messianic possibilities) is probably too

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[200] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 318.
[201] Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action*, 232.
[202] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.
[203] C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 199.
[204] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 197.
[205] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 197.

subtly theological for this context.[206] BAGD 684b 2.a.g suggests that poioj should be read as the equivalent for tinoj: by whose authority? If so, the addition of a second question, tij soi edwken thn exousian tauth, draws out the implication of the first question more pointedly by its implied accusation—"We did not give it to you."[207]

The term exousia mentioned in their question was also stated in 1:22 where it was used in contrast to the teaching of the scribes.[208] Taylor argues that exousia is meant as divine authority not legal or political right.[209] In the minds of the religious leaders, the reference is to the Rabbinical authority and their double questions about his authority means that Jesus is without authority, because Jesus is not ordained as a Rabbi.[210] Mark's readers, of course, know the source of the authority, which "comes in the name of the Lord" (11:9). Gundry rightly interprets 'these things' and 'them' (tauta) to refer to Jesus' action in temple.[211] He quotes the forward position of the temple in the previous verse as evidence that Mark deliberately resolves to recall the temple event at this point in the narrative.[212] The 'these things" about which Jesus is questioned are no doubt his attack on the temple business and his condemnation of the priestly leaders described in 11:15-19.[213] Obviously, the Sanhedrin had not authorized him to do

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[206] Gundry, *Mark*, 657.
[207] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.
[208] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 334. The question of Jesus' authority was raised at the very beginning of his public ministry (see 1:22, 27; 2:10), with the implication that his authority is from God and transcends the authority of other Jewish teachers and leaders as well as that of Roman officials (even the emperor). For Jesus sharing his authority with his disciples, see 3:15 and 6:7.
[209] V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 469.
[210] Taylor, *Mark*, 469. Lane argues that the Sanhedrin was concerned to learn why Jesus performed what appears to be an official act if he possesses no official status (*Mark*, 413). Gundry in contrast argues that the Sanhedrin did not need to be told that Jesus lacks the kind of authority that rabbinic ordination confers (*Mark*, 657).
[211] Gundry, *Mark*, 657. Kingsbury agrees with his view, pointing out telling that the Sanhedrin confronts Jesus in this text with "the cleansing of the temple still fresh in their minds" (*Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authority, Disciples* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 79). Cf. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.
[212] Gundry, *Mark*, 666.
[213] Hurtado, *Mark*, 189; Painter*, Mark's Gospel*, 161. It is possible that the questions posed here originally had a wider reference and where asked of Jesus' activity of preaching and healing in general (Hooker, *Mark*, 271).

these things. Thus, they objected to his actions and questioned his authority.

The question follows logically and naturally from the incident. The ruling priests have authorized the activities of the buyers, sellers and money-changers. The ruling priests possessed ultimate authority on the Temple Mount, an authority to which in many honours even the Romans deferred to (cf. *Babylonian Talmud. Roš Hoššanah*.31a; *Babylonian Talmud. Šabbat*. 15a; *Babylonian Talmud. Sanhedrin*. 41a).[214] In light of this the Jewish religious leaders were inquiring as to Jesus' authority, in order for them to arrogate their authority in matters of temple polity. In the present case, the Jewish religious leaders' questions function as a challenge to Jesus' honour. The questions are not designed to draw out any information in return, but only to humiliate Jesus and expose him as a deceiver.[215]

The religious authorities did not want to believe in Jesus' authority, demonstrated by his cleansing temple, for according to their understanding of scripture and law, what Jesus claimed to be and to do, which included authority over the temple, was blasphemy, and hence Jesus, because of his temple action, was regarded as a dishonourable person.[216] The authorities could not accept Jesus' purifying temple, as this authority belonged exclusively to God (they thought of themselves as agents of God).[217] The authorities perceived his attitude as a challenge to God's honour. Since Jesus' attitude was classified as a first-degree dishonour, that is blasphemy, by the authorities, they refused to believe in Jesus' authority. This unbelief of the opponents of Jesus implied their denial to acknowledge God's presence in and through the personal life of Jesus.

2.3.2.2 Jesus' Luminous Response (11: 29-30)

Jesus does not directly interrelate with the content of the Sanhedrin's questions. Instead, he agrees to answer the religious leaders' questions if they are prepared to proclaim whether John's baptism was of divine or human origin: "Jesus said to them. 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human

[214] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 200.
[215] Gundry, *Mark*, 657.
[216] Smith, *A Lion with Wings,* 69.
[217] Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as Story*, 117-19.

origin?" (11:29-30).[218]. He thereby turns the tables on his challengers.

The way on which a question is answered by counter-question also mirrors a Semitic teaching style, which indicates that Jesus expects an unequivocal answer.[219] Answering a question by another question was a common rabbinic custom, especially in the context of debate (cf. 10:2-3). What is distinctive here is that Jesus makes his answer depend entirely on theirs.[220] If they admit John's divine commission, they must then acknowledge their own disregard for his message. If they deny John's prophetic authority, they will discredit themselves in the eyes of the crowd, whose animosity they plainly fear (11:18, 32). They are therefore forced to proclaim themselves agnostic on the issues, which Jesus then uses to deny them the explicit proclamation they seek concerning his own authority.[221] If the Jewish religious leaders correctly answered the counter-question about the divine origin of John's authority, they should also confess the divine authority of Jesus.

The dilemma of the Sanhedrin does not mean simply that they are unable to answer to his question. More to the point, their options have been so limited by Jesus' brilliant response that they have no way to publicly defend their own honour. They recognized their dilemma: if they recognize John's divine authority, they would expose themselves to the charge of unbelief.[222] They also understand that they would be forced to recognize that Jesus' authority comes from God. Just as John's authority may derive from God, so Jesus' authority may be traced directly to God. However, in order to maintain their public honour, they could not admit Jesus' authority.

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[218] This style has frequently been compared to parallels in rabbinic discourse (cf. 10:2-3). In these parallels, one addresses an arguable point to a colleague who opposes with a question on which both the interlocutor and his colleague agree (Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 203). This approach offers not only the basis for the questioner's response but also the basis for his colleague's climatic response (G. S. Shae, "The question on the Authority of Jesus," *NovT* 16 [1974]: 13-14 in 1-29; cf. *Babylonian Talmud. Sanh*. 65b).
[219] H. Strack & P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrash*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (München: C. H. Beck, 1961), 860; Schweizer, *The Good News*, 237.
[220] Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 413.
[221] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 198.
[222] Lane, *Mark*, 414.

Jesus' counter-question functions rhetorically to direct attention back to John's baptism at the initiation of the Markan story.[223] Mark's Gospel begins with the Baptist's appearance in the wilderness, declaring a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins (1:4). In first-century Jewish context, the locale for forgiveness of sins was not the Jordan River, but the Jerusalem temple.[224] The important points for the understanding of our text are found in John's rejection of the temple system of forgiveness. That the religious leaders acknowledge the divine authority of John to preserve their honour among the people, means that they acknowledge John's critical assessment of the sacrificial system of the temple, along with his promise of forgiveness apart from the temple through the vehicle a "stronger one" still to come (1:7).[225] The Markan reader recognizes that Jesus is the stronger one whom John baptized and whom God honoured with an announcement of his sonship from heaven.[226] By evoking John's baptism in connection with Jesus' authority, Mark is able simultaneously to expose, diagnose, and answer the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

2.3.2.3. The Opponents' Unbelief (11:31-33)

The opponents' unbelief is exposed to the reader their private discussion (dielogizonto) over how to answer to Jesus' counter-question (11:31). In his reference to John's baptism they clearly understand an implicit application to John's witness to himself, otherwise they could have freely acknowledged John's divine authority. Their stumbling block is in the situation of Jesus asking them: dia ti Îoun ouk episteusate autwÈ that is, admit his declaration of a coming stronger one.[227] This would have posed no threat to them. They have not acknowledged Jesus' implied assertion to be the stronger one. Once again, Mark

[223] John and Jesus are intertwined in the first Jerusalem controversy (11:27-33). For both John and Jesus, the source of their authority is God and what they do is done by them as God's agents. Just as the controversies early in Jesus' Galilean ministry establish that his authority is from God (see 1:22, 27; 2:10), so early in his Jerusalem ministry it becomes clear that Jesus' authority is from God (Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 336).
[224] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 53-56.
[225] Marshall, *Faith*, 198.
[226] Iersel understands Jesus' baptism by John as the key referent for the question in Mark 11:30: "Jesus has the right to act the way he does because of what the voice from heaven said to him. He, more than the authorities, is more at home in the temple, because God has called him his dear son" (*Reading Mark* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989], 148).
[227] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 198.

demonstrates that the unbelief of Jesus' opponents is not in failure to understand his authority, but in a stubborn refusal to accept in it.

Now, the verb pisteuein with the dative (autw) in 11:31 is the common style in secular Greek to describe belief in the truth of what someone declares.[228] This is used once in our text, and the primary sense is to give credibility to John's declaration, "in a somewhat pregnant sense."[229] John's declaration exhorted obedience to a baptism of repentance. "Moreover, inasmuch as Mark portrays John as a prophet (v.32), the belief directed towards him was, in accordance with Old Testament-Jewish thought (Ex. 4:1-9; 14:30; 19:9; 2 Chron 20:20; Jn 5:46; Acts 8:12), ultimately placed in God."[230] To believe in him (=John), inevitably meant not only accepting John and his baptism as ordained of God, but also involved demonstrating the faith by obediently submitting to his baptism of repentance.[231] To believe in John's message means to accept eschatological conversion as a demand of God, and to respond in obedience. In contrast, to disbelieve means to reject the divine command, and to regard the prediction of a stronger one as groundless.

Mark parallels and differentiates the faith evoked by John and the faith vested in Jesus. They are distinguished by their content. In the case of John, faith is the inner dynamic of repentance in view of a future act of God. In the case of Jesus, it is a trustful reliance on the present action of God's kingly power.[232] With John, faith is implicit in the act of repentant baptism. With Jesus, however, faith emerges as a distinct demand, and is the on-going condition appropriate to the new reality he brings.

At the same time, 11:30-32 implies a close link between belief in John and faith in Jesus. Mark in fact suggests that the opponents refused to perceive in Jesus is a continuation and consequence of their rejection of John's baptism of repentance. The Jewish leaders' unbelief had already consolidated with respect to John (cf.

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[228] M. J. Harris, "Preposition and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *Appendix to NIDNTT* 3 1213.
[229] B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: OUP, 1929), 475.
[230] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 199.
[231] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 206. Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 18-20.
[232] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 199.

12:1-5), which is why they are portrayed as hostile to Jesus from their very first emergence in Mark's narrative (2:6; cf. 1:22). This association at the level of unbelief is part of a larger theme in the Gospel in which Mark parallels the careers of John and Jesus, detailed consideration of which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[233] It suffices to note here that John and Jesus, as God's messengers, produce fear in the ruling authorities (6:20; 11:18, 32; 12:12), both are rejected, and both suffer a violent fate. Unbelief in John' message leads ultimately to the rejection of Jesus. We have noted earlier (1:14; 6:14-29; 9:9-13)[234] that Mark understands the fate of John and the fate of Jesus to be interwoven. The implication here is not only that the authority of both was from heaven, but also that the divine authority of both was rejected by the authorities.[235]

Part of the apodosis of v. 32, "John really was a prophet," gives another meaning of rejection nuance. Jesus' antagonists assert that John's authority was from God, not from men. "Both John and Jesus were regarded by the people as genuine prophets, and for this reason the authorities 'feared' the people in both instances (11:18, 32; 12:12).[236] The Markan reader understands that the opponents' action against Jesus links to Israel's rejecting action against the prophets in the OT to

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[233] See. W. H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 13, 34; F. J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 98-100; W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist. Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1969), 42f.

[234] The first hint of the rejection of Jesus because of their lack of understanding occurs in 1:14. The arrest of John is described in the following way: Meta de to paradoqhnai ("handed over" or "delivered up") ton Iwannhn. In Mark's Gospel, this verb is developed as a technical term to be used in the parallel between the rejection of John and Jesus. Mark uses the same word later when he speaks of Jesus who is delivered up by the power of evil men. The use of the term corresponds to a similar use with allusion to the Son of Man, i.e. Jesus (9:31; 10:33). John declares Jesus' coming for salvation (1:7) and John is put in prison (1:14); then Jesus announces the gospel of God (1:14) and he also is handed over to his adversaries (9:31; 10:33). The passive in 14:21 follows at the end of Jesus' statement to the disciples, "One of you will hand me over" (14:18), and it is modified by the clause "he man (Judas) through whom the Son of Man is being handed over." Furthermore, in 10:33 Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed to the chief priest and scribes, i.e. they will scorn him and will hand him over to the Gentile. The prediction is fulfilled as Judas Iscariot delivers Jesus up to them (14:10-11, 41b-47). The handing over of John and Jesus is attributed to the hardness hearts of their opponents (3:6).

[235] Hooker, *Mark*, 272.

[236] Lane, *Mark*, 414.

reject them. By not allowing them to know the origin of his authority, Jesus refuses to answer their question (11:33). "Jesus has thus masterfully exercised and demonstrated his own superior, divine authority over the Jewish leaders who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge and believe in the divine origin of John's baptism and hence of Jesus' authority" (11:33).[237]

The Opponents' Failure to Answer

The authorities are irretrievably trapped, and they are finally reduced to uttering a falsehood, which ironically becomes true in a most profound sense. They answer Jesus' brilliant riposte with the statement, "we do not know" (ouk oidamen 11:33). Through giving an elusive answer and failing to answer Jesus' challenge, the religious leaders forfeit their opportunity to force Jesus to indict himself, and are shamed before the crowd. Ostensibly, there to protect the temple as God's house from arbitrary acts of unauthorized persons and to take action against just such persons, these representatives of the Sanhedrin and the ranking priests indicate their true colours.[238] Rather than defend the temple, they elected to protect themselves. In doing so, they exposed their own selfish concerns and betrayed their ability to respond to and for God, who confronted them in the persons of John and Jesus.[239] The result is that their answer demonstrates their unbelief.

Mark's explanation of their discussion points to the fact that he believed them to be intentionally refusing to recognize the truth. Jesus' refusal to answer is typical of the way in which he asserts authority throughout Mark's Gospel.[240] The use of historical present tense, legousin in 11:33 may indicate Mark's interpretive style in his own style to emphasize the embarrassment evident in the Sanhedrin's answer,[241] because he believed them to be deliberately refusing to acknowledge the truth.[242] By the same token, the matching present historical tense (legw 'I say') plus the emphatic personal pronoun (egw) emphasizes Jesus' authority in refusing to answer them.[243]

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[237] Hooker, *Mark*, 233.
[238] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 207.
[239] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 207.
[240] Hooker, *Mark*, 272.
[241] Gundry, *Mark*, 658.
[242] Hooker, *Mark*, 272.
[243] Gundry, *Mark*, 658.

"By what authority I am doing these things" brings us back to the original question of Jesus' authority to do "these things," in the temple precincts. The dialogue has indicated Jesus to have an implied authority in the way he counters and responds to the temple authorities.[244] This is the same authority implied in Jesus' ministry to sinners, the sick, and the possessed, which Mark emphasizes at the outset of his Gospel in 1:22, 27; 2:10. Therefore, the readers know that this implied authority gives Jesus the right to do "these things."[245] But Jesus refused to respond the opponents' question about his authority posed by the ruling priests, scribes, and elders. They say, "we do not know," implying unbelief; Jesus says, "I won't tell," implying that he has the authority to refuse the temple authorities. The one question, the question of Jesus' authority to do these things, is bound up with the more fundamental question, namely what is the nature of the authority that marks Jesus' ministry? Mark moves to this broader question by adding the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants (12:1-12), which emphasizes who Jesus is, and who the religious authorities are, from the divine perspective (12:12b).[246]

In reducing Jesus' opponents to silence by means of the counter-question and its dilemma, the narrative demonstrates Jesus' superior wit and suggests that, just as John's baptism was surely from God, so Jesus' authority to do 'these things' also was from God, Thus, Jesus evades a direct confrontation with his powerful opponents (yet wins the debate), and still indicates that God is the real source of his authority.[247] Thus, the one who walks imperiously around the temple, who declares himself having authority to cleanse it, who proclaims the foundation of a new community of faith, and whom the Jewish religious leaders seek to destroy, is none other than the Son of God.

2.3.3 Summary

In 2:1-12 and 11:27-33, Mark depicts the antagonists' unbelief in their reaction to Jesus' authority. In 2:1-12, the scribes refuse to accept Jesus' authority indicated in his forgiving of sins, while in 11:27-33 the priestly leaders refuse to accept his authority revealed in his sovereignty over the temple. In both narratives Mark demonstrates that their disbelief lies in their conscious refusal to accept the clear

[244] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208.
[245] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208.
[246] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208-9.
[247] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 335.

implication of what they perceive, rather than in a failure to perceive the truth.

The authorities of the temple do not accept Jesus' authority, proved by his action because, according to their recognition of the law, what Jesus declares himself to be and to do, which includes authority over the temple, was to them blasphemy. Jesus, because of his action in the temple courts, was regarded as a dishonourable person. They refuse to believe in Jesus' authority over the temple, as this authority belongs exclusively to God.

In 11:27-33, the reason why official hostility to Jesus comes into full-blown view right at the beginning of his ministry (2:6-10) becomes evident: eschatological initiative had already taken root before Jesus' work began. A rejection by the Jewish religious leaders to believe John and his message of repentance was the first step on the way to the passion of Jesus (11:30-32). And it is at the last moment of his passion that we find the crudest exhibition of unbelief within Mark's Gospel.

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities eventually leads to his death. In the first passion prediction (8:31), Jesus says that he will be rejected by the Jewish religious authorities. This episode dramatically fulfils Jesus' prediction. The Jewish religious leaders fully understand the implications of Jesus' teaching and deeds. Nevertheless, due to their hardened hearts originating from 3:5, they do not believe his divine authority and look for a way to kill him (11:18). Earlier they took council how they might kill Jesus (3:6), now it is only a question of deciding the convenient situation.

2. 4 UNBELIEF BENETH THE CROSS (15:27-32)

Jesus begins his ministry in Mark by calling people to repentant faith in view of the dawning the Kingdom (1:14-15). He ends his ministry, however, with his opponents assembled beneath the cross deridingly offering faith in the Kingdom in return for a distorted display of divine power (Mark 15). The scene at the cross represents for Mark both the ultimate repudiation of the gospel proclaimed in 1:14-15 and the clearest demonstration of the paradoxical relationship that exists

between faith, power, and powerlessness.[248]

What Jesus predicted finally takes place in Mark 15. Several times he had foretold his passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) to uncomprehending disciples. Now he is crucified, the most terrible, painful, shameful form of execution practiced in late antiquity. Mark's description of the crucifixion concentrates on the mockery of Jesus. In this pericope, this is followed by threefold mocking of Jesus at the cross, by bystanders, the chief priests with the scribes, and by those who were crucified with him. In the dramatic scene of the crucified King on the cross, Mark offers a vignette of unbelief.

2.4.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The passion narrative has two thematically connected high points: the trial scene in 14:53-65 and the crucifixion description in 15:20b-41, both of which the unbelief reference we are interested in occurs.[249] The crucifixion account is part of the larger rhetorical unit of chapter 15,[250] which is arranged into the temporal format of a single day divided into three one-hour three-hour periods (15:1, 25, 33, 34, 42).

In Mark 15, each of the described incidents leading up to the death of Jesus is followed by a mockery,[251] representing a kind of 'anti-confession' of Jesus' true messianic identity: trial (15:1-15)/ soldiers' mockery (15:16-20a); crucifixion (15: 20b-27)/ the religious leaders' mockery (15:29-32); darkness and cry of

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[248] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.
[249] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.
[250] F. J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 21-34.
[251] LXX Isaiah 50:6 indicates a mockery scene by using the terms, rapisma and emptusatwn, which language demonstrates a great deal of similarity to the figure used in the Markan narratives (14:65)—Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel passion Narratives* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 139. That Isa. 50:6 influenced the mockery motif in Mark 14-15 is suggested by the use of familiar terms that link this verse with the mockery of Christ—C. H. Dood, *Historical Tradition in the Forth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 40. The term rapisma occurs only in Isa. 50:6 in the LXX and only in contexts related to the mockery of Christ in the New Testament (Mk. 14:65; Mt. 26:67; Jn. 18:22; 19:3). The word emptusatwn in Isa. 50:6 is used in the NT when Jesus is mocked, especially in Mark (Mk. 10:34; 14:56; 15:19; cf. Mt 26:67; Lk. 18:32)-Dood, *Historical Tradition*, 88, 139.

dereliction (15:33-34)/ bystanders mockery (15:35-36).[252] Our principle interest is with the second mockery scene, which Mark locates between the third and sixth hours (15:25, 33). The scene is bracketed by two allusions to those crucified with Jesus (15:27, 32), and like the rest of the crucifixion story, is highly formalized to bring out the primitive fulfilment of the Scripture in what happens Jesus. Allusions to Psalm 22 especially contribute to the Markan characterization of Jesus here as the suffering righteous one.[253]

Beneath the cross there are three groups of characters whose mockery rehearses the main issue of the trial scene, and indeed the outstanding features of Jesus' ministry as a whole. The first group is simply depicted as spectators. They scorned Jesus as temple-destroyer. Their appearance in the same scene as chief priests and scribes is strongly evocative of the false witness at Jesus' trial (14:56-9), and their function here may be similar (Cf. Pss 27:12; 35:11).[254] Their scornful words and actions end with a challenge to Jesus to save himself and descend from the cross. The second group is identified as the chief priests and the scribes (15:31). They denied that the crucified one could save himself, in contrast to his saving of others. They also made witnessing his descent from the cross a condition for their faith in him as messianic king. The third group had no part in the dialogue. However the fact that Jesus' two fellow victims relinquished gave up their unity in pain with him, also to insult him, expresses the extent of his aloneness.[255]

Now, the derisory offer of faith in the dying messiah is placed only the mouths of the chief priests and scribes, and thus represents the climax of the theme of unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders. However, because the implied author expressly likens the mockery of the first and second groups of ridiculers, and they both require the same self-serving miracle, we may consider the dialogue as a whole as constitutive of Mark's representation of unbelief in this crucifixion scene.[256]

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[252] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.
[253] J. Reumann, "Psalm 22 at the Cross. Lament Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ," *Int* 28 (1974): 39-58; Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus,* 129.
[254] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.
[255] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.
[256] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.

2.4.2 Exegetical Perspective on the Portrayal of Unbelief

2.4.2.1 Crucifixion in Terms of Honour and Shame

Some scholars argue that Jesus' hostility against the temple caused his subsequent arrest, trials and crucifixion.[257] However, we should not overlook Mark's reference to the fact that the crowd, who honoured Jesus in the Galilee mission, now was honouring him again in the Jerusalem mission (11:8-11, 18; 12:12, 37; 14:1-2). This, of course, was a major threat to the honour of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. In order to protect their honour, they sent some messengers to question Jesus regarding the payment of taxes to the emperor (Mk 12:13-17), the resurrection (12:18-27) and the first commandment (12:28-34).

In order to protect their honour, through crucifixion, the opponents attempted to establish Jesus as shame. The shaming embraces of social, judicial and political areas of society, of which political shaming is of importance for our pericope. From the point of view of political shaming, Bechtel notes that it was especially shameful to be captured by the enemy, or for that matter, by anybody.[258] To shame captured people further, they were stripped of their clothes; nakedness exposed people's sexual parts publicly. Their nakedness was also symbolic of the defencelessness of their nation and demonstrative of its failure to achieve victory. Other common shaming techniques used to disgrace captives further were to make them a laughingstock, or by insulting, mocking, and scorning them.[259] At this point, for the protection of their own honour, the opponents refuse to accept Jesus, but rather shame him through the crucifixion and verbal abuse.

The people, who initially gave Jesus honour when he moved into Jerusalem, turned against him, because Jesus' honour was removed the crucifixion (11:9-10). It was a disappointment for them, because they have actually believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he would change everything when he moved into Jerusalem. That is the reason for why they sang for him. But, when he was

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[257] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 339; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 360; J. S. McLaren, *Power and Politics in Palestine: The Jews and the Governing of their Land 100 BC-AD 70* (Sheffield: JOST Press, 1991), 99.

[258] L. N. Bechtel, "Shame as Sanction of Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *JSOT* 49 (1991): 54-70.

[259] Bechtel, "Shame," 72.

captured, his honour, which they gave him, was lost. Therefore, they could not accept him as the Messiah and advocated that he should be crucified as a blasphemer.

The most obvious biblical quotation in Mark's crucifixion narrative is from Psalm 22, which is customarily classified as a lament. Psalm 22 is the prayer of a righteous person who has suffered greatly, but has been vindicated, all the while retaining and being sustained by trust in God's power and care.[260] Its first part (22:1-21a) alternates between complaints about various sufferings and confessions of trust in God.[261] The second part (22:21b-31) presumes a mood of vindication, thanksgiving, and celebration.[262] The use of Psalm 22 reminds us that for Mark and early Christians Jesus suffered and died "according to the Scripture" (1 Cor 15:3). Recourse to the OT Scriptures (Lev 24:14 and Num 15:35-36) enabled them to make sense out of the cruel and shameful death Jesus suffered on the cross.[263]

The physical sufferings of a crucified person were intense and indeed horrible. Perhaps Mark's literary strategy of sparse and 'objective' reporting together with understatement serve to make the point more effectively than a detailed and graphic description of Jesus physical suffering (exposure to the hot sun, pain from the nails, the gradual and progressive suffocation, and so on) would have achieved.[264] However, Mark also helps the reader to move beyond the physical sufferings of Jesus to recognize what was perhaps an even greater suffering that Jesus endured: misunderstanding and dismissed by practically everyone.[265]

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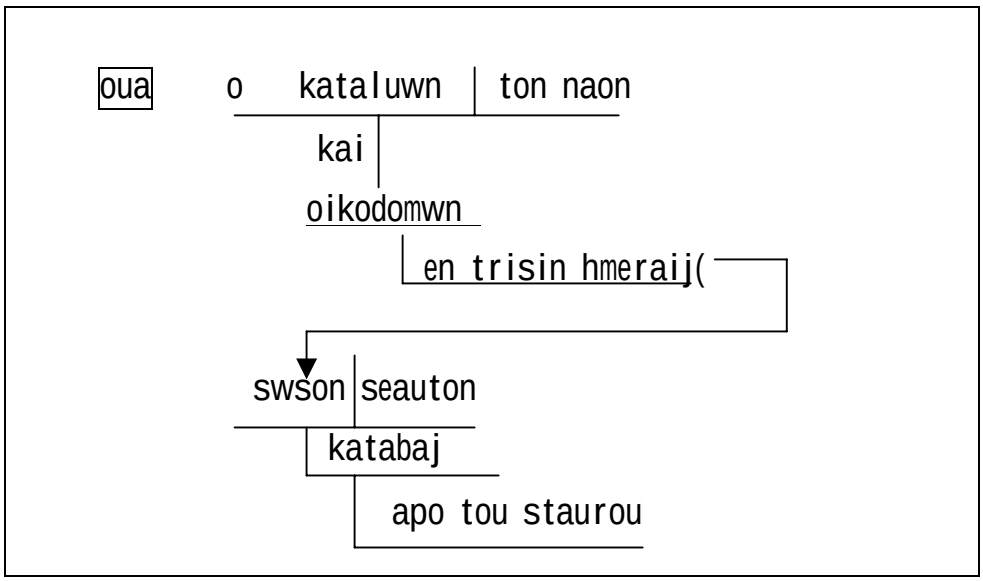
[260] J. A. Fitzmyer, "Crucifixion in ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament," *CBQ* 40 (1979): 493-513.
[261] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.
[262] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.
[263] B. K. Blount, "A Social-Rhetorical Analysis of Simon of Cyrene: Mark 15:21 and Its Parallels," *Semeia* 64 (1994): 171-98. The Roman orator Cicero referred to crucifixion as a "most cruel and disgusting penalty" and "the extreme and ultimate penalty for a slave" (*In Verrem* 2.5.64.66). Josephus called it "the most pitiable of deaths" (*War* 7. 203). Even Paul conceded that proclaiming Christ crucified was "a stumbling block to Jew and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23), and the author of Hebrews celebrated Jesus as the one who "endured the cross, disregarding its shame (Heb 12:2).
[264] K. E. Bailey, "The Fall of Jerusalem and Mark's Account of the Cross," *ExpTim* 102 (1991): 102-5.
[265] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 446.

The theme of misunderstanding and rejection runs through Mark's Gospel: the plot initiated by the Pharisees and Herodians (3:6), the unbelief indicated by the people of Jesus' home town (6:1-6), the misunderstanding and obtuseness displayed by the disciples (8:14-21) opposition from the leadership in Jerusalem (11:1-12:44), and the final abandonment by his own disciples (14:43-52). On the cross Jesus has no friends; he is solitary righteous man closely surrounded on all sides by opponents.[266]

2.4.2.2 Two Aspects of Unbelief

The syntactic structure of Mark 15:29



Roman practice was to crucify criminals in popular places, by the roadside, where bystanders would see. Mark's description reflects this scenario. Shaking[267] their heads the passers-by mock Jesus for his alleged threats against the temple: "Aha! You who are going to destroy the temple and built it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross" (15:29b-30).[268] The unbelief of the

[266] Cf. T. E. Schmidt, "Mark 15:16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession," *NTS* 41 (1995): 1-18.

[267] "Shaking the head" is a relatively common OT metaphor for mockery (see II Kings 19:21; Job 16:4; Sir 13:7; Ps. 109: 25)—Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1966), 591. The shaking of their heads may indicate unbelief and rejection (Ps. 109:25). Another kind of mockery of the righteous sufferer is the offer of a drink (Ps. 9:21). The significance of "shaking heads" and "the offer of drink" is that they represent the action of mockery.

[268] Cf. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 647. This echoes Ps 22:8, "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads." The mocking of the bystanders is like the mocking enemies in Ps 22:8, who ridicule the good man's hope for

scoffers in 15:27-32 has two aspects: their implied denial of the eschatological implications, which they know Jesus lays claim to, and their demand for compelling proof as a ground for accepting his claim.

Rejection of Eschatological Significance

The words of the scoffers serve to confirm, albeit with ironic intent, that they clearly apprehend the eschatological status, which Jesus has claimed for himself during the course of his ministry.[269] They scorned him as a messianic pretender (15:32) because they knew from the trial that he considered himself to be the royal Messiah. The scoffers' denunciation of Jesus as one who would destroy and rebuild the temple (15:29) recalls of course, the charge brought against Jesus in the trial before the Sanhedrin (14:58). The point to note is that behind the accusation lies in an implicit recognition of Jesus scandalous claim to sovereignty over the temple (11:28) and to the right to establish a new temple order (11:17).[270] The scornful reference to Jesus' saving others (15:30) discloses an apprehension of his therapeutic power (3:4; 5:23, 28; 6:56; 10:52) and of the intended role in attesting his message of the beneficiaries of ultimate salvation.[271]

The verb blasfhmew echoes the charge brought against Jesus by his adversaries (3:28, 29; 7:22; 14:64. cf. 2:7). In these contexts, the word "blasphemy" is used loosely to refer to inappropriate and offensive speech.[272] This word is used almost exclusively in both Greek and biblical literature to express evil speech against God; by implication the derision hurled at Jesus was blasphemy against God—making the chief priests and Scribes guilty of the very thing Jesus was condemned for by the Sanhedrin (14:64).[273] Mark may use this

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God's justification (Hurtado, *Mark*, 275). The Psalmist accounts for the sufferer's physical affliction that is made worse by mockery from his opponents, who are probably to be regarded as the ungodly, in general. After mockery the sufferer, the opponents divide his garments (22:18). The widespread custom of dividing the condemned criminal's clothes would suggest the possibility that an execution scene is envisaged here and that the sufferer sees his enemies already distributing his clothes in anticipation of his death (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 [London: Purnell &Sons Ltd., 1972], 191).

[269] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.
[270] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.
[271] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.
[272] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 443.
[273] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 473.

word to mean simply 'to deride,' but he may also intend an ironic contrast with the blasphemy charge levelled by the high priest against Jesus at the ending of his initial questioning (14:64). The high priest reviled Jesus for making a ridicule of God's power by claiming to be God's Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, when, in his view, Jesus was only a disgraceful wretch.[274] Just as the Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus' authority in synagogue and during his trial, now the bystanders also refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah prior to the cross.[275]

The insult, "save yourself, and come down from the cross" (katabaj[276] apo tou staurou), reaches deeper into the centre of Mark's Gospel. There is a promptly obvious surface logic to the ridiculers' words. In ancient philosophy, words were proven true if they became visible through deeds, which means whenever Jesus said something, he should have been able to prove his words through his deeds.[277] Thus, it is expected of the Messiah who claims to destroy and restore the temple, to save his own life. For the mockers the fact of Jesus' crucifixion was definitive proof that his prophecies about the temple (see 11:15-17; 13:2; 14:58) were false.[278]

However, the surface logic is of a deep misunderstanding of Jesus and his message confronted before in Mark's narrative.[279] When Peter heard Jesus' first

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[274] Garland, *Mark*, 590.
[275] Evans, *Mark 8:26-16:20*, 505.
[276] Some verbs compounded with the preposition kata run throughout the central portion of the crucifixion story to contrast Jesus' view of salvation and his opponents' view (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 282). In 15:29-30 the bystanders insult Jesus by insisting that as one who could tear *down* (kataluwn) the temple, he ought to be able to save himself by coming *down* (katabaj) from the cross. Similarly, in 15:32 the chief priests and scribes mock him to come *down* (katabatw) from the cross so they can see and believe. Even later, after Jesus' cry from the cross, spectators expect to see divine aid in the form of Elijah take Jesus down (kataelein) off the cross (15:36). In the blind view of the opponents, what is required of Jesus to save himself would be that he come down from the cross to rejoin the human world (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 282). However, Jesus' cry in 15:36 means that his sincere desire is to rejoin God in the divine realm instead of being left down in the human world.
[277] Cf. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 275-76; Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 197-209.
[278] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 443.
[279] D. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1984), 119.

passion prediction, he had tried to restrain him (8:32). So, Jesus gathered the disciples and taught them the fact that "whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's, will save it" (oj gar ean qelh thn yuchn autou swsai apolesei authn\ oj dV an apolesei thn yuchn autou eneken emou kai tou euaggeliou swsei authn 8:35]. This kind of logic, take up the cross and lose life to save it, directly contradicts the demand of the scoffers: "save yourself and come down from the cross."

The mocking challenge for Jesus to come down from the cross is in essence the same temptation that he faced in Gethsemane, that is, to avoid 'the cup' of suffering.[280] At Gethsemane Jesus made the costly decision, which he now fulfils, to do the will of God rather than his own will. As Senior argues, the effort to separate Jesus from his cross through a different perception of his authority and mission is an alien spirit against which the whole Gospel of Mark is mobilized.[281]

The chief priests and the scribes come next in the procession of scorn (15:31-32). The alliance against Jesus has systematically identified with the chief priests, firstly with the leading role of the high priest at the trial (14:53-65). Then, before Pilate, it was the chief priests who blamed him (15:3). At the cross, the chief priests with the scribes, mock him to one another in the same way as the bystanders (15:31).[282] Their objective is made to publicly shame Jesus. Likewise, the mockery is the centre of Mark's description of Jesus' crucifixion.[283] The first articulation of their mockery is similar to the logic of the foregoing mockery of the bystanders, but moves from Jesus' threat against the temple to his power to save: "He saved others, he cannot save himself" (allouj eswsen(eauton ou dunatai swsai\ 15:31). While the mockery of the bystanders concludes with the challenge to Jesus to save himself, the mockery of the religious leaders begins with the taunt that he cannot do this. Both scoffers conclude with the same taunt, "Come down from the cross." The religious leaders' taunt casts doubt on the actuality and worth of Jesus' previous actions for saving other.[284] Since he is

[280] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 474.
[281] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 119.
[282] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 473.
[283] Painter, *Mark*, 204.
[284] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 505. The verb "save" used here is linked to healing

unable to save himself, he probably has saved no one else, no matter what is rumoured about him. Now, his opponents refuse to accept his power as Messiah. His incapacity to save himself thus cancels the legitimacy of his mission, which was to save Israel.[285]

However, the Jewish religious leaders' taunt is, in the eyes of the reader, a profound ironic truth. If Jesus was to accomplish his redemptive mission for people, he could not save himself from the crucifixion appointed by God (cf. 8:31). Jesus' death is a ransom for others (10:45), and exactly in order to save these others he must not and cannot save himself. If he wanted to save others, then it was true, he had to give up his own life as substitute. The action and words at the Passover meal had concentrated Jesus' whole mission of salvation in a similar way and had bound them to his death: "this is my body…this is my blood… poured out for many" (cf. 14:22-25).[286] The actuality of salvation is not directed toward Jesus himself, but toward others.

Their unbelief then lies not in a failure or inability to discern Jesus' potential significance, but in a conscious rejection of him and of his work. For this reason Mark portrays their diatribe as blasphemy (15:29), a culpable violation of God's honour. Ironically, they are thus doing the very thing for which they condemned Jesus (2:7; 14:64), and so bring condemnation on themselves (3:28).

Unbelieving Demand for Compelling Proof

The other aspect of the description of unbelief beneath the cross is the demand for immediate, visible, irrefutable proof as the condition of faith. In Mark 15:32, the religious leaders suggested that if Jesus would come down from the cross, then they would 'see and believe.'[287] Mark's Gospel lays a special emphasis on

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in the Gospel, expressing the liberating transformation effected by Jesus' power (Lane, *Mark*, 569-70). Several individuals - the haemorrhaging woman (5:23, 28), the sick in the villages around Gennesaret (6:56), and blind Bartimaeus (10:52) - are saved by Jesus. These salvation experiences are only a few of the many other expressions of compassionate strength in the Gospel where, although the word is not used, Jesus saves broken humanity (Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 120).

[285] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 505.

[286] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 120.

[287] The logic of seeing and believing echoes the description in Wis. 2:17-18: "Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;

faith (which implies both to understand and to obey) by means of repeated use of visual reference and terminology. Such references were evidently made possible by an abundance of material, like healing, the sea episodes, and teachings related to the motif of 'seeing' (6:45-52; 8:14-21; 7:31-37; 8:22-26; 9:14-29; 10:46-52; ch.13). 'Seeing' introduced in Mk 4:12 is considered to be a 'grand metaphor,' which repeatedly appeared in the Gospel that followed.[288] The references to 'seeing' in either story or discourse, have more than mere literary meanings, as Fowler argues: "In 4:12, the reader can surely figure out minimally that this comment is suggesting that someone who thinks that he 'sees', really does not perceive anything at all…"[289] The metaphor is an essential part of the language Mark uses for faith in Jesus. The parables, as veiled speech, are mysterious to those who reject Jesus, so that they may see, but not understand (cf. 4:11-12).

They will never be able to see and believe in Jesus as he truly is, unless they perceive him on the cross. The turn of phrase in this scorn, "that we may see and believe," is unique to Mark and is a direct preparation for the explosion of events, which will occur on the other side of Jesus 'death.[290] What the religious leaders did not see, a Roman centurion will see (15:39).

Because the Jewish religious leaders could not recognise Jesus as the King of Israel, their next demand was that a miracle should be performed. The demand that he should "come down …from the cross, so that we may see and believe" (15:32) indicates a false conception of the nature of faith, which is not dependent on miracles, but indeed an essential condition for the people.[291]

Their demand would recall to the reader/hearer the Pharisees' demand for a sign in 8:11-13. In both cases, the demand for a particular sign is itself an expression of their unbelief. In Mark 8, the implied author emphasizes this through placing the Pharisees' words immediately after the second feeding of the crowd: they

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for it the righteous man is God's son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries" (See. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506).

[288] R. M. Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Direction and in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 48 (1989) 127 in 115-34.

[289] Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Direction," 127; Cf. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 206.

[290] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 121.

[291] Hooker, *Mark*, 374.

refuse to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and demand special signs continually. “They demand a miracle, a sign, upon which to found their faith, but faith is not something an action of Jesus can give to them.”[292] Faith is not the result of signs and miracles, but a condition for them.[293] The faith Mark wills for his readers is not compelled by sight, but evoked by the person of Jesus, especially in his sacrifice on the cross.[294] In their request, they expose their profound ignorance of the nature of faith. If the people could not understand and accept the fact that Jesus was crucified for others, they could accordingly not believe and accept Jesus to be the Messiah.

The taunt of the Jewish religious leaders assumes that salvation of self is the greatest good.[295] However, according to Mark it is on the cross that Jesus is claimed to be the King of Israel and that he is confirmed as Messiah. To come down to save himself in fact is to deny the principle established by Jesus in 8:35 that it is by losing one’s life that one gains it. Although the crucifixion seems to contradict the Jewish expectation about what the way of the Messiah would be when he appeared, Mark wants his readers to realize that Jesus truly is the king of Israel, the Son of God (cf. 1:1). The motif that the Son of God would experience crucifixion was repulsive and difficult to recognize (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25).[296]

The Jewish religious leaders would not realize that Jesus would die as a ransom for many people (10:45) or that his body would be broken and his blood poured for the many (14:22-25). Thus, they unbelievingly demanded a visible proof that Jesus comes down from the cross. If one does not really understand the irony of what Jesus has done, one would not be able to understand who Jesus is. He is actually everything upside down, the observe of what ordinary people would expect to be the way in which one should respond to things by an approach of service and sacrifice as being the way in which God illustrates his power. If a person cannot understand or accept this irony, they cannot become a Christian, and consequently, they continue their unbelief.

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[292] Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 182.
[293] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 474.
[294] Cf. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 61-74.
[295] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506.
[296] Hurtado, *Mark*, 266-67.

The unbelief of the religious leaders, therefore, is a combination of correctly seeing Jesus' implied claims to messianic dignity and yet failing to see God's own validation of them.[297] The cross itself is not the primary stumbling block, because it is their unbelief that put Jesus there in the first place. However, the cross is a dramatic symbol of the mainspring of their denial of Jesus as Messiah.[298]

2.4.3 Summary

The whole picture beneath the cross turns on the issue of power - Jesus' power to destroy the temple, and his power to save others, yet not to save himself. At the heart of official unbelief, as Mark treats it here is a scorn for the ethically and soteriologically qualified use of power by Jesus. Jesus' opponents can neither accept that God's rule is evidenced in his works of restoration, his saving of others (cf. 2:1-12; 3:1-6), nor in his inability to save himself. They consider his voluntary self-giving (10:45; 15:4), his powerless dependence on God (14:36), as a fatal weakness and they appeal to his apparent importance to discredit his claims. They thus evaluate divine power purely in human, self-serving terms, according to their own standards of practice (e.g. 11:18; 12:1-9; 14:43, 48f; cf. 14:65 and 15:19).[299] They are therefore closed to faith, since Mark describes faith as the possession solely of those who recognize their own powerlessness and who accept the demand it brings to relinquish conventional notions of rule and power (e.g. 10:42-45).[300]

In relation to this kind of 'observation,' due to their hardened hearts, the opponents never saw God's redemption as becoming a reality through Jesus' death (cf. 3:5; 4:11-12). Accordingly they thought of Jesus' implied declaration as blasphemy (15:29), a culpable infringement of God's honour. Thus, they refused to accept his claim when on trial, and mocked him when on the cross. Since their eyes and ears were closed, and their hearts were hardened, the opponents did not accept that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. They consequently refused to acknowledge the passion and death of Jesus what it truly was.

2.5 HARDNESS OF HEART AMONG THE OPPONENT OF JESUS

[297] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 205.
[298] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 205.
[299] Matera, *Kingship of Jesus*, 96.
[300] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 206.

All characters in Mark's narrative have the opportunity to respond to Jesus' message (1:15). Mark describes the Jewish religious leaders in a consistently negative light. He builds his characterization on their unbelief toward Jesus. They refuse to believe in his authority (1:22; 2:10; 11:28) and accuse him of blasphemy (2:7; 14:64). Due to their hardness of heart (3:5), they cannot believe in Jesus' identity as Son of God in spite of his many miracles. Consequently, the opponents are 'blind' to the proclamation of Jesus.

The language of 'hardness of heart'[301] in Jesus' teaching was not a creation of either Mark or Jesus. When Mark employed the concept of 'hardness of heart,' based on Jesus' sayings, for his unique purpose, not only was the concept already known in first century Palestine, but also it had extended past history. The language originating from the OT has been repeatedly echoed in the process of the transmission or actualisation of the biblical or the Jewish traditions. Through an ongoing interpretive process of development of the Jewish Christian tradition, the language has echoes in the Jewish literature of the first century. In his Gospel, Mark seems to emphasize the language of 'hardness of heart,' which was commonly known within the larger Jewish context in the first century, to indicate the problem of unbelief (3:6; 6:52; 10:5; 8:17-18). The language was used in Mark's Gospel in order to attribute a reason for the opponents' disbelief. The language of 'hardness of heart' as applied to the opponents may also be signalling their presumed end, namely divine judgment. In this section we will

[301] The terms in the NT, such as sklhrothj, pwrwsij, and pacunw express obduracy when linked with the word kardia. These terms are comparatively rare in the NT. Nevertheless, they occur throughout the Synoptic Gospels (10 times out of the 26 occurrences in the NT), particularly in Mark (5 times). They occur 4 times in Acts, 6 times in Paul, 4 times in Hebrews, and once each in Jude and James; sklhrokardia (Mt 19:8; Mk 10:5; 16:14), sklhrothj (Rom 2:5), sklhrotrachloi (Ac 7:51), sklhroj (Jas 3:4; Ju 15; Jn 6:60; Mt 25:24; Ac 26:14), sklhrunw (Ac 19:9; Rom 9:18 Heb 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7), pwrow (Mk 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; Jn 12:40; Rom 11:7, 25; 2 Co 3:14; Eph 4:18), pacunw (Mt 13:15; Ac 28:27). In Rom 2:5, sklhrothj denotes hardness as a human quality, in this example describing self-righteous and stubborn Jews. The word pwrow is used in Mark's Gospel to refer to the hardening of Jesus' disciples (Mk. 6:52; 8:17), while the verbal noun pwrwsij is applied to the Jews (Mk. 3:5; 10:5). Concerning the disciples, the terminology warns against a relapse into Jewish modes of thought. Figuratively, pacunw denotes "to make impervious, insensitive, dull" (Mt. 13:15; Ac. 28:27). In both passages, the terminology is quoted from Isa. 6:10 (here the quotation is used as in the LXX).

examine the idea of hardness of heart in other gospels, some passages in Mark's Gospel that deal with the issues of hardness of heart among Jesus' opponents, and the allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:11-12.

2.5.1 The Idea of Hardness of Heart in Other Gospels[302]

In Matthew's Gospel, as an answer for the disciples' question concerning the parables, Jesus says: "he answered and said to them, 'because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'" (13:11). In Matthew's view, Jesus has a positive view of the disciples.[303] In contrast, because of dullness of heart (epacunqh gar h kardia tou laou toutou), those who are not Jesus' disciples are further bewildered further by Jesus' parables, and so fall deeper into a lack of knowledge (13:13,15).[304] In order to expose the outsider's unbelief and punishment, Matthew formally quotes Isa. 6:9-10 of the LXX. The quotation corroborates the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the people will hear and see, but never perceive, because their hearts have become dull (13:14). However, unlike LXX Isaiah 6:9-10, the prophecy is fulfilled in them who are not Jesus' disciples, i.e. the outsider (13:11, 14), but not the disciples like Israel in LXX Isaiah 6:9-10. In Mark's context the outsider's hardening is an already existing condition, not one brought on by Jesus. Accordingly, in Matthew, the disciples are not the subjects of the hardening, but the author describes Jesus' opponents as the subjects of the

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[302] During the last century and a half, the two-document hypothesis has come to dominate synoptic studies. The theory argues that "Mark was the first Gospel written and that it was used independently by Matthew and Luke" (R. H. Stein, "Synoptic Problem," *Dictionary of Jesus*, 787). It was argued that along with Mark, Matthew and Luke used another common source which has been called "Q." According to the theory, the materials in Matthew and Luke are developed theologically. "Mark, for example, uses the term "Lord" for Jesus six times, but in Matthew it is used not only in the same six instances, but in an additional twenty-four. Mark lacks this term" (Stein, "Synoptic Problem," 789). However, the term "hardness of heart" is used four times in Mark's narrative, but in Matthew and Luke it is never used. The authorship of synoptic gospels lies in the creation of something, which did not previously exist, a single, co-ordinated, written narrative about the earthly Jesus, indeed the gospels form themselves (R. Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in Stuhlmacher, P., ed., *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, WUNT 28 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983], 213).

[303] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 109

[304] B. van Elderen, 'The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17,' *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longeneker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 185-86

hardening, especially the Pharisees and the scribes.[305] Hence, because of dullness of heart the opponents will see, but never understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, they never enter the kingdom.

In Luke's Gospel, although the distinctive vocabulary of hardness is not used, the author assumes the general idea of hardness. The opponents of Jesus, as the scribes and the Pharisees who plot his death, are delineated as being filled with folly (6:11; anoia).[306] Thus, they oppose Jesus' saying about what is lawful on the Sabbath (6:9), and his miraculous power (6:10). Accordingly, the 'rest' who are not Jesus' disciples (which includes the scribes and the Pharisees), are not privileged with comprehension of kingdom truths (8:5-8). Unlike Mark, in Luke's gospel only a softened version of the hardening idea is applied to the disciples.[307] They are unable to understand fully until the resurrected Jesus explains the scripture to them.[308] In 24:11, the disciples do not believe the report of the woman who had returned from the empty tomb. The two on the road to Emmaus do not perceive the raised Jesus because 'their eyes are kept from recognizing him' (24:16). Thus, after breaking bread, Jesus said them "how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (24:25). Then, Jesus explains the scriptures (24:25-26) and opens their hearts to understand the scriptures (24:45-47). In Luke's Gospel, the disciples' spiritual incomprehension is described as temporary, and primarily on account of their disappointment and puzzlement following Jesus' death (see 24:19-24).[309] According to Luke, Jesus does not rebuke the disciples for their hardness but he opens their minds (ton noun) to be able to understand the Scriptures.

In John's Gospel, an extensive theme of incomprehension[310] is facilitated by the hardness of heart. The world and its own did not recognize and accept the Word,

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[305] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 112: "That the Scribes and Pharisees are considered obdurate elsewhere in Matthew is plainly evident by their castigation as 'blind guides of the blind' (see 15:14; 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26).
[306] The frenzy and loss of reason which is caused by extreme excitement (A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke,* ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1975], 170).
[307] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 120.
[308] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 120.
[309] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.
[310] For full discussion of this theme see H. Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1968).

although it was in the world (1:10-11). The Jews did not believe Jesus' declaration about raising up his 'temple' in three days (2:19-21). Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, did not understand Jesus' saying about being born again (3:1-5). Jesus' opponents did not believe that he was telling them about his Father (8:27). Despite his confirming signs that attended it, the people did not believe in Jesus' ministry (12:37-43). In 12:40, John quotes Isa. 6:10, "He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts**...**" (12:40; Tetuflwken autwn touj ofqalmouj kai epwrwsen autwn thn kardian), in order to explain the people's failure to believe in Jesus. They fail to believe in Jesus because God hardens their heart as Isaiah says. In contrast with the synoptic gospels, in 12:40 God is expressly called an ultimate agent of the hardening. The evangelist never applies the concept of the hardness of heart to the disciples.

In the other gospels except Mark's Gospel, the concept of hardness of heart is used in order to indicate the opponent's unbelieving rejection of Jesus and to predict a punishment for it. The concept appears in the gospels as an explanation of why the people have not understood the parables of the kingdom (in the synoptic gospels) and Jesus' signs (in John's Gospel). However, in contrast to the other evangelists Mark uniquely applies the concept of hardness of heart to the disciples in relation to their unbelief (6:52; 8:17-18).[311] Hence, this concept is very significant as a theme in Mark's Gospel, especially with regard to the unbelief of the disciples.

2.5.2 The Withered Hand and the Withered Heart (Mark 3:1-6)

[311] In particular, Mark employs pepwrwmenh and pepwrwmenhn in order to describe the hardening. It should be noted that in the passive voice there is an agent. These passive words are probably 'divine or theological passive.' The theological passive is a name given to the passive used in order to avoid directly naming God as the unexpressed agent (cf. Mark 1:11-12)-See Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 76. On the other hand, "Jesus speaks openly to his disciples and explains his action; thus the disciples are responsible and blameworthy for not understanding (6:52; 7:14-18; 8:17-21, 32a; 9:10, 32; 10:26-27). And those who reject Jesus and kill him act on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1)—Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 120. Further, Mark 4:15 hints that the agent of the hardening is Satan. Some combination of these agents acts in God's redemptive plan (we will consider this matter in detail in chapter 5)

The healing on the Sabbath day of the man with the withered hand (3:1-6) is the last story among five controversy stories (2:1-3:6). It is positioned logically by topical association with previous stories, and demonstrates that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.[312] Further, it indicates the differences between the standard that Jesus brings and convention established by the Jewish leaders.

2.5.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

Mark 3:1-6 concludes the first major section of the Gospel in which the subjects' Jesus taught on or the matters he dealt with caused controversy or conflict. For the reader/hearer, the linear progression of the controversial stories in 2:1-3:6 combines with 'the circular progression' to increase the tension and to constitute a climax in the final story.[313] Furthermore, the fact that the hostility in 3:1-6 is information given to the reader/hearer alone and not to the internal actor of Mark's narrative,[314] indicates that a major function of 3:1-6 is to make the reader/hearer aware of the opponent's insensitivity and incredulity.[315] The conclusion in 3:5-6 is used as an ending of the story of the withered hand, the total controversy section, and the first stage of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Thus, Mark employed the controversial stories theologically to indicate that Jesus and his opponents are on a collision course that will culminate in Jesus' death.[316]

Despite its wide-raging structural parallels with the first story in the section 2:1-12, our concluding narrative is more thoroughly saturated with the element of conflict, by virtue of its position at the end of the controversy section.[317] In the course of the passage one sees, from the side of Jesus, provocative behaviour (3:3), anger, and sorrow (3:5); from the side of the Pharisees, a desire to condemn Jesus (3:2), hostile silence (3:4), hardness of heart (3:5), and the instigation of a murder plot (3:6).[318] It is symptomatic of the difference between 3:1-6 and 2:1-12 that the

[312] Lane, *Mark*, 121.
[313] Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 53.
[314] Dan O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 149.
[315] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 118.
[316] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 119.
[317] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 250.
[318] J. Kiilunen, *Die Vollmacht im Widerstreit. Undersuchungen zum Werdegang von Mk 2:1-3:6* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1985), 222, 239-44.

latter begins and ends with reference to hostile opponents.[319] Atypically for a miracle story, there is no acclamation of the miracle from the audience; instead its Pharisaic observers go out and begin to plot Jesus' murder (cf. John 11:45-54).[320] Corresponding to this emphasis on conflict, the man who is healed plays a relatively minor role in the story, serving primarily as a spotlight to focus attention on the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees.[321]

2.5.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Hardness of Heart

This controversy story indicates that when Jesus entered again into the synagogue (Kai eishlqen palin[322] eij thn sunagwghn), there was a man with a withered hand (v. 1b), and Jesus' activity being was monitored by Jewish leaders in an attempt to catch him in an act of breaking the Sabbath Law (v. 2). As the narrator intentionally uses the word palin, he intends to establish a connection with a place Jesus has already been in Mark 1, in this case a synagogue (1:21).[323] In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' first teaching and miracle, which was to heal a man who was possessed by an evil spirit, occurred in the synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28). In response to Jesus' ministry generally, the people were amazed but the parties concerned with the synagogue, i.e., the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 2:6, 16, 24; 3:6) were silent. They refuse to believe in Jesus as Son of God through silent (cf. 3:4). Hence, Mark, in the fifth controversy story, does not simply echo the incident: he draws a conclusion about the opponents' unbelief and rejection of Jesus, which perhaps began in 1:21-28 and has escalated through other controversy stories.

The Meaning of "Watching"

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[319] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 104.
[320] Marcus, *Mark 1-8,* 250.
[321] Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 133.
[322] In Mark, palin is used with two meanings: 'back' or 'again, once more.' This word in the report of Jesus' journey, is used with the second meaning, i.e., it is used when such an action is repeated. Mark uses this word when Jesus again visits a place, which he has previously visited (com. 2:1 with 1:21, 2:13 with 1:16-20, 3:1 with 1:21, 4:1 with 2:13, 5:21 with 4:36, 7:31 with 7:24, 11:27 with 11:7,15). The word palin calls the reader's attention to a previous place or action. Hence, the word in 3:1 ("he entered again into a synagogue") could be a reminder of Jesus' first entrance into the synagogue of Capernaum in 1:21.
[323] Lane, *Mark*, 133.

Furthermore, the opponents demonstrate their unbelief of Jesus; "they were watching (parethroun) closely"(3:2).[324] The verb parethroun has no expressed subject (as in 2:18), but the preceding passage, and the specification that it was the Pharisees and Herodians (3:6) against Jesus, indicates that the nucleus of the hostile attention was Pharisaic, even though no doubt the whole congregation was aware of the tension of the situation.[325] If we see this story as a sequel to the Capernaum synagogue episode (cf. 1:21and 3:1) and to the story found at the end of Mark 2, then Dewy is right that 2:24 can be seen as the caution before actual legal trial that an accusation would be set in motion; and at 3:2 the adversaries are observing so that if Jesus acts illegally again on the Sabbath, he is likely to be arrested.[326] "The claim of Jesus in 2:28 prepares the reader for the higher level of hostility and greater stakes involved in 3:1-6."[327]

The imperfect tense of parethroun is probably iterative: they kept on watching.[328] Apparently, the meaning is not that Jesus was watched by the common people, but has kept under surveillance by his antagonists. What the Pharisees are trying to find is legal evidence for accusing Jesus. This implies that they refuse to believe Jesus' claim that he is the Lord of the Sabbath and Son of God. This same verb is used in Ps. 36:12 (one of only two LXX usages), in which it is sinner who lie in wait for the pious, to slay him (cf. Ps. 129:3).[329] This is similar to the account of the Pharisees' plot at the end of our passage (3:6). They wish to accuse him, that is, bring legal charges against him because the violation of the Sabbath would be a serious offence and could be punishable by death

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[324] "There is no subject expressed here, but it is easily supplied from our knowledge of the class who insisted on these rigours of Sabbath observance. And 3:6 tells us that it was the Pharisees who went out and conspired with the Herodians against him." (Ezra P. Gould, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1975], 52). The Pharisees appear always in Mark as antagonists (2:16, 18, 24; 3:6; 7:3; 8:11, 15; 10:2; 12:13). Jesus called them "hypocrites" (7:6), refuses to grant their request for a sign (8:11), and warns his disciples against the "leaven of the Pharisees" (8:15).

[325] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 149.

[326] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 99-100.

[327] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 100.

[328] James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The American Commentary Vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 68.

[329] Marcus, *Mark*, 252.

(Exod. 31:14-15; M. Sanhedrin 7:4).[330]

It is important to note that Mark's explanation suggests that the real issue is not whether or not the Sabbath should be kept, but how it should be kept. Throughout his Gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as faithful upholder of Torah (1:44; 3:4; 7:8-13; 10:3-9; 12:29-31), who attacks not the Torah itself, but the interpretation given to its demands by the religious leaders of his day.[331] It is not, then, Torah which is at fault but those who misinterpret it; the purpose is to bring life, but when it is wrongly applied, it could become an instrument of evil and the bearer of death.[332]

The Unbelieving Silence

Although the reader is not here told explicitly as he was in 2:8, that Jesus is aware of the silent questioning of the Pharisees, i.e., violation of the Sabbath,[333] the question is answered by Jesus' ironic double counter-questions, as in 2:23-26.[334] Before the questions, Jesus commands the man with the shrivelled hand "stand up[335] in front of everyone" (3:3).[336] Then, he poses the question: which is lawful, to preserve life by healing or to destroy life by refusing to heal on the Sabbath? (3:4). It was not normally permissible to heal on the Sabbath, since

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[330] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 101; cf. Eduard Lohse, "Jesu worte über den Sabbat," *Judentum Urchristentum Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walther Eltester (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), 79-89.
[331] Hooker, *Mark*, 106.
[332] Com. Rom. 7.
[333] Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 102; "This may be an indication of the interdependence of the narrative of 2:1-3:6. The reader already knows that Jesus can read the minds of his opponents." (231n 143).
[334] Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, 222.
[335] The verb egeire is associated with healing in 1:31; 2:9, 11, 12; 5:41; 10:49; 16:6, and carries overtones of the restoration of health and even of life itself (resurrection)—Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 115. Mark's reader may well have been aware of this insinuation of the verb, which proposes that the man is being offered new life (Hooker, *Mark*, 87).
[336] J. D. M. Derrett, "Christ and the Power of Choice (Mark 3:1-6)," *Bib* 65 (1984): 172, contends that this man would have stood out when the congregation stood for prayer and raised both hands to shoulder height, palms outward, in prayer. A withered hand is frequently the punishment for stretching out one's hand to reach for something sinful (Ps. 137:5; Zech 11:17). Jeroboam's hand "dried up" when he tried to take action against the rebellion prophets (1Kings 13:4-6). His condition would have been regarded as proof of un-confessed sin that had not escaped God's notice (Ps. 32:1-5).

healing was classified as work but, if life was threatened, then emergency treatment was allowed.[337] It is to this principle that Jesus appeals and which he extends, because, in this instance, the man's life is not in danger.[338] In describing a sharp converse between doing good and doing evil, and between attitudes which either save life or kill, Jesus refuses to describe a distinction between saving life in the narrowest sense, and the offer of full life, which characterizes his whole ministry.[339] To postpone healing for a day is to disagree with the Sabbath's true intention, which is to glorify of God and for the benefit of man. Through their neglect of opportunities to do good things, the Pharisees destroy life rather than save it, and do harm. While Jesus was ready to heal, the Pharisees were plotting to put him to death. It is obvious who really was guilty of breaking the Sabbath (3:4a), but they refused to answer the question and remained silent (3:4b).[340]

This silence does not reflect, "the casuistic persuasiveness of Jesus' answer" (3:4).[341] The opponents' silence and subsequent response (cf. 3:6) indicate "their perception of a much deeper issue that challenged far more than their interpretation of the Law."[342] The Pharisees can neither deny their principle of saving life on the Sabbath nor go along with Jesus new principle.

The Opponents' Hardness of Heart

The Pharisees said nothing, being incapable of response, because of their hardness of heart. Jesus' reaction to the silent Pharisees is narrated in 3:5a, which reflects Jesus' anger and grief[343] over the hardening of the Pharisees' hearts (th pwrwsei thj kardiaj autwn).[344] The verb pwrow means 'to harden

[337] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 99.
[338] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 149.
[339] Hooker, *Mark*, 107.
[340] Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 115.
[341] Guelich, *Mark*, 137.
[342] Guelich, *Mark*, 137.
[343] 'Anger' used here and in the verbal from in 1:41, is virtually synonymous with 'wrath' (see Isa, 63:3, 6; Rom 2:8; Col 3:8). When used by humans, anger and wrath are vices (Gal 5:20; Col 3:8; Eph. 4:31). The wrath of God describes God's displeasure at human evil, every often as a summons to change or reform (Deut 9:7, 8, 22; Isa. 60:10; Pss 6:1; 38:1), and with reference to the disclosure of divine wrath that will characterize the eschatological day of the Lord (Zech 1:15; Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7)-Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 116.
[344] In the Greek literature, the 'tuff-stone' derived from o pwroj was used medically in order to describe "the hardened swelling of the bone" (Aristotle [384-

a broken bone' for healing.' The word is always used figuratively in the NT. If the kardiaj, the seat of mental discernment and spiritual insight, is hardened, it cannot function properly to accept new insight.[345] Jesus' critics are 'set in their ways,' and in their insensitivity (or 'obdurate stupidity'). The phrase 'hardness of heart' is almost a stock expression in the NT for those who cannot will or will not perceive the truth, used most commonly with reference to Israel's failure to recognize Jesus as their Messiah (Rom. 11:7, 25; 2 Cor 3:14; Jn 12:40, citing Isa. 6:10), but on two other occasions by Mark to describe the disciples' failure to appreciate the significance of Jesus miracles (6:53; 8:17).[346]

Mark considers 'hardness of heart' as the highest cause of unbelief and an utter insensitivity to man's needs and problems.[347] Throughout Mark's Gospel, refusal to believe in Jesus is described by this language (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up human opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Since their hearts are hardened, the opponents have not believed that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death.[348] As Mark recounts Jesus' anger and deep sorrow over the hardness of their hearts and their murderous plan, he wants the readers to avoid the way of the opponents. The motif of the hardening of the opponents' hearts indicates not only that the Jewish religious leaders *did not*, as a matter of course, understand Jesus' true significance, but that they *could not* understand it.[349]

The biblical motif of 'hardness of heart' signifies human resistance to God's

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322 B.C.]. Hist. An., III, 19, 521a, 21)-Schmidt, "pwrow, pwrwsij," 1025. Hippocrates (460?-377? B. C.) transferred it to mean "to make dull or insensitive" physically or mentally (Nymphis Fr., 16 [FHG, III 16])-Schmidt, "pwrow, pwrwsij," 1026.

[345] J. A Robinson, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan & Co, Limited, 1903), 267-74.

[346] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 151.

[347] Edward J. Mally, "The Gospel According to Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol 2, eds. Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 236. Cf. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.

[348] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 134.

[349] John Paul Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Function of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, and John 6:15b-21*, Analecta Biblica 87 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981), 74.

revelation. The concept carries with a mixture of divine and human responsibility. "The hardening by God is also a self-hardening of the unbeliever who does not obey God. Though in this mystery man cannot escape the sovereignty of the divine action, this does not absolve him from personal responsibility."[350] The Jewish religious leaders who refuse to believe in Jesus and kill him, act on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1). The religious leaders' hardness of heart (3:5) was caused not by withholding instruction but by their own unwillingness to receive it. Their hardness of heart was the basis of their rejecting him, not the result of his rejecting them.[351] In the parable in 12:1-10 the wicked tenants intentionally kill the owner's son in order to seize the inheritance (12:7). In the parable of the Sower (4:1-10), the negative fates of the seeds are an allegorical allusion to people who fail to believe in Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel.[352] The first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. The earth is so hard that the seed stays on the surface which rejects its fruitfulness. Similarly, from first to last the opponents refuse to accept Jesus' healings and forgiving words and to believe in him. Instead they kill him. The language highlights the inability to understand divine revelation. Rather than upsetting God's redemptive plan, the "hardness of heart" is part of it.

On the other hand, in Isaiah 6:9-10 alluded to in Mark 4:12 God, through the prophet, hardens the hearts of those who do not repent of their sins. Unless the opponents repent of their sins and believe in Jesus, God, through parabolic words, hardens their hearts so that they do not understand the secret of the Kingdom and believe in his teachings and works. "That the evangelist seems to be saying that it was God's will that few believe in Jesus because of hardened hearts, seems to be unavoidable."[353]

At the end of this story, the Pharisees and Herodians[354] began to plot against him

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[350] Schmidt, "pwrow pwrwsij," 1026.
[351] Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 74.
[352] Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 151-60.
[353] C. A. Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, eds. C. A. Evans & W. F. Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 228.
[354] They were the supporters of Herod Antipas (Josephus, J.W. 1.16.6 § 319; Ant. 14.15.10 § 450), who had arrested John and eventually beheaded him.

looking for a way to kill him (3:6). It is perhaps significant that the phrase sumboulion edidoun is echoed in 15:1, in which sumboulion occurs again, either in the sense of 'decision,' or with the meaning 'consultation.' The verb apollumi is picked up 11:18, in which it is the chief priests and sribes who plot Jesus' death. Their pact to destroy him will conclude in 15:1, when another group of power brokers take council to destroy him and successfully, or so they think (Ps 37:31-33; Isa. 29:20-21; Jer. 20:10-11).[355] Thus, the reader is enabled to put more substance into Jesus' enigmatic hint about the 'removal' of the bridegroom (2:20), and to envisage more concretely the two contrasting reactions to Jesus which will form the framework for the narrative and discourse of chapter 3-4, the rejoicing of the wedding guests and the plotting of those who are determined to destroy the bridegroom.[356]

Pharaoh's Hardness of Heart

The language of "hardness of heart" in Mark's Gospel echoes[357] the OT texts,

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[355] Garland, *Mark*, 109.

[356] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 153; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 102.

[357] Previous studies of reference to the OT in the New have often distinguished between forms of citation, viz., quotation, allusion and echo. There is no agreed definition, but generally, a quotation involves a self-conscious break from the author's style to introduce words from another context (Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 18). There is frequently an introductory formula like "it is written" or "Moses says." Next comes allusion, usually woven into the text rather than 'quoted,' and often rather less precise in terms of wording (Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality," 18). Naturally, there is considerable debate as to how much verbal agreement is necessary to establish the presence of an allusion. Hays proposes seven tests: availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, historical interpretation and satisfaction (R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Heaven/London: Yale University Press, 1989], 155). Lastly, comes echo, faint traces of texts that are probably quite unconscious but emerge from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel. The figure of echo concerns both the means by which texts relate and a more general theory of intextuality. Texts echo other texts, and as such can be understood as 'echo chambers.' In an echo chamber—that is, in a literary context for echoing—any text being echoed will sound differently to what it sounded elsewhere. One virtue of this theory is that it expresses the intertextual character of all writing while maintaining, in metaphor at least, a sense of closure (walls) around the text's structure (Timothy K. Beal, "Glossary," in *Reading between Texts. Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. N. Fewell [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992], 21).

and this provokes a question, whether this OT usage had an influence on Mark's story. The most famous biblical example of hardness of heart[358] is the Pharaoh of

[358] In the OT, the word 'heart' (לֵב) has a dominant metaphorical use in reference to the centre of human psychical and spiritual life, to the entire inner life of a person (Alex Luc, לֵב, *NIDOTTE Vol 2*, 749). "The heart is the seat of emotion, whether of joy (Deut 19:6; 1 Sam 2:1) or pain (Jer 4:19), of tranquillity (Prov. 14:30) or enthusiasm (Deut. 28:47), etc; man's creative and wicked thoughts are attributed to the heart (2 Sam 18:32; Gen 6:5)"-H. J. Fabry, לֵב, *TDOT Vol VII*, 414. Furthermore, planning and volition are attributed to the heart; a decision may be described as 'setting' the heart (2 Chr. 12:14); restriction of the decision-making ability is depicted as 'hardness of heart' (Ex. 10:1; Josh. 11:20). The heart demonstrates spiritual activity through which people determine their religious and ethical relationship to God -- W. Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 2* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 142-44. E.g. Deut 5:29; 29:4; 1 Sam 16:7; Prov 4:23; 5:12; 6:21; Ezek 11:10; 36:26; Joel 2:13. The heart combines these faculties—the emotional, intellectual, volitional -- rather than isolates them. Consequently, the heart in the OT is often seen as the inner and spiritual totality of a person's relationship to God. When the heart is hardened, made obdurate, made fat, people become insensitive and unwilling to act, and they are no longer able to believe and obey God's call and command. In Ex. 9:7 and Isa. 59:1 the Qal of כבד is used with 'heart' or 'ear' to express stubbornness (C. Dohmen, כבד, *TDOT Vol VII*, 16). The Hiphil of the word functions primarily as the causative of the Qal, so that its meanings are closely related to those of the qal: "make someone's heart hard" (Dohmen, כבד,16. Cf. Ex. 7:14. 8:15, 32: 9:7, 34; 10:1). When חזק appears with heart as its subject, the fundamental meaning 'become strong' is not the point of departure, but the derived meaning 'become hard' (F. Hesse, חזק, *TDOT Vol IV*, 308). In the OT, the heart is also the seat of 'wisdom,' 'understanding,' or 'will' (Ex. 7:23; Deut. 6:5; 1 Kgs. 3:12; Prov. 16:23). When the heart is softened, people receive God's commandments and obey His will, but a hard heart is not receptive. In the OT, when the language of כבד, קשׁה, חזק, and שׁמן occurs with 'heart,' it is to express the obstinacy of one's heart (Cf. Deut. 11:10). In the light of OT usage, the basic meaning of חזק is that of 'having power to accomplish a function' or it may secondly refer to a desire which is prerequisite for accomplishing something. It means also 'to be firm or strong,' which generally emphasizes the power of something to continue to perform its function (Cf. 2 King 14:5; Isa. 28:22; Ezra. 9:12 etc.). The use of חזק with respect to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8, 17) is probably similar to that in Josh. 11:20, where God gives the Canaanites a strong determination to fight and actually to execute a military campaign against Israel, which resulted in the Canaanites' destruction. Likewise, Pharaoh indicates his strong desire in refusing to let Israel go, and this leads to his destruction. The word כבד has the meaning of 'heaviness, weightiness.' When this word is used with reference to bodily organs, it indicates that the organ is not functioning normally (W. Caspari, *Die Bedeutungen des Wortsippe Kabed im Hebraischen* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1908], 8-10). Thus the heavy eyes no longer see (Gen 48:10), and the heavy ears no longer hear (Isa. 6:10). Furthermore, when the heart is called 'heavy,' it is unresponsive to obey God, especially Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 7:14; 8:15; 9:7, 34; 10:1 etc.). The basic meaning of קשׁה in the OT is 'being difficult' (G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14

Exodus (Ex. 7:3, 13, 22; 8:15).[359] According to Marcus, “Mark intends his readers to link the Pharisees with the Egyptian king, especially since the Greek words, Farisaioj and Faraw, are so close to each other.”[360]

Pharaoh had begun hardening his own heart long before God stepped in. He delighted in exploiting the people of Israel for profit (Ex. 1:14; 2:23; 3:7, 9) and had no respect for the One true God (Ex. 5:2). He not only flatly refused to listen to Moses and Aaron when they first came to him, but also he used their appeal as justification to treat the Israelites more cruelly than before (Ex. 5:5-18).

God, who knows the hearts of all men (Jer. 17:10), knew that Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and Aaron except under extreme compulsion. He predicted this to Moses (Ex. 3:19).[361] And indeed, the first six times that Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, the writer says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, or that he “hardened his heart" (Ex. 7:13, 7:22; 8:15; 8:19; 8:32; 9:7). Pharaoh had seen many miracles, but was not prepared to let the Israelites go. He made it clear in the sight of God and Moses that he had set himself in rebellion against the Lord.[362] Pharaoh indicated numerous times that he was determined to harden his heart. There came a point where God said, in effect, "Very well, if you want to harden your heart continually, then I'm going to let you harden your heart ” (cf. Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).[363]

Despite the many plagues brought against him through Moses, Pharaoh (or God) hardened his heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32, 35; 9:7, 12, 34; 10:1, 20,

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and Romans 9,” *Trinity Journal* (1984): 131 in 129-154). It is sometimes used to refer to strong activity, which is cruel or fierce (Gen 49:7). It is also used in the meaning of stiff-necked (Deut 10:16; 2 Kgs. 17:14; 2 Chron 30:8; 36:13; Neh. 9:16, 17, 29; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15; Prov. 28:14; 29:1)-Larry Walker and I. Swart, “קשׁה” *NIDOTTE*, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 578. Like other ‘hardening’ words, this word is also used in relation to Pharaoh’s heart; e.g., Ex. 7:3, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart”; 13: 15, “When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go.”

[359] Cf. S. H. Lee, *Hardness of Heart as a Theme in Mark’s Gospel*, Unpublished MTH Dissertation (Trinity Western University, 2002), 24-29.

[360] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 253.

[361] Robert B. Chisholm Jr, “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 411-12 in 410-34

[362] Moshe Greenberg, “The Thematic Unity of Exodus 3-11,” *WCJS* 1 (1967): 156.

[363] Cf. W Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 191.

27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) and refused to believe in God's work in Moses and to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.[364] Yet, the continued hardenings, disbelieving, and refusals provoked great acts of judgment, such as the tenth plague (7:4).[365] In particular, God destroys the firstborn sons of Pharaoh and the Egyptians just as they are seeking to destroy God's firstborn, i.e. Israel (cf. 4:22-24).[366] This sounds very much like the law of 'tooth for tooth', i.e. an act of judgment or punishment in kind. What is more, in Ex. 15 as Moses praises God for his deliverance, God is cast in the role of the Israelites' champion who destroys their enemies - those who oppose God. They experience his 'burning anger' (vs. 6-7).

Although some Exodus texts (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) tell us that Pharaoh's heart is hardened by the Lord, and Paul's great example of God's sovereign right is to dispose of human affairs as he pleases (Rom. 9:14-18), Mark's narrative emphasizes the Pharisees' responsibility for their attitude (Mk. 3:5-6).[367] This is notable in the 'inside view' the writer gives the reader/audience of Jesus' emotional reaction to the Pharisees' question: he is 'angered' and 'grieved' at their hardened hearts (3:5).[368] The implication is that better behaviour might be expected from the Jewish religious leaders, not that God has predestined that they act unmercifully. Similarly, in Mark 10:5, Jesus calls the Pharisees hard-hearted for they need Moses' concession to divorce.[369]

Hardness of Heart in Sam. 6:6

The connection with the Exodus narrative made in 1 Sam. 6:6 indicates that the Philistines' hardening attitude echoes Pharaoh's hardness of heart and its result: "Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he

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[364] Just as we discussed in the previous section, the unbelief of Jesus' opponents implied the refusal to understand and obey Jesus' prophetic messages and miracles.

[365] In relation to the phrase in v. 21 "I will kill the firstborn in Egypt," we can assume that "these great acts of judgment" constitute the tenth plague.

[366] R. R. Willson "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 23.

[367] Marry Ann Beavis, *Mark's Audience. The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11-12* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 89-90.

[368] Hurtado, Mark, 40; H. Räisänen, *The Idea of Divine Hardening: Comparative Study of the Notion of Divine Hardening, Leading Astray and Inviting to Evil in the Bible and the Qumran* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1976), 81-82.

[369] Dale Miller & Patricia Miller, *The Gospel of Mark as Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 140.

treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?"(NIV).[370] Due to hardness of heart, Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, when that was God's intention. Then, God punished him for his hard-hearted rejection. This discourse is argument that as the Philistines harden their hearts and refuse to let the ark of God go back to Israel, they replicate the terrible destructiveness that Pharaoh brought on himself by his hard-heartedness and refusal to release the Israelites.

Hardness of Heart in the Jewish Literature

The author of *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, in Sirach 16:15-16,[371] quotes the 'hardening of Pharaoh' as an instance illustrating God's righteous wrath against the wicked, "the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh who knew Him not, whose works were manifest under the heaven" (Sir 16:15). God judges the Wicked Pharaoh, because of his hardness of heart.

The final chapters (17-19) of *Wisdom of Solomon* contrast the treatment of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who suffered plagues and the Israelites who were delivered from bondage by the wisdom of God. The deliverance of the righteous is contrasted with the destruction of their enemies. Pharaoh and the Egyptians are described as the wicked, the uninstructed, and the lawless (17:1). Because of the hardness of their hearts, Pharaoh and the Egyptians become captives of darkness and prisoners of long night (17:2). God destroys them totally by righteous anger, i.e. a mighty flood (18:5). Although Pharaoh and the Egyptians permit the Israelites to depart and hastily send them out, they change their minds[372] and pursue them. God exiles the Egyptians from eternal providence (19:2).

In the Book of Jubilees (chapters 46-50) the plagues that Moses performs in Egypt against Pharaoh and the Egyptians are God's judgment and vengeance on

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[370] Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 30.

[371] "Verses 15-16 (in the footnote) appear in one Hebrew manuscript and a few witnesses in Greek and Syriac. Verse 15 was added by a copyist who felt Pharaoh should have been included among the sinners who were destroyed, and verse 16 introduces a reference to God's mercy in creation" (John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], 83.

[372] "I [God] will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them" (Ex. 14:4).

them (48:5-7). God hardened their hearts and made them stubborn in order to destroy the Egyptians and to cast them into the sea (48:17-18). But God delivers Israel out of Pharaoh's hand and he brings them through the midst of the sea as if it is dry land (48:13-14). Therefore, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart is an important element of judgment contained in the actions of God. This story inspires the readers to trust in God and to worship him.

In *Antiquities* II,[373] Josephus retells the Exodus narrative. Josephus does not use the term "Pharaoh's hardness of heart." Instead he interprets the hardening attitude as the characteristic of the wicked. When Moses asks Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave, Pharaoh is very angry that Moses should have thought that he could have influenced Pharaoh by the deceitful tricks and magical acts with his staff (*Ant*. 2. XIII. 3, 4). When, after the plague of the blood, Pharaoh is called stubborn in refusing to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, Josephus remarks that Pharaoh is no longer willing to be wise (*Ant*. 2. XIV. 2). Accordingly God punishes his falseness with another plague. Despite the continued plagues that Moses brings to Pharaoh as signs, Pharaoh consistently refuses to release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, because Pharaoh saw the signs, but he did not understand their meanings (*Ant*. 2. XIV.2).[374] Thus, "God presently resolves to punish his wickedness with several sorts of calamities" (*Ant*. 2. XIV. 4)[375] Pharaoh loses reason and is matching himself against God as a deliberate traitor (*Ant*. 2. XV. 1).

Pharaoh's continued refusals provoke great judicial action in the tenth plague (*Ant*. 2. XIV. 6). As a result, after the tenth plague, the Egyptians permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt (*Ant*. 2. XV. 1). But as soon as the Israelites depart, Pharaoh decides to pursue the Israelites who are marching out, because he

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[373] *Antiquities* is a long work of twenty books, beginning with creation and extending to the outbreak of war with the Romans. The first part of the work, to the end of the exile, follows closely the biblical stories; the second part, postexilic, is compiled from various sources--R. C. Stone, "Josephus," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* Volume 3, ed. M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977). 345.

[374] In the Hebrew Bible, the cause of Pharaoh's refusal is because God hardens his heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 etc).

[375] Trans, William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 61.

forgets all the signs that have been sent by God (*Ant*. 2. XV. 3).[376] God in the Red Sea finally destroys the Egyptians:

> As soon as even the whole Egyptian army was within it, the sea flowed to its own place, and came down with torrents raised by storms of wind, and encompassed the Egyptians. Indicators of rain also came down from the sky, and dreadful thunders and lighting, with flashes of fire. Thunderbolts were also darted upon them; nor was there anything which used to be sent by God upon men as indication of his wrath which did not happen at this time, for a dark and dismal night oppressed them. And thus did all these men perish, so that there was not one man left to be a messenger of this calamity to the rest of the Egyptians (*Antiq*. 2.XVI.3).[377]

Due to the ignorance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians concerning God's mighty actions, God acted to punish them. By contrast, through this judgment the Israelites realized that God is their protector and worshiped him (*Ant*. 2. XVI. 4). The destruction of the Egyptians admonishes the Israelites against wickedness and disobedience (cf. Ex. 32-34). Consequently, the narrative of the plagues illustrates God's righteous wrath against the wicked (cf. *Ant*. 2. XVI. 5; Sir 16:15; Rom 9).

In *De vita Mosis* I, Philo retells that Pharaoh and the Egyptians whose hearts are hardened are described as the wicked, the foolish men and the impious (95, 96). Moses asked Pharaoh and the Egyptians to send the Israelites from Egypt. However, these impious men refused, "clinging to their original inhumanity and impiety as to some inalienable virtue" (95).[378] After they had recovered somewhat from these punishments, they again returned to their original wickedness and forgot the evils that they had already experienced (102,106, 120). Thus, ten punishments were inflicted upon the land so that it was destroyed. The purpose was to exhibit the extent of the authority that God wields (96). Philo is stressing the punishment upon 'the land of these impious men' rather than upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians themselves (97-98). Thus, the ten plagues admonish the Egyptians to obey God's command and to understand God's powerful identity:

> God was desirous rather to admonish the Egyptians than to destroy them: for if he had designed to destroy them utterly once for all, he would not have employed animals to be, as it were, his coadjutors in the work of destruction,

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[376] In Hebrew, God hardens their heart (Ex.14:4, 8, 14).
[377] Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, 64.
[378] Trans. C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1993), 468.

but rather such heaven-sent afflictions as famine and pestilence (110).[379]

Thus, if after experiencing the plagues they obeyed God's command, they could avoid God's final judgment. But, because the Egyptians disregarded the warning, God finally destroyed them through the catastrophe at the sea (179). In the story of Moses the hardened attitudes of the Egyptians exemplify the characteristic of the wicked. However, God provided them with an opportunity to repent of their disobedience.

In the early Jewish sources, the concept 'hardness of heart' qualified the wicked, like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Due to their hardness of heart, they did not believe in God and obey his commands. The consequent result was God's judgment. In the writings of early Jewish writers (Josephus and Philo), the hardening of the wicked was used as an instance to illustrate God' righteous wrath and to warn the righteous against disobedience. Pharaoh's hardening of heart was consequently used as an example on behalf of the wickedness of the unbelievers. However, when used for the covenanters and the righteous, it fulfilled the function of warning and exhortation to deter them from engaging in any form of disobedience.

The usage of Pharaoh's hardening in early Jewish literature provides the appropriate context for properly assessing the function of its echo in Mark 3:1-6. Mark took the idea known broadly in the Jewish context of the first century A.D. in order to describe the unbelief of Jesus' opponents. Just as Pharaoh had, due to his hardened heart, refused to believe and obey God's message, so due to the hardness of their hearts, the opponents did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but rather rejected him. However, God would judge them, because of their persistent unbelief, due to their hardness of heart.[380]

To summarize: Mark, in 3:1-6, recapitulates the first section of Jesus' Galilean ministry (1:16- 3:6). Although Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom through his authoritative teachings and miracles, the Jewish leaders refused to respond to Jesus' message, because their hearts were hardened. Mark describes 'hardness of heart' as the ultimate cause of the opponents' unbelief. Since their hearts are

[379] Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 469.
[380] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 253.

hardened, the opponents have not believed in the teaching that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus has brought forward the conditions pertaining to the eschatological Sabbath, when there will be a continual and progressive relief from death. Thus, with regard to Jesus' opponents the concept of 'hardness of heart,' the conscious refusal to believe in Jesus, delineated the opponents' unbelief and hostility. Mark described 'hardness of heart' as the ultimate cause of the opponents' unbelief.

The various negative fates of the seeds mentioned in Mark 4:1-10 allude allegorically to those who refuse to believe in Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel. The first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. The earth is so hard that the seed remains on the surface and fails to bear its fruits. Similarly, from the beginning to the end the unbelievers refused to accept Jesus' healings and forgiving words, as well as to sincerely believe in him. Instead, they began to plot how they could kill him.

Just as heart-hardening caused Pharaoh to refuse to believe and obey God's message, so hardness of heart caused the opponents not to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but rather to reject him. Just as Pharaoh's refusal determined the plagues as a great judgment (Ex. 7:3) and the catastrophe at the sea (Ex. 14:4, 8, 14), in a similar way the opponents' refusal would determine for God's consequent judgment (cf. Mark 12:1-12).

2.5.3 Jesus' Teachings in Parables (4:10-12)

Mark and the early church faced the conundrum, as to why the Jews did not believe in and accept Jesus to be the Son of God. Mark 4:10-12 addresses this riddle. The vital observation in these verses is the distinction between insiders and outsiders (v. 11). When the disciples asked Jesus about the parables, his answer set them apart from the outsiders. To them the secret of the Kingdom has been given, while to outsiders, everything came in riddles. Isaiah 6:9-10 is then cited to justify this enigmatic teaching.

2.5.3.1 Insider and Outsiders

In 3:20-35, the hostility of the Jewish leaders to Jesus is highlighted strongly and their attitudes are associated with that of Jesus' family. This becomes the basis

for some very positive statements about Jesus' followers. In 3:31-35 'those around'[381] Jesus are contrasted with his natural family.[382] Those around Jesus are his true family. Members of Jesus' spiritual family do God's will. This contrast stood in contrast with the opponent's refusal to accept Jesus, i.e. the hardness of their hearts. It is another way of emphasizing close association with Jesus. The phrase 'those around him' then appears in 4:10, while the disciples are plainly related to this group.

The kingdom of God, parables, knowledge, insiders and outsiders - these elements are interrelated. Knowledge belongs to the kingdom of God. Thus, to the insider group this empowers them to understand the parables correctly within a commonly accepted framework of insiders' interpretation. The outsiders do not understand this interpretation. The knowledge belonged to the insider group. The others did not converse in riddles: because this was characteristic of the insider group. Jesus said that the parable would make sense to the insider group, because they belong to the kingdom. The outsider group did not accept that the kingdom of God would come through Jesus. Therefore, they would not try and would not be able to interpret the parables correctly. This knowledge has a close relationship to faith. The kingdom will be revealed to those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God. However, the eyes of the unbelievers would be closed regarding pertaining a valid understanding of the kingdom of God.

The disciples have been given privileged access to the secret (to musthrion)[383] of the kingdom of God, which would be coming in a veiled way in the person, words and works of Jesus.[384] The disciples were insiders nevertheless, even

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[381] They may be members of the crowd described in 4:1-2 who have been stimulated by Jesus' parable to inquire further and become his disciples (Marcus, *Mark*, 302).

[382] Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1975), 40-41.

[383] "The Qumran scrolls are especially rich in such 'mystery' language. At Qumran, as in our passage, the mysteries include the notion that God forgives the sins of the members of the elect community (CD 3:18) while at the same time allowing, and even causing, outsiders to be led astray (1QH 5:36)."-Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 298.

[384] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1966), 153.

though they were misunderstanding insiders (8:14-21).[385] Nowhere in Mark were they called 'outsiders.' The secret of the Kingdom was that people could not see and believe that his sowing of word, which would lead to his crucifixion and resurrection, was the culmination of God's decisive eschatological action.[386] However for 'the outsider'[387] all things were in 'riddles' (parabolaij)[388] so that they looked and looked, but did not see, heard and heard, but did not understand (4:11-12). Namely, those who have ears to hear perceive the real meaning of the kingdom, while those whose hearts are hardened and whose ears are dulled understand nothing, but a disturbing riddle.[389] Revelation becomes a riddle to the hardened, shallow, and indifferent mind, and the end result is puzzlement and unbelief. "The parables were designed so that no response meant no perception, no understanding, no forgiveness."[390] The parables give insight to the open-mined, but come as judgment on the obdurate.

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[385] J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989): 215 in 194-216.

[386] Garland, *Mark*, 158.

[387] Those outside are, in the larger Markan context, not just people who are outside of the house where Jesus is presently closeted with his disciples, but Jesus' opponents who have excluded themselves from the circle of salvation by their refusal to believe in Jesus (Marcus, *Mark*, 306).

[388] As Jeremias and others have indicated, in such a context parables must be understood as riddles, since the word apparently stands in contrast to the unfolding of a 'secret'-- J. Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 16-18; Schweizer, *Good News*, 93; R. Pesch, *Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1976), 239; B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984), 96. Furthermore, Mark's word parabolaij for 'parable' is the Hebrew word משל, which means enigma or riddle (Prov. 1:6 [LXX]).

[389] The motif of concealment from the outsiders and revelation to a few insiders is a commonplace in Jewish apocalyptic. In 2 Bar 48:2-3, Baruch says to God, "You do not reveal your mysteries to many," and in Ezra 12:36-37 Ezra is instructed to teach his mysteries only to those can understand (R. E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery,"* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968], 35. Similarly, just as the insiders in Mark 4:11 are given the revelation, at Qumran the members of the community receive secrets which are hidden from outsiders. The Lord "shall hide the counsel of the law in the midst of the man of sin. He should reproach with true knowledge and with just judgment those who chose the path" (1QS 9:17)-Wilfred G. E. Watson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14. Although none of the things hidden from Israel are to be concealed from the Qumran community (1QS 8:11-12), to the outsiders, the 'men of perdition,' the proper attitude is "everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy" (1QS 9:21-22)-J. Marcus. "Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology," *JBL* 103 (1984), 560.

[390] Painter, *Mark*, 80-81.

The same division is mentioned in 4:33-34, in which the disciples are given explanations, but the crowd is not. For those who have been given the kingdom, the parables should further elucidate the reality of the kingdom.[391] However, for those whose ears and eyes are closed and hearts are hardened the parables only obscure matters further.[392]

> And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (NRSV; 4:24-25).

Hence, the purpose of the parable is not simply to be a riddle but to draw out awareness of whether one is responding in faith or not. The parables reveal the truth of the Kingdom to those who accept Jesus, while they conceal its mysteries from the unworthy, who reject his messages.

The parables are therefore a 'two-edged sword' that reveal the secret of the Kingdom to insiders who understand, but cause blindness in others.[393] Edwards comments that they are

> Like the cloud which separated the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. It brought "darkness to the one side and light to the other" (Exod 14:20). The same cloud which condemned the Egyptians to their hardness of heart also protected Israel and made a way for her through the sea. That which was blindness to Egypt was revelation to Israel.[394]

Outsiders see no revelation of the kingdom of God in Jesus' miracles, teachings, and his crucifixion. Only insiders, although they are sometimes somewhat confused by its enigmatic concealment, are enabled ultimately to see the truth.[395]

2.5.3.2 The Allusion[396] of Isaiah 6:9-10 at Mark 4:12[397]

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[391] In the Greco-Roman world, the writers and readers treated parables as comparisons or comparative illustrations that could be used for rhetorical purposes and for the purpose of persuading someone about something (Aristotle, Rhetoric 2.20.1ff)—M. H. McCall, *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Similes and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1-22.

[392] Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 65.

[393] J. Marcus, "Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology," *JBL* 103 (1984): 566.

[394] Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches," 215.

[395] Garland, *Mark*, 159.

[396] An allusion exists when one text shares enough with another text, even without reproducing several consecutive words from it, to establish the latter as a subtext to which an audience is being implicitly directed (D. C. Allision, Jr., *The Intertextual Jesus Scripture in Q* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000], x.

Mark alludes to Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 to explain why the outsiders cannot comprehend the parables of Jesus and believe in his teachings. The Isaiah 6:9-10 allusion or quotation occurs always in the NT, as here, in a context of unbelief and hardness of heart (Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40, etc.). This leads us to favour the text as it stands. In the OT usage, the hardening language is often used for Israel itself. Just as the pagans' hearts are hardened by God for the particular purpose that God will punish them because their rejection of God's commandment, the Israelites are hardened by God for punishment, because of their sinful actions, that is, their disobedience. This is expressed most strongly in the book of Isaiah (6:9-10; 29:9-10; 42:18-20; 43:8; 44:18). God's words had come to the Israelites through the prophets, but they refused to listen to them. Thus, God, lest they perceive the words and repent their sins (unbelief), hardened their hearts in order to punish them. Among the obduracy passages in the OT, Isaiah 6:9-10 is only alluded to in Mk 4: 12 in relation to the 'hardening' language. Isaiah 6:9-10 is the most important OT hardness of heart passage for researching the usage of 'hardness of heart' in Mark's Gospel.

Isaiah 6:9-10 has an interesting history of textual transmission and interpretation. The textual diversity to be found in the various text traditions raises some questions with respect to the Massoretic pointing of the Hebrew text.[398] The following section is concerned not only with the original meaning of the Hebrew, but aims to provide a sketch of the early interpretation in the Jewish context, and the textual transmission of this significant prophetic text.

Isaiah 6:9-10

The theme of spiritual blindness and deafness, which is so prominent in the book of Isaiah (29:9-10; 44:18; 63:17 etc), is derived from the 'hardening' motif in 6:9-10. The text of Massoretic text reads in the following way:

Isaiah 6:9 וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לָעָם הַזֶּה
שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמוֹעַ וְאַל־תָּבִינוּ

The allusion of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12 seem to correspond more closely to the *Tg. Isa* 6:9, rather than the MT or to 1QIsaiah or to the LXX.

[397] There is no doubt concerning the importance of the allusion of Isa. 6:9-10 in the gospel tradition. All writers of four gospels employ this text at a vital place in their gospel (Mk. 4:12; Matt. 13:14-15; Lk 8:10; Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40).

[398] C. A. Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," *ZAW* 92 (1982): 415 in 415- 418.

וּרְאוּ רָאוֹ וְאַל־תֵּדָעוּ׃
הַשְׁמֵן לֵב־הָעָם הַזֶּה Isaiah 6:10
וְאָזְנָיו הַכְבֵּד
וְעֵינָיו הָשַׁע
פֶּן־יִרְאֶה בְעֵינָיו
וּבְאָזְנָיו יִשְׁמָע
וּלְבָבוֹ יָבִין
וָשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ׃

> 6:9: Then, he said, "Go and speak to this people: 'listen continually,[399] but you do not discern; see unceasingly, but you do not understand.' 6:10 Make fat the heart of this people, and make heavy its ears, and make blind its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, and listen with its ears, and comprehend with its heart, and it turn and be healed" (my translation).

In 6:9 the prophet is given God's message to make stubborn the Israelites' hearts. According to the pointing of the MT both proteases contain Qal imperatives (שמעו [listen] and ראו [see], which are followed by their respective infinitive absolute forms] while the verb of apodoses are negative jussives expressing prohibition (אל־תבינו [discern] and אל־תדעו [understand], respectively].[400] In 6:10 the verbs of the first three lines are *Hiphil* imperatives--"make fat" (הַשְׁמֵן), "make heavy" (הַכְבֵּד), and "make blind" (הָשַׁע)--and as such have causative force.[401] In the second half of 6:10 the grim purpose (פֶּן) of the prophet's message is stated. The prophet will make obdurate the Israelites' hearts in order to accomplish God's intention to devastate the Israelites. God commands Isaiah to harden the Israelites' hearts so that they may not repent (=unbelief).[402] The prophet is to render the Israelites insensitive to the impending judgment and calamity.[403] This terrible message is to be proclaimed until the land has been laid waste (cf. Isa, 6:11-13). The prophesied judgment (vv.11-13) was considered when the Assyrians devastated

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[399] To stress continuous action or repetition, the infinitive absolute follows the finite verb and is of the same root (cf. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 38. # 206; Gn. 31:15; Num. 11:32; 1 Sam. 6:12; 14:19)

[400] C. A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6:9-10 in early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Sheffield: JOST, 1989), 23.

[401] J. L. McLaughlin, "Their Hearts were Hardened: The Use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Book of Isaiah", *Biblica* 75 (1994): 5.

[402] See. A. F. Key, " The Magical Background of Is. 6:9-13", *JBL* (1967): 198-204. In Mark 1:15 faith is parallel to repentance. Thus, only those who believe in Jesus' prophetic message repent their sins.

[403] On the purpose of the message see O. H. Steck, "Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 6," *BZ* 16 (1972): 188-206; J. Schreiner, "Zur Textgestalt von Jes 6 und 7:1-17," *BZ* 22 (1978): 92-97.

the land (about B.C 701; cf. 1:2-20, esp. vv. 4-9).[404] As a result, in this context, the term "hardness of heart" is used in order to express the appropriateness of God's judgment upon the Israelites' disobedience and unfaithfulness.

In the various text traditions, however, much of severity of Isa. 6:9-10 is absent. Indeed, the tradition is so diverse as to appear confused. In the following discussion we shall examine these various traditions: 1QIsaiah^{a}, the LXX, and the Targum.

1QIsaiah^{a}

The biblical texts of Qumran provide a very interesting perspective. Not only do they indicate the inaccuracy of the present OT as reflected in the MT, they also inform us about the interpretation of it by the Qumran community. Their apocalyptic-eschatological perspective led the community to believe that every prophetic assertion in Jewish scripture spoke directly to them, because they identified themselves as the 'righteous remnant'[405] in distinction to other Jewish groups (Sadducees and Pharisees). Unlike the Massoretic text (MT), in 1QIsaiah^{a} the passage of Isa. 6:9-10 no longer describes the nuance of judgment.

1QIsaiah^{a} were discovered among the contents of Cave 1.[406] 1Qisaiah^{a}, known as the Great Isaiah Scroll, preserves the full sixty-six chapters of the biblical book in their entirety.[407] One interesting example in 1QIsaiah^{a} is its rendering of Isaiah

[404] Chisholm, "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," 432.
[405] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 53; For 'remnant' idea see 1QH6:8-10; 14:1-7; 1QM 14:7-9; 1QS 8:5; 11:8; CD 1:7. Here, the community calls itself 'an everlasting planting.' Also 1Qs 8:7 the community calls itself the 'precious corner-stone,' alluding to Isa. 28:16; in 1QH6:25-27 we have a midrash on Isa. 28:16-17 in which the community sees itself as a solid building made of tested stones. In 4QpIsa[a] 1:26-29, Isa. 10:21-22 ('a remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God') is interpreted" (53n. 3). T. H. Gaster restores the pesher in the following way: "[This remnant of Is]rael denotes [the congregation of the elect,] the godly champions of righteousness" (*The Dead Sea Scriptures* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1976^{3}], 305). Also in 1QH 6:8: "Thou wilt raise a reviving for Thy people and grant to Thine inheritance a remnant, and refine them, to purge them of guilt" (Ibid., 167). Cf. Ezra 9:8-9; 1QH 14:1.
[406] 4QpIsa^{b} 3:8-9 appears to contain a commentary on Isa. 6:9, but the text is not preserved well enough to be of much help (cf. M. P. Morgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books* [Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1979], 89, 93).
[407] E. Ulrich, "Isaiah Scrolls," *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 552.

6:9-10 and 13, where the prophet's word no longer is to bring about further hardening, but is transformed into an exhortation to guard against impiety[408]. Some variations in 1QIsaiah[a] are of such a constrained character that they are explicable only as deliberate emendations. Isa 6:9-10 in 1QIsaiah[a] may be rendered in the following way:

1Q Isaiah[a] Column 6, II. 2-5

v. 9 ויאמר לך ואמרתה לעם הזה
שמעו שמוע ועל תבינו
ראו ראו ועל תרעו
v. 10 השמ לב העם הזה
ואוזניו הכבד
ועיניו השע
פן יראה בעיניו
ובאוזניו ישמעו
בלבבו יבין
ושב ורפא לו[409]

9 And he said. 'Go, and say to this people:
"Listen continually,[410] *and* you may understand;
See unceasingly, *and* you may perceive!"
10 Make the heart of this people appalled [dull][411]
and its ears dull
and its eyes closed
lest it see with its eyes
and hear with its ears.
Let it understand in its heart
and return and be healed' (my translation).

1QIsaiah[a] 6:9-10 contains a whole series of textual variations. Although a few of them may be attributed to spelling (e.g. the insertion of ו for certain vowels) and so are incidental, there appear to be several deliberate alterations.[412] Brownlee suspects that "this could have arisen through accidental misspelling (especially likely if the manuscript were copied from dictation), but it is remarkable that the

[408] C. A. Evans, "1QIsaiah[a] and the Absence of Prophetic Critique at Qumran," *RevQ* 11 (1984): 560-70.
[409] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 53.
[410] Both 'hear' and 'see' are imperative followed by their respective infinitive absolute forms, a construction that usually implies emphasis of continual action (E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol I: I-XVIII* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 256, n. 42).
[411] Generally, in the OT this word is rendered as 'to appall' or 'to desolate' (e.g. Isa. 52:14 Jer 2:12-13; 18:16; 19:8; 49:17; Ezek. 26:16; 27:35; 28:19).
[412] Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," 418.

same error occurs twice in immediate sequence."[413] The combination of these particular alternatives goes beyond mere misspelling. Rather, the scribe uses these words for his technical terms, which have a similar sound, in order to validate a new understanding of the Isaianic text.[414]

In the second and third lines of 6:9 (what the prophet is to say) the text reads ועל (‘and’) instead of ואל (‘but…not’) of the MT.[415] As the text now stands the meaning is completely transformed. The prophet is to urge the people to listen, *because* (על] they may understand, and to look *because* (על] they may perceive. In 6:10 the final ן of השמן of the MT[416] has been omitted, and in the last line of the verse ולבבו has become בלבבו.[417] The scribe did not change the medial מ of השמ into the final ם according to Hebrew standard orthography. If it is assumed to be the intended reading, how השמ should be pointed? Is it הָשָׁמ (qal participle of שׁימ, “established”) or הָשֵּׁמ? Morrow prefers the *Hiphil* imperative pointing (*Hiphil* imperative of שׁמם ‘make appalled’), because השמ so pointed in 1QH 7:2-3 makes the most contextual and grammatical sense.[418] For similar reasons, and because

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[413] W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1964), 186.
[414] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 55.
[415] In the OT, when ועל is followed by subject and verb, the meaning of the preposition is often omitted, and only the meaning of the conjunction is rendered by ‘and’ (e.g. Gen 27:40; 41:40; Ex. 3:22 Deut. 4:39; 11:18; Jos. 22:20; Jdg 6:37; 1 Kings 7:35; 2Ch. 19:10; Isa. 9:6; 10:6; 11:8, etc).
[416] As a Hiphil verb, this word carries an opposed meaning in Isa. 6:10. In this verse, God commends the prophet Isaiah to ‘make fat’ (NIV. “calloused”) the hearts of Israelites. According to God’s commandment, Isaiah will desensitise their hearts and so predispose them for the judgment (W. A. VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE Vol. 4*; Michigan: Zondervan, 1997, p. 172). In Isa. 6:9-10, the term is employed as God’s judgment.
[417] Evans, “The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10,” 416.
[418] F. J. Morrow, *The Text of Isaiah at Qumran* (Washington: Catholic University of American, 1973), 27. Cf. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls In Englis*h (New York: Penquim, 1975), 172. Brownlee notes the similar text of 1QH7:2-3 in which ‘evil’ and ‘murder’ are the expressed objects. In 1QIsa[a] 6:10 they are the unexpressed, but understood, objects (*The Meaning of the Qumran*, 187). In 1QH 7:1-5, the evil have insulted and laid their hands on the poet. Thus, his whole being is shaken to its core; his bones are out of joint and he is like a ship that is assailed by a stormy sea. His heart is utterly distraught at the threat of a sin. Hence, he warns himself against evil things, voices, and thoughts to protect himself, and encourages himself to remain in God’s covenant. In this literary context, just as the poet’s eyes are closed, and his ears are deafened to the evil

of his understanding of the 1QIsaiah[a] passage as a whole, Brownlee also prefers the *Hiphil* imperative pointing.[419] I am inclined to agree with Brownlee and Morrow: "*Make* the heart of this people *appalled*."

1QH7:2-3

Brownlee notes the similar text of 1QH7:2-3 in which "evil" and "murder" are the expressed objects, which in 1QIsa[a] 6:10 are the unexpressed, but understood, object:

> Shut my eyes from seeing *evil*,
> [Dull] my ears from hearing of plots of *murder*.[420]
> Make my heart appalled (השם) at *evil thoughts*.[421]

The occurrence of the words 'eyes,' 'ears,' 'heart,' and especially השם should be noted. In 1QH 7:1-5, evil persons have insulted and laid their hands on the poet. Thus, his whole being is shaken to its base; his bones are out of joint and he is like a ship that is assailed by a stormy sea. His heart is utterly distraught at the threat of sin. Hence, he warns himself against evil things, voices, and thoughts to protect himself, and encourages himself to remain in God's covenant. In this literary context, just as the poet's eyes are closed, and his ears deafened to the evil voice, his heart also is dull so that he rejects temptation of evil.

Furthermore, the caution in the hymnic passage is also enriched by allusion to Isa. 33:15, where the righteous person is delineated as one "who stops his ears against plots of *murder* and shuts his eyes against contemplating *evil*."[422] Here, the blindness and the deafness function to warn the righteous against evil ways, rather than as divine judgment. "The use of השׁמ in Jer. 2:12-13 is instructive: 'Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me**…**' Here השׁמ is used in the context of being appalled at Israel's sin, which is quite similar to its

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voice, so his heart also is dull so that he rejects evil's temptation.

[419] Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 186-87.

[420] Cf. Isa. 33: 15.

[421] Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 187. Cf. M. Wallenstein, "A Striking Hymn from the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BJRL*, Vol. 38 (1955): 241-65, esp. 264.

[422] M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 148n 7.

meaning in 1QIsaiah[a],[423] The purpose is to make the heart of the people appalled (השׁמ) at evil, lest they see evil with their eyes and hear of murder with their ears.

In the last line of v, 10, the conjunction ו is omitted and actually replaced with ב (a sound-alike).[424] The final lines now take on imperative force: *Let* the people understand in their heart and return and be healed.[425]

Hence, when the scribe of 1QIsaiah[a] transcribed the hardening passage, he might have kept in mind the warning function of the concept. He may have understood that Isaiah 6:9-10 warned the Qumran covenanters against evil thoughts. Thus, the text 1QIsaiah[a] 6:10 is to be read:

> Make the heart of this people appalled [at evil thoughts]
> and make its ears dull,
> and its eyes shut,
> lest it see [evil] with its eyes,
> and hear [plots of murder] with its ears.
> Let them understand in their heart,
> and return and be healed.

The variants in 1QIsaiah[a] 6:9-10 redirect the usage of the hardening in the MT. Its usage is not divine judgment, but to warn the people against evil thoughts and hence to protect them. In the MT, the role of the prophet is to make the Israelites' heart dull lest they understand in their heart and repent and be healed. However, in Qumran his role is to make their hearts, ears and eyes dull lest they see evil things, hear evil voices, to empower them to understand God's words in their heart, repent and be healed. Thus, according to the Qumran version the prophet is no longer speaking an oracle of judgment in order to promote obduracy.[426] Rather the prophet admonishes the righteous (i.e. the Qumran covenanters) to take heed lest they fall prey to evil.[427]

The LXX text of Isaiah 6:9-10

In the LXX there is significant grammatical change in the message the prophet is

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[423] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 189, n. 9.
[424] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 55.
[425] Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*,186.
[426] C. A. Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10", *ZAW* 92 (1982): 418.
[427] Cf. M. P. Morgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books*, 93.

to speak. The LXX text of Isaiah 6:9-10 reads in the following way:

> 9 kai eipen poreuqhti kai eipon tw law toutw akoh akousete kai ou mh sunhte kai blepontej bleyete kai ou mh idhte 10 epacunqh gar h kardia tou laou toutou kai toij wsin autwn barewj hkousan kai touj ofqalmouj autwn ekammusan mhpote idwsin toij ofqalmoij kai toij wsin akouswsin kai th kardia sunwsin kai epistreywsin kai iasomai autouj (Rahlfs' text).
>
> 9 And he said, "Go and say to this people:
> 'You shall hear with the ability to hear but you shall not understand;
> and with seeing you shall see but you shall not perceive.'
> 10 For the heart of this people has been made dull [by God],
> and with their ears they have heard heavily,
> and they have closed their eyes;
> lest they should see with their eyes,
> and hear with their ears,
> and understand with their heart,
> and turn [to me]
> and [that consequence] I would heal them"(my translation)

Although the Greek translator employed the respective cognates (akoh akousete and blepontej bleyete) for rendering of שָׁמוֹעַ שִׁמְעוּ and רָאוֹ רְאוּ in Isa. 6:9-10, the Greek version (the LXX) shows a significant grammatical alteration. Whereas in the MT, the verbs 'listen' (שִׁמְעוּ Qal imperative] and 'see' (רְאוּ Qal imperative) are used as imperatives, in the LXX these are used as the future - 'you will listen' (akousete) and 'you will see' (bleyete).[428] The prophet is preaching that the people will remain obdurate according to God's judgment.

In 6:10 the LXX translates הכבד ("make heavy") with epacunqh (aor. Pass. Ind. 3rd sing. from pacunw), inserts the causal gar, and translates השמן and השע with indicative hkousan and ekammusan respectively. Isaiah 6:10 answers to the reason for the judicial appearance announced in 6:9. Although the people will listen with the ability to hear, they will not understand *because* (gar) the people has been made dull by God *lest* (mhpote) they should understand. Because of the people's sin (Isaiah. 1-5), God makes its heart dull so that the people will never understand the warning message of the judgment and thus they will not repent of

[428] The future tense frequently has the imperative force with prohibition (e.g. Jas. 2:8; cf. Ernest De Witt. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1973], 73). "However, in view of alteration in v. 10 akousete and bleyete are probably no more than predictive futures and not imperatival futures" (Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 62).

their sins. Ultimately, they will be destroyed (cf. 6:11-12).[429]

In the MT, God commands Isaiah to make the Israelites' hearts hard in order to accomplish the penalty. To them, there is no room for repentance, just judgment. But in the LXX the hardening is *God's* work. Now, through the prediction of the impending judgment the prophet warns the people against disobedience. Hence, if the people persist in the disobedience, God's judgment is coming soon through the hardening of its heart.

The Text of Isa. 6:9-10 in Targum

The text of Isa. 6:9-10 in Targum reads in the following way:

v. 9 ואמר איזיל ותימר לעמא הדין
דשמעין משמע ולא מסתכלין
וחזן מחזא ולא ידעין
v. 10 טפיש לביה דעמא חדין
ואודנוהי יקר
ועינוהי טמטים
דלמא יחזון בעיניהון
ובאודנהון ישעון
ובליבהון יסתכלון
ויתובון וישתביק להון

> 9 And he said, "Go and speak to this people who hear indeed, but do not understand, and see indeed, but do not perceive. 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and repent and it be forgiven them."[430]

In Isaiah 6:9 of the Targum the imperative mood in the MT is changed into the indicative mood.[431] This is achieved by prefixing שמעין with the relative pronoun ד.[432] With this addition the whole tenor of the verse is changed. The prophet is to "speak to this people *who* (ד) indeed hear, but do not comprehend." In the Targum the prophet speaks to those who are obdurate, who stand in contrast to the righteous, and it is these who are to be hardened and punished.

The targumic text of Isaiah 6:9-10 preserves the judgmental nuance of the

[429] In Isaiah 6 (LXX) God announces his punishment on Israel in the future.
[430] Cf. B. D. Chilton, *Isaiah Targum* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1987), 91.
[431] Lee, *Hardness of Heart,* 68.
[432] Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," 417.

hardening. But the targumist does not apply it to all the Israelites.[433] In the Targum, God does not harden all the people of Israel and calls his servant Israel 'the blind.' There is a tendency to distinguish between those who were wicked and unfaithful and those who were righteous and faithful. Thus, the hearts of the wicked are hardened and they are called the deaf and the blind. "Since there is indeed no longer a nation of Israel [as the targumist writes], but a Jewish people scattered throughout the world, the way of forgiveness and righteousness is always open to those who return."[434] In the Aramaic text, God does not judge Israel as a whole. Now, it underscores an individualistic hardening rather than the collective hardening.

2.5.3.3 Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12

Isaiah 6:9-10 is found in Mark 4:12, and is the OT text's earliest appearance in the NT. It reads:

ina blepontej blepwsin kai mh idwsin(kai akouontej akouwsin kai mh suniwsin(mhpote epistreywsin kai afeqh autoijÅ

In order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.' " (NRSV)

Mark's allusion is an abbreviation of the Isaianic text.[435] Although most of his vocabulary is found in the LXX, Mark's allusion differs from the LXX in four major ways:[436] 1) Mark has placed the part that derives from Isaiah 6:9bc in the third person, while the LXX follows the second person (but not the imperative) of the Hebrew. 2) The causes of Isaiah 6:9bc are reversed in Mark's allusion, with the 'seeing' clause occurring first and the 'hearing' clause second. 3) Mark truncates the Isaianic text by leaving out the portions describing the blindness of the eyes, the deafness of the ears, and hardness of the heart. It is probable that this abbreviation has been made out of grammatical concerns. As Black argues, the purpose for such abridgment was "to complete the main thought of the ina

[433] Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 70.
[434] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 76.
[435] Matthew's formal citation of the LXX is evidence that Mark's allusion was understood as indeed a specific reference to Isaiah 6:10 by at least on early Christian.
[436] Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 92; Richard Schneck, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-VIII* (Vallejo: Bibal Press, 1994), 104-105.

clause" which introduced the allusion.[437] 4) as his last clause in the allusion (i.e. Isa. 6:10), Mark has kai afeqh autoij rather than the LXX's kai iasomai autouj.

When we compare Mark's allusion with the text of the Targum, we find three important similarities.[438] 1) The Targum also has shifted v. 9 into the third person in order to accommodate the syntactical alteration from direct speech to a relative clause. 2) Like the Targum's rendering of v. 9, Mark's verbs are indicative, not imperative. 3) The Targum has the equivalent of Mark's phrase, "to be forgiven." In view of these similarities, the allusion of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12 seems to correspond to Tg. Isa 6:9-10, rather than to the MT, 1QIsaiah, or the LXX.

According to Mark 4:12, Jesus alluded to Isaiah 6:9-10 to explain in part why some did not understand or believe in his teachings: "in order that those who see will not perceive and those who hear will not understand, lest they repent and be forgiven." Jesus has alluded to a version of Isaiah that approximates what we now find in the Isaiah Targum. Seemingly, he stated that the purpose of his parables was to keep 'outsiders' in the dark. This seems to be the basic idea of the Isaiah Targum as well. There the prophet is to speak to those "people who hear but do not listen, and see but do not understand." The prophet is to "make dull their heart and make heavy their ear." In other word, according to the Targum, the prophet is to harden only those who do not listen (i.e., the outsiders). In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites, but the wicked and unfaithful who do not obey God's command. This differs from the way it reads in the MT, in which the prophet is to harden the whole people. In the Aramaic text, the language suggests individualistic hardening rather than collective hardening. In Mark 4, hardening by the parables is not applied to all Israelites, but the outsiders, who refuse to accept Jesus consciously.

Although influenced by the Aramaic version of Isa. 6:9-10, the Markan allusion retains the telic, or final, sense of Isaiah's terrible word of prophetic judgment.[439]

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[437] M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967[3]), 214.
[438] Schneck, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark*, 105.
[439] C. A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 129.

Those whose eyes and ears God closes and whose hearts he hardens are the enemies of Israel, such as Pharaoh and King Sihon, or Israel's foolish leaders, and even Israel herself (Isa. 6:9-10; 29:9-10; 63:17). God is ultimate cause for Israel's hardness of heart just as he is of the pagan individuals. Through the prophet's declaration, God hardens the Israelites' hearts so that they do not cease their unfaithful actions. Yet, they become liable to be punished by God.

Mark has understood the judgmental feature of Jesus' parables in terms of the word of judgment God commanded Isaiah to speak, which was designed to render Israel obdurate.[440] Just as Isaiah's parabolic words were to produce hardness and blindness and to bring about Israel's judgment, so the parables of Jesus would have a similar effect.[441] The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose for giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from understanding, belief, repentance, and forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate those who refuse to understand and believe his message so that they cannot perceive, nor repent and be forgiven. Jesus works in the context into which John the Baptist had already come and warned that judgment would fall on the people unless they repented of their sins (1:4-8. cf. 12:1-12). The outsiders are excluded from the opportunity of being further instructed in the mysteries of the Kingdom so long as their unbelief continues.[442] Just as their rejection (or unbelief) of his messages matches the concealment of the secret of the Kingdom, so the judgment on their hardening entails the divine rejection of the outsiders. In the Markan account Jesus regarded himself and his rejected message as parallel to the rejection of Isaiah and his message centuries earlier. But the parallel may extend even further. Just as Isaiah's word of judgment would result in actual judgment[443] and the appearance of a holy seed (Isa. 6:13c), so Jesus' words of judgment would result in actual judgment, which might be seen as the second destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the

[440] C. A. Evans, "A Note on the Function of Isaiah VI, 9-10 in Mark, IV," *RB* 88 (1981): 234-35; M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Story: A Literary Study* (Washington: CBA, 1977), 43-44; F. Eakin, "Spiritual Obduracy and Parable Purpose," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. J. M. Efird (Durham: Duke University, 1972), 87-107.
[441] See 1 Enoch 68:1-2, where parables and judgment are linked.
[442] Lane, *Mark*, 159.
[443] Isaiah 6:11-13b, originally in reference the Assyrian invasion, but later probably understood in reference to Jerusalem's first destruction at the hands of the Babylonians).

Romans, and the appearance of a fruitful seed (i.e., his followers).[444] Since Jesus' parables produce obduracy the outsiders, they do not understand and believe in Jesus' words of the secret of the kingdom. Thus, divine judgment on them is pending.

It would appear then that the allusion of Isa. 6:9-10 serves the purpose of clarifying the nature of Jesus' parables (4:13). Mark demonstrates that at the centre of Jesus' parables is the word (4:14-20), that is, the good news (cf. 1:1, 1:14-15), which is proclaimed through Jesus, the disciples and Christians. Some believe in it and others reject it. Those who do not believe and reject the good news, do so because they are hardened to its divine truth (4:11-12).

To summarize: As for the agent of the hardness of heart, God demands the obedience of the Israelites in terms of the Covenant, but they reject his claim. Thus, God hardens their hearts so that they do not cease from their sinful actions and so become liable to be punished by God. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God gives Isaiah the mission to harden the heart of Israel in order to carry out the penalty for her because she rejected God's command. The object of the judgment is never the righteous or neutral, but the rebel against God's authority.

However, the Isaiah text of Qumran softens the judicial meaning of the MT. It no longer has the prophet speaking an oracle in order to promote obduracy. Instead the prophet admonishes the righteous (the Qumran members) to take heed during the troubled times that lie ahead. In Isaiah of the LXX, through prediction of the impending judgment (future tense) the prophet warns the Israelites against disobedience. According to the Targum, the prophet is to harden only those who do not listen. In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites; only the wicked and unfaithful who do not obey God's command.

The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose of giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from obtaining knowledge, faith, repentance, forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate

[444] C. A. Evans, "A Note on the Function of Isaiah VI 9-10 in Mark," *RB* 88 (1981); 234-35; idem, "The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John," *NovT* 24 (1982), 124-38.

those who refuse to understand and believe his message so that they cannot perceive, repent and be forgiven.

2.5.4 Legalism and Hardness of Heart (10:1-5)

This passage containing Jesus' teaching on the subject of divorce is placed in the block of material devoted to teaching on discipleship (8:27-10:52), because it concerns one of the most important areas of responsibility (marriage) for disciples, or for anyone for that matter.[445] It is possible that this passage is placed immediately after the preceding material that urges peace among disciples (9:50), because marriage proves to be of the most common areas of strife, though it should be noted that 10:1 is a transitional statement, indicating that a new unit of material is being presented.[446]

2.5.4.1 Exegetical Perspective on Hardness of Heart

The narrative begins in 10:2 with Jesus confronted by a group of Pharisees who are seeking his opinion on whether it is legally permitted for a man to divorce his wife: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"(10:2). A woman was legally the property of her husband and had no power to end the marriage.[447] Furthermore, there was never any question about whether a man might be free to end his marriage by divorce, but the only interest reflected in the ancient rabbinic tradition is that a man should give proper official certification of the divorce to his wife (cf. Mal. 2:13-16; Damascus Rule 4).[448] The callous attitude which could be taken concerning divorce, is well illustrated by the counsel of a respected teacher, Joshua ben Sira (*ca*. 200B.C.): "If she go out not as you would have her go, cut her off and give her a bill of divorce" (Ecclus 25:26).[449]

In Jewish society, there was a difference of view between two major ancient traditions of rabbinic thought concerning what were the legitimate causes for a man to divorce his wife. The school of Hillel allowed the husband to divorce his wife on trivial grounds, while the school of Shammai insisted that only adultery

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[445] Hurtado, *Mark*, 159.
[446] Hurtado, *Mark*, 159; Cf. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 140.
[447] Hurtado, *Mark*, 159.
[448] Hooker, *St Mark*, 235.
[449] Lane, *Mark*, 355.

was a sufficient cause.[450] It seems likely, however, that far more than this rabbinic argument was at issue in the context of the question suggested in 10:2. The question of the Pharisees carried an antagonistic motive with the aim of trapping him, as Mark reveals by the word 'test,' and this larger context of entrapment is very important to the passage as a whole.

Like the Sadducees questioning Jesus about the woman who married a bevy of brothers in sequence (Mark 7), they raised a legal question to 'test' (peirazontej) Jesus (10:2). The question was oppositional and intended as a trap. If Jesus said "no," he would seem to speak against the Law of Moses. If he said "yes," he would apparently contradict his own commitment to a permanent relationship. It is implied that they sought to lead Jesus into a contradiction of the law.[451] The Pharisees did not wish to approve Jesus; they wished to discredit Him.

The question of the lawfulness of divorce had been the immediate occasion for John the Baptist's condemnation of the conduct of Herod Antipas and Herodias (cf. 6:14-29).[452] And it had led to his violent death. Josephus refers to Herod's marriage to Herodias: "Herodias, taking it into her head to flout the way of our father, married Herod, her husband's brother by the same father, who was tetrarch of Galilee; to do this she parted from a living husband" (*Ant*. 18.5.4 § 136).[453] This suggests that the divorce itself, even apart from the additional offence of marrying the wife of one's brother, was a serious violation of the law.[454] As Guelich indicates, "the Baptist charged Herod with an illegal marriage based on the law of forbidden marriage that specifically excluded marrying one's brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except for the occasion of a levirate marriage to raise children to an older brother."[455] The Pharisees hoped that as Jesus said something on the subject of divorce that would reflect unfavourably upon divorce

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[450] M. Gittin IX 10: TB Gittin 90a; TJ Sotah I. 1. 16b; Num. R. IX. 30. For treatments of the Jewish legislation on divorce see M. R. Lehmann, "Gen. 2:24 as the Basis for Divorce in Halakhah and New Testament," *ZAW* 72 (1960), 263-267; T. V. Fleming, "Christ and Divorce," *JThS* 24 (1963): 541-554; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 300.

[451] Painter, *Mark*, 140.

[452] Garland, *Mark*, 378.

[453] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark,* 300.

[454] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 80.

[455] Guelich, *Mark*, 331.

and remarriage, he would meet the same fate at the hands of Herod as John did.[456] Thus, the question was hostile and had Jesus' entrapment as its object.

When the Pharisees ask whether divorce is lawful, instead of a direct answer, Jesus refers them back to Moses' command: "What did Moses *command* you?" (10:3). In the OT it is usually God who commands Israel, although on occasion Moses does the commanding (Ex. 4:28; 7:6, 10, 20; 12:28; Lev 9:5; Num 34:13; Deut 31:23 etc).[457] Pharisees needed to discover that what God commanded was not what Moses permitted.[458] Jesus shifts "the ground of discussion from what Moses wrote (vv. 3-4) to what God made and meant (vv. 6-7); from loopholes that may be permitted to the intention of what is commanded; from divorce to marriage."[459]

The Pharisees respond to Jesus' counter-question by quoting of Deut 24:1-4, where Moses' regulation covers the divorce process: "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away" (10:4). By using the word "command" in 10:3 Jesus has put his opponents on the defensive and forced them to use the more correct term "allowed." Their admission that Moses allowed divorce leaves the question of "commanding" open and prepares for Jesus' contention that Moses did so because of the people's hardness of heart.[460]

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[456] Lane, *Mark*, 354; Brooks, *Mark*, 157; Hurtado, *Mark,* 160; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 82. Perhaps due to the cooperation between the Herodians and the Pharisees, the Pharisees have known that Herod wants to kill Jesus (cf. Luke 19:11-27) and fears that Jesus might actually be John raised from the dead (Mk. 6:16).

[457] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 83.

[458] The Qumran text offers a significant parallel to Jesus' thought. Expanding on Deut 17:17, the Temple Scroll instructs "He is not to take another wife in addition to her; no, she alone will be with him as long as she lives. If she dies, then he may take himself another wife from his father's house, that is, his family" (11Qtemple 57:17-19)-M. Wise, M Abegg, and E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* [san Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996], 485). According to the Damascus Document, "They (Qumran's opponents) are caught in two traps: fornication, by taking two wives in their lifetimes although the principle of creation is 'male and female he created them' [Gen 1:27] and those who went into the ark 'went into the ark two by two' [Gen 7:9]. Concerning the David had not read the sealed book of the Law…" (CD 4:20-5:2)-Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, 197-226.

[459] Williamson, *Mark*, 176.

[460] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 293.

On the question of the lawfulness of divorce, the Pharisees understood that divorce was permitted according to the provision of Deut 24:1-4, since the passage constituted the legitimate grounds for divorce among various authorities within the Pharisaic movement (cf. Aqiba: *Gittin* IX, 10).[461] But, in Deut 24:1-3, the husband wrote a document declaring that he had divorced his wife and her sent away. Possession of this certificate provided the woman with legal proof that the marriage had ended and made it possible for her to marry someone else.[462] In this sense the certificate offered the woman legal protection against any claims of the former husband, and the possibility of starting a new life.[463]

In the light of the background, it appears that Jesus views Moses' permission as not a reflection of God's will, but instead a reflection the Israelites' hardness of heart (thn sklhrokardian umwn). Jesus' powerful retort is a condemnation of human sinfulness, which elucidates the intention of the Law of Moses. Through his retort, Jesus wanted to make clear that the purpose of Deut. 24:1 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to limit sinfulness and to control its result. To most Jews Jesus' statement would have seemed to be an attack upon the holiness and perfection of the Law of Moses. However, it is certainly an attack upon the use of Deut 24:1-4 to justify the divorcement of wives whenever husbands wished to do so.[464]

In the early chapters of Exodus, Pharaoh is described as an example of hardness of heart. In Ps 95:7, the people of Israel are urged not to follow the bad example of their ancestors as they wandered in wilderness: "Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the days of Massah in the desert." In Mark 3:5 Jesus' opponents in the synagogue are accused of hardness of heart and in 4:10-12 the general public's failure to understand the parables is explained in terms of the prophecy about hardness of heart in Isaiah 6:9-10. In Mark 6:52 the failure of Jesus' own disciples to understand him and his deeds is attributed to their hardened hearts. In the context of the debate about marriage and divorce in Mark 10:1-12 Jesus interprets Deut 24:1-4 as temporary concession by God to the spiritual weakness

[461] Williamson, *Mark*, 175.
[462] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 293.
[463] Garland, *Mark*, 379.
[464] Hurtado, *Mark*, 160.

of the people.[465]

The term sklhrokardia was used in the LXX (Deut 10:16, Jer 4:4, and Ezek 3:7),[466] where the prophets rebuke the Israelites for their refusal to listen to God's commands. Jesus' use of personalizing language intentionally connects the current religious leaders and their Jewish ancestors in a rebellious attitude to God. Just as their ancestors were disobedient to God's words, because of their hardness of heart, so due to their hardened hearts the current Jewish religious leaders are insensitive to Jesus, blind to his action and deaf to his words (4:10-12; 3:5-6). In Mark 12:1-12, Jesus retells a story of Israel's historical disobedience of God's plan in order to rebuke the opponents for their refusal to believe in Jesus' prophetic message and predict the impending judgment upon them. With the concept of hardness of heart, Jesus' retort is an assertion of the Pharisees' sinfulness. The hardness of heart is the source of their unbelief and rejection of the divine decree.[467] Due to the hardness of their hearts, Jesus' opponents indicate persistent incomprehension, unbelief, rejection, when faced with Jesus' prophetic message in his teachings and deeds. With regard to Jesus' opponents, hardness of heart is used to indicate their hostility towards him.

Jesus indicates that the provision for divorce was due to human rebellion against the divine command. He uses the language of 'hardness of heart' rhetorically to reject the Israelites who had refused to obey God's commandments:

> Jesus acknowledges the "commandment" written by Moses but relativizes it with the proclamation that it was "because of your hardness of heart," that is, because of the obstinate refusal and rebellion against the salvific ways and will of God that was characteristic of the people of Israel and that Pharisees continue to manifest in their opposition of Jesus (see 3:5), that Moses permitted divorce (10:5).[468]

Jesus' purpose is to make clear that "the intention of Deut 24:1 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to limit sinfulness, and to control its consequence."[469]

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[465] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 294.
[466] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 391.
[467] Cf. Mark 7:1-20 where their adherence to human tradition causes them to nullify the law of God.
[468] John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 204.
[469] Lane, *Mark*, 355.

Defiance against God's ordinance is the essence of hardness of heart.

2.5.5 Summary

This section has studied the literary and rhetorical functions of the term 'hardness of heart' in relation to unbelief. Throughout Mark's Gospel the opponents refused to believe in his authority (1:22; 2:10; 11:28) and accused him of blasphemy (2:7; 14:64). The opponents' disbelief is described by the language 'hardness of heart' (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up human opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Since their hearts are hardened, the opponents have not believed in that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death (3:5-6).

The image of Pharaoh's hardness of heart in the OT provides the appropriate context for properly assessing the function of its echo in Mark 3:1-6. Even though Jesus declares the arrival of the kingdom in his authoritative teachings and deeds, the unbelievers refuse to believe to Jesus' message, because their hearts are hardened, as due to hardness of heart Pharaoh refuses to release Israel from Egypt. In particular, the hardness of heart produces the opponents' conscious refusal to accept Jesus as the Son of God and his prophetic message - repentance and belief.

On the other hand, in Isaiah 6:9-10 alluded in Mark 4:12 God, through the prophet, hardens the hearts of those who do not repent of their sins. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God gives Isaiah the mission to harden the heart of Israel in order to carry out the penalty for her because she rejected God's command. The object of the judgment is never the righteous or neutral people, but the rebels against God's authority. In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites, but the wicked and the unfaithful who do not obey God's command. The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose for giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from knowledge, faith, repentance, forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate those who refuse to accept his message, so that they cannot perceive, nor repent and be forgiven. Unless the opponents accept Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus, through his parabolic words, hardens their hearts so that they do not understand the secret of the Kingdom.
In the context of the debate about marriage and divorce in this passage (10:1-12),

Jesus interprets Deut 24:1-4 as temporary concession by God to the spiritual weakness of the people. It was because the Israelites' hearts were hardened that Moses wrote a certificate of divorce. Since their hearts were hardened, they rebelled against God's command of marriage. Just as their ancestors disobeyed God's commands because of their hardness of heart, so due to their hardened hearts the current Jewish religious leaders are insensitive to Jesus, blind to his action and deaf to his words.

In Mark's Gospel, the outsiders are Jesus' opponents who have deliberately excluded themselves from the circle of salvation (the kingdom of God), because of their unbelief in Jesus (cf. 1:22, 39; 2:1-3:6; 7:1-23; 8:11-12 etc.). In Mark's Gospel, the language 'hardness of heart' is used as a cause of the opponent's refusal to believe in and acknowledge Jesus' authority as the Son of God. In Mark's Gospel their plot, which is caused by the heart-hardening is repeated (11:18; 12:9) and expanded in the following way: seizing, beating, striking, and killing him, since their hearts are hardened (3:5; 10:5). Accordingly, the opponents' hardness of heart will cause God to judge them. However, if they believe in Jesus' prophetic message in 1:14-15 and repent of their sins, they will obtain the forgiveness of God as a benefit in the Kingdom. Through this description, Mark's readers are required to decide whether they will opt for belief in Jesus and the kingdom, or for the unbelief of the opponent whose hearts are hardened. The readers are constantly admonished not to slip back into the pattern of the hardness of heart.

2.6. SYMBOLIC ACTIONS AND PARABLE ABOUT JUDGMENT ON THE UNBELIEVERS

Mark illustrates the unbelief of Jesus' opponents as refusal to understand Jesus' implied claim to a unique identity. They are amazed that Jesus dares to act in God' stead (2:7), and like God, possesses wisdom and remarkable healing powers (6:2; 15:31), claims authority over the Temple (11:28), and regards himself to be the messianic king (15:32). Nevertheless, their unbelief becomes apparent in their refusal to understand the divine authority of Jesus' teaching and deeds, instead preferring to accuse Jesus of blasphemy (2:7) and demonic loyalty (6:3; cf. 3:22, 28).

Due to the impertinence of the alleged blasphemy by Jesus (2:1-12), his humble

family and social career (6:1-6), his public honour, and his apparent powerlessness (15:29-32), they are unable to accept Jesus as a divine messiah, the Son of God, despite his obvious authority including forgiveness of sins (2:5, 10) and even power over the temple system (11:28). The king of Israel who merely saves others, but will not save himself is not worthy of faith. The Jewish religious leaders are violently opposed to his new principles because, to accept it, would mean a termination of the kind of rule which they had worked out, and from which they benefited.

However, the ultimate cause of unbelief of the opponents is their hardness of heart (3:5; 4:12; 10:5). In Mark's Gospel, the hardening language is used in order to indicate the opponents' persistent refusal to understand and believe Jesus' prophetic message (1:14-15) in his teachings and deeds. Furthermore, the language forecasts the imminent divine judgment on the unbelievers. In Mark 11-12, the opponents refuse also to accept Jesus' teaching in the parable of the wicked tenants, and his action in the Temple. Instead, they plot how to put him to death (11:18; 14:1). The opponents' unbelief in Jesus and his message is a step on the way to their own destruction (11:20; 12:1-9; 13:1-2).

2.6.1 The Cleansing of the Temple (11:15-17) and the Cursing of the Fig Tree (11:12-14, 20-26)

We are clearly meant to observe a connection between the fate of the barren fig tree and Jesus' action in the Temple. But this section (11:12-26) has been placed within two paragraphs dealing with the Jewish religious leaders' unbelief in Jesus' identity and authority (vv. 1-11, 27-33), so building up another, more complex sandwich. The judgment announced on Israel in vv. 12-26 is thus firmly connected with the Jewish religious leaders' refusal to believe in Jesus and his prophetic message. In this section, we once again find one incident sandwiched within another:

A. The cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14)

B. The cleansing of the Temple (11:15-19)

A. The cursed fig tree (11:20-26)

Both the bracketing episodes, as well as the central episode have the form of symbolic prophetic actions. Some symbolic actions carry meaning and feeling

and always produce what they symbolize.[470] For example, in Ezekiel 5 God commands the prophet to cut off and divide some of the hair on his head and face. The destiny of the hair will be the destiny of the Israelites. Both the cursing of the fig tree and the action in the Temple are symbolic in that they figure the forth coming judgment of God on the heart of Israel. "That which is appealing from a distance (cf. 11:13 to 13:1), on closer inspection has no real fruit to offer up to Jesus or God."[471]

In central episode, Jesus singles out the people who performed a legitimate function in the Temple, allowing for the performance of proper sacrifice commanded by God. To drive them out amounts to interrupting such divinely willed Temple sacrifice. It represents serious challenge to the to the Temple authorities.

One story is used as a frame for another, and both stories interpret each other. We should not expect to see here some actual chronological sequence. Here more than elsewhere the bracketing episodes patently interpret the central episode, because the cursing and withering of the fig tree foreshadows the destruction of the Temple. But on a deeper level the central episode remains the key, since without the episode of clearing the Temple, the cursing and withering fig tree remain a riddle.[472] In other words, the event of the cursing and withering of the fig tree is a symbolic or enacted prophecy.[473]

2.6.1.1 The Exegetical Perspective on the Cursing of the Fig Tree

This event involving the fig tree occurred on the day following on the Temple cleansing when Jesus and his disciples were returning from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus inspects the fig tree, going to see if he could find anything on it, just as on the previous day he inspects the Temple. The tree could not provide Jesus with figs to eat, because it was not the season for figs,[474] but despite the

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[470] Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Synoptic Gospels*, 249.
[471] Witherington III, *Mark*, 312.
[472] Edwards, *Markan Sandwiches*, 208.
[473] Isa. 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-5.
[474] For more explanation see Lane, *Mark*, 401; Hooker, *Mark,* 262; W. J. Cotter, "For It was not the Season for Figs," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 62-66.

season, the tree should have been covered with fruit to greet the Messiah.[475] Jesus' disappointment with the fig tree is like his disappointment with Israel and the Temple, especially the Temple authorities.

Fig Tree in the OT

In the context of the story, the statement, "he found nothing except leaves" (11:13; ouden euren ei mh fulla), simply indicates that the tree was completely barren and Jesus' quest was in vain. The tree apparently did not even have immature figs on it. Barrenness occurs in the OT as a description of Israel's failure to bear appropriate fruit for God, that is, belief and obedience (e.g. Jer. 8:13; Mic 1:7), as well as an expression of God's judgment (e.g. Jer 7:20; Hos. 9:16).[476] Consequently, Jesus' request for fruit from the barren fig tree has been seen as a parable of his request for those who believe in his prophetic message to Israel.[477] The close connection between this parable and the Temple demonstration, however, suggests that this quest for faith was specifically within the centre of Israel's religious life (the Temple).[478]

The fig tree would indeed have been understood as a symbol for Israel, which has failed to produce the appropriate fruits when her Messiah looked for them. The background of the imagery is found in passages of the OT, which speak of the Lord looking in vain for grapes on his vine or figs on his fig tree and of the judgment which necessarily follows.[479] This, then, is why Jesus curses the fig tree: not out pique, but because it represents the Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus. They have fallen under the judgment of God.

The fig tree that has not borne fruit is cursed (11:14): "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (mhketi eij ton aiwna ek sou mhdeij karpon fagoi). The

[475] Hooker, *Mark*, 262. In the Messianic age the fig tree will bear fruit (e.g. Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; Hag. 2:19).
[476] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 158.
[477] J. N. Birdshall, "The Withering of the Fig-Tree (Mark xi. 12-14, 20-22)," *ExpTim* 73 (1962): 191; Lane, *Mark*, 401; G. Müderlein, "Die Verfluchung des Feigenbaumes (Mk 11:12-14)," *NTS* 10 (1963): 100-101 in 89-104.
[478] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 155.
[479] Isa. 34:4; Jer 5:17; 29:17; Hos 2:12; 9:10; Joel 1:7; Mic 7:1-6. See. W. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1980), 193-96.

question must be raised whether 11:14 should be seen as a curse or a prophetic utterance. Mark has understood the declaration as an emphatic curse. Peter seems to take it in the former meaning later in 11:21. Why curse a fig tree for not bearing figs out of season? Jesus surely knows it is not fig season. This detail is cue for the reader to look beyond the surface meaning and to see its symbolic meaning.[480] This action is not about a particular unfruitful fig tree; it has to do with the Temple. The word 'season' (kairoj) in 11:13 is not botanical term for the growing season but the religious term found in 1:15 (Peplhrwtai o kairoj; "the time has come") denoting the time of the kingdom of God (cf. 13:33).[481] The barren fig tree represents the barrenness of the Temple authorities who refuse to accept Jesus' messianic reign. Thus, Mark is describing a symbolic act of judgment like the action in the Temple, which foreshadows what is to come.[482]

The tree is condemned, because of its failure to produce fruit. Hooker comments on this in the following way:

> In the declaring judgment and carrying it out, Jesus exercises the authority of God himself to condemn and destroy, but since the fig tree is a symbol for the nation, it is possible that Mark sees this action as symbol for future divine action, and supposes that God himself—rather than Jesus—will carry out the final, eschatological judgment of Israel.[483]

In context, Mark 11:14 is equivalent in function to Mark 12:9, in which the figure of the vineyard is parallel to the symbolism of the fig tree.[484] As Jesus seeks fruit from the fig tree, so God seeks fruit from the vineyard. When the tree does not produces anything or it is withheld, destruction follows. The absence of figs or fruit on the tree leads to the future inability of the tree to produce fruit. Therefore, the focus is on the failure of the fig tree and Jesus' judgment on it.[485]

Telford argues that the fig tree would indeed serve as a symbol for Israel which

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[480] Garland, *Mark*, 440.
[481] Garland, *Mark*, 440.
[482] Withherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 312.
[483] Hooker, *Mark*, 267.
[484] Lane, *Mark*, 402; Hurtado, *Mark*, 180. The cursing of the tree is familiar to the readers of the OT (e.g., Isa. 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-15).
[485] In the parable there is allusion to such passages as Jeremiah 8:8-17 or Micah 7:1-6, which predict the destruction of Jerusalem and judgment upon Israel for the failure of her leaders to demonstrate faithlessness to God (Hurtado, *Mark*, 180).

was meant to bear fruit at the end time.[486] The point is that Jesus has come and is ready to gather in God's people, who repent their sins and believe in the good news (1:14-15).[487] But, they are bearing no fruits at all (cf. Mark 4). At this point, the story of the 'withered' fig tree reflects the impending judgment upon the unbelievers. Thus, the opponents who reject Jesus' teaching and action will be destroyed due to their rejection of Jesus, just as the fig tree does by not bearing fruit, and is withered from the roots up. In the succeeding story we see parallel judgment on the Temple priests and the teachers of the law who turn the Temple into a den of robbers.[488]

Withering of the Tree

The phrase exhrammenhn ek rizwn ("withered from the roots up") in 11:20 is very similar to Hos 9:10-10:2 (the LXX), in which the expression is used as a metaphor to indicate the destruction of the Jewish leaders (cf. Job 18:16; 31:12; Ezek 17:9). In the Jewish context the concept of 'withering of the tree' has been used as a vivid warning of imminent judgment (cf. Mk 13:2; Ps 90:6; Joel 1:12; Hos. 9:16). Within the context of a number of passages, indeed, the reason given for God's wrathful visitation particularly concerns cultic deviation on the part of Israel, her running after false gods, or her censure for a corrupt Temple cult and sacrificial system (e.g. Jer. 5:17-18; 8:12-23; Hos 2:11-13; 9:10-17; Am. 4:4-13).[489]

In particular, the word exhrammenhn sends the Markan readers back to 3:1-6 where the word is used in order to describe a paralytic. This passage signals a contrast between a man with a 'withered' hand and the opponents, in response to Jesus' divine authority. According to the OT (Lev. 21:16-24) the paralytic was forbidden to enter the Temple because it was a result of the divine judgment due to his sins. As the man believes in Jesus' divine authority, his withered hand is healed. By contrast, as the opponents whose hearts are hardened reject his authority as the Son of God, they place themselves under divine judgment.

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[486] Telford, *The Barren Temple*, 195-96.
[487] Withherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 313.
[488] Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man*, 297-99.
[489] Telford, *The Barren Temple*, 135.

2.6.1.2 The Exegetical Perspective on the Cleansing of the Temple

Jesus goes into the Temple and immediately begins throwing out those selling and buying, and also overturns the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who selling doves. Jesus' action would have perhaps been an expression of divine righteous anger against this insensitive act, which prevented true worship from going on in the Court of the Gentiles.[490] Perhaps the Court of the Gentiles is not really the issue here. Jesus is interrupting sacrifices being made in the courts further within the Temple than the Court of the Gentiles. Then the issue will be whether or not all such activities and acts of worshiping God within the Temple have become farcical deception, in which case we are dealing here with a symbolic action in the Temple.[491]

His actions did not signify the destruction and replacement of the Temple;[492] they were meant to demonstrate disapprobation with respect to certain aspects of the trading.[493] His criticism was not directed against the purchase of animals as such and certainly was not directed against the practice of sacrifice; nor was it directed against money-changing. All of these things were necessary for Israel's religion to be practiced according to the Law of Moses. It is important that although Jesus' actions were directed against the animal vendor and money-changers, his criticism applied to the Temple establishment in general.[494] For it was by the authority of the ruling priests, especially the high priest himself, that these commercial activities took place in the precincts of the Temple. In attacking the vendors and money-changers, Jesus had attacked the priestly authorities.

Jesus expressed deep disappointment in the failure of the Temple establishment and issued a prophetic challenge.[495] The Temple had to function as the place of

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[490] See. D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 172.
[491] Hooker, *Mark*, 264.
[492] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*. 73-74. Sanders, argues that Jesus' action was a symbolic action or prophetic gesture (e.g., the breaking of the pot in Jer 19:10), foreshadowing the impending destruction of the Herodian temple and its replacement with one that God would build through Jesus (cf. 14:58).
[493] C. A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 (1989): 237-70; idem, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.
[494] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 180.
[495] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

prayer for the nations in accomplishment of its God-given purpose.[496] But instead, it had become a den of robbers and stood in danger of destruction. In what way the Temple functioned as a den of robbers will be discovered in several actions of the opponents' rejection in Mark 12-14.

The interpretation that Jesus gives to his action is crucial for understanding what he intended. This teaching transforms a simple display of protest into an announcement of divine judgment (see 12:9). The disciples, and the readers of Mark's Gospel also, have added advantage for understanding this incident, because they saw the cursing of the fig tree.[497]

The Cleansing of the Temple as a Symbolic Action

It was a symbolic action, not power play, to take over or do away with the Temple.[498] Rather it foreshadows such judgment. Perhaps, Mal 3:1-5 provides a background of this event, where the purging action of God is the prelude to the Judgment. From at least the time of Malachi there had been protests about the priests, whose corruption meant that the sacrifices offered in the Temple were not purely pleasing to the Lord (Mal. 3:5). Similar complaints are found in the Psalms of Solomon (2.3-5; 8.11-13) and in the Talmud (B. Pes. 57 a), while Josephus portrays the way in which the servants of the priestly aristocracy stole tithes from the ordinary priests (*Ant*. XX. 8.8; 9.2).[499] He tells the bribery of the high priests (*Ant*. 20.9.4 § 213; *Life* 39 §§ 195-96), and violence (Ant. 20.8.8 § 179-81). In some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the high priest is called as the 'Wicked Priest' (1QHab 1:13; 8:9; 9:9; 11:4), who has robbed the poor (1QpHab 8:12; 9:5; 10:1; 12:10), has accumulated wealth (1QpHab 8:8-12; 9:4-5), and has defiled the "Sanctuary of God (1QpHab 12:8-9).[500] In 2 *Baruch* the priests confess in the wake of the Temple's destruction that they have been 'false stewards' (2 *Bar*. 10:18).[501] In Mark 11:15-18 the chief priests in fact represent the Temple. Thus,

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[496] Hurtado, *Mark*, 181.
[497] Garland, *Mark*, 437.
[498] P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), 111-14; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 171.
[499] Hooker, *Mark*, 264.
[500] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 168.
[501] C. A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption," in SBL 1989 *Seminar Papers*, ed. D. J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 531-34. The

Jesus is condemning the Temple establishment rather than Temple itself.[502] There is good reason to think that Jesus may have been aiming his protests at the priests, and though Sanders objects that there is no indication that Jesus attacked them,[503] this episode is perhaps sufficient evidence that he did so. There is also significant evidence in the Markan tradition to indicate that Jesus was critical of the Temple authorities. The parable of the wicked vineyard Tenants (Mark 12:1-9) incriminates the priestly aristocracy and threatens them with the loss of their position and power.

Undoubtedly, Mark sees Jesus' actions as much more than a mere gesture of protest. They are to be understood as prophetic actions, symbolizing a divine judgment, which will be accomplished in a future incident.[504] Mark, by inserting the event in the story of the fig tree, demonstrates clearly that he understands it as sign of God's criticism of Israel, because of her unbelief and failure to bear true fruit. This presupposes that he sees it as symbol of future destruction of the Temple and final cessation of worship. Jesus' words and actions are condemnation of the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, for her failure to bear fruit, and in the context of the story of the barren fig tree, they imply judgment and destruction.

Jesus, like the Baptist, comes as the precursor trying to cleanse the heart of the people before the great and terrible judgment begins. This description might be supported by *Pss. Sol.* 17:30-32, in which the Messiah is to come and to cleanse the land, making possible the conditions for redemption (cf. 13:4-9. 12-13).[505] When God sent his Messiah, the Messiah was expected to cleanse Jerusalem, so that it would again be holy. According to Buchanan, Jesus himself saw his action as a messianic action fulfilling the prediction of Zech. 14:21 regarding the Temple: "And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of armies

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scene is fictional, of course, but it articulates he view of the author at the end of the first century.

[502] The condemnation of the Scribes who devour widows' houses is probably in reference to efforts to collect gifts for the temple (12:38-40).

[503] Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 61-76.

[504] Garland, *Mark*, 436.

[505] C. Roth, "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah," *NovT* 4 (1960): 174-81; Cf. Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20,

on that day."[506] But, although Jesus indicates their sins and warns of the impending judgment, because of blindness, deafness and hardness of heart, the Temple authorities do not understand his prophetic actions, do not repent of their sins, but reject him. Thus, the divine judgment is not far behind. At this point, the purging is a prelude to the coming judgment, and therefore a prophetic sign of that coming judgment.[507] When Jesus performs the symbolic purging in the Temple, the judgment cannot be far behind, much like the prediction in Mark 13:28-29 with regard to the fig tree.

Jesus' action of one trying to reform the corruption in the Temple indicates to us a dramatic demonstration regarding the coming judgment. What is the reason then for the judgment of the Temple? Jesus says they have made the house of God into a den of robbers or brigands (11:17). The perfect tense of the verb here pepoihkate ("you have made") indicates the irremediable character of the action of the priestly authorities, who are Jesus' opponents in Mark's Gospel, and points forward to the warning in Mark 13:2 (the Temple's destruction).[508] Like the fig tree, the Temple's functional vitality is now "withered from the root" (cf. Hos 9:16).

Quotation of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11

The mixed quotation in 11:17, which is drawn from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, probably following the LXX may have known to Mark's audience[509] clarified Jesus' action in the Temple. Isaiah 56 begins the final section of the entire book. Most scholars believe this to be written after the Babylonian exile, when the exiles were returning to their homeland.[510] After the exile, the manifest theological question was: "who are the people of God?" The answer is, the righteous people who follow the ethical demands of covenant. In Isaiah 56-66, the Temple worship is condemned. God's presence is not limited to the Temple, but exists in the righteous (Isa. 66:2).[511] The Temple represents defective covenant faithfulness,

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[506] G. W. Buchanan, "Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?" *NTS* 37 (1991): 283 in 280-90.
[507] Witherington III, *Mark*, 315.
[508] Lane, *Mark*, 407.
[509] Isaiah 56:7 (LXX) en tw oikw thj proseuchj mou; Jeremiah 7:11 (LXX) mh sphlaion lhstw.
[510] P. F. Qualls, "Mark 11:15-18: A Prophetic Challenge," *Review and Exposition* 93 (1996): 398 in 395-402.
[511] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.

without faithfulness the Temple and cult are void of meaning.

Isaiah 56 begins with a call to justice (vv. 1-2) and to covenant (vv. 3-8), which is followed by condemnation against the wicked rulers (vv. 9-12). Those who follow the covenant are the recipients of the promise of 56:7: “these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (NIV). In the quotation of Isaiah 56:7 all the righteous had a right to pray in the Temple.[512] It is thus possible to conclude that the evangelist wants his reader to understand Jesus not as eliminating the Temple, but rather permitting the believers to worship God.[513] However, this underplays the strong allusion to Jeremiah.

Mark alone, of the four evangelists includes the words *for all the nations* (LXX pasin toij eqnesin) in the quotation from Isaiah 56:7. This recalls for us that the words were originally a promise about the future.[514] Mark was probably aware of the eschatological dimension of the words. If so, he included them because he saw Jesus’ action in the Temple as a symbol of the phenomenon that through his coming death, the believers were to be brought to worship God. Surely, this would correspond to Mark 12:9 and 15:39 (cf. John 12:32). Perhaps, the evangelist sees Jesus’ action as a ‘messianic act’ - not merely a condemnation of Israel for her failure, but a claim that the time has come for the purpose of God to be fulfilled - though this will be via the paradoxical way of rejection.[515]

Jesus indicates that the people change the house of God into a den of robbers.

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[512] Cf. Witherington III, *Mark*, 313: “For some it was precisely Herod’s association with the temple and its building that made this temple problematic, for Herod was an Idumean by family heritage, which is to say his family descended from the Edomites. This, coupled with his immorality, violent actions, and self-aggrandizing activities (especially the building projects) made him an objectionable figure to many….In the Enochian and Qumran literature we find views that this temple is hopelessly corrupt and will be judged or destroyed (cf. 1 Enoch 89:73-90:29; 4QFlor 1.1-12; cf. for similar complaints about temple or the priests, Pss. Sol 2:3-5; 8:11-13; 1QpHab 8.8-13; 12:1-10; CD 5.6-8; 6.12-17; *b. Pesah*. 57a).”

[513] Witherington III, *Mark*, 316.

[514] By omitting them, Matthew and Luke make Jesus’ words a straightforward contrast between what the temple should have been and what it had become.

[515] Hooker, *Mark*, 266.

This is probably saying not that the Temple is a haven for Zealots,[516] but is rather a reference to Jeremiah 7:11, which cautions that God is about to lay waste the Jerusalem Temple (7:14).[517] The "den of robbers" in this verse is not a reference to persons who steal. In the OT, a "den" or "cave" is a place of refuge from animals or persons,[518] and "a robber can be understood as a brigand, not a thief, but a person of violence who will kill to rob."[519] It is the place where those congregate who commit such terrible acts against the covenant as described in 7:9.

The quotation from Jeremiah 7:11 attributed to Jesus in v. 17 does not refer in its original context to commercial transactions in the Temple. The people are there depicted as 'robbers' or 'brigands' because their behaviour outside the Temple means that when they enter the Temple they cannot worship God sincerely. They rob God in the Temple as surely as they have robbed the poor outside. Since by driving out the buyers and sellers, and by overturning the table of the money-changers Jesus prevents worshippers from buying sacrifices or of offering the half-shekel tax, this suggests that he is protesting that their worship without faith is shame but more than simply attacking the malpractices of the Temple authorities.[520]

The tradition of Zion had considerable popular appeal and was preached by those whom Jeremiah considers to be false prophets.[521] Jeremiah warns the

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[516] Mark may have deliberately chosen the term lhsthj, because he is writing as the Jewish War is going on and knows that in the winter of A. D. 67-68 a group of Zealotic brigands had moved into Jerusalem, setting up headquarters in the inner part of the temple, in which they remained until A. D. 70 (cf. Jos. War 4.151-57; 5.5)—J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 117-18.

[517] Lane, *Mark*, 407.

[518] The temple literally became a refuge for bandits during the war with Rome when the Zealots retreated to it. According to Josephus, they committed all manner of vile acts: "For this reason, I think, even God Himself, hating their impiety, turned away from our city, and no longer judging the temple to be a clean house for Him, brought the Romans upon us and a cleansing fire on the city" (Ant 20.8.5.§ 166)—cf. Garland, *Mark*, 439.If the original readers were aware of this fact, the reference to the "den of robbers" would have a double meaning.

[519] William L. Holladay, "Jeremiah 1," *A Commentary on the Book the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 246.

[520] Hooker, *Mark*, 264.

[521] Neils Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelites Society*

Israelites in his sermon of chapter 7, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” (7:4, NIV). He follows the statement with the demands of the covenant. But the people continually affirm their trust in Zion. After declaring the corruption of the people, Jeremiah continues with a word from the Lord in 7:10-11. The people were putting their trust in the Temple and the tradition of Zion as a substitute for trust in God.[522] This attitude excluded faithful actions toward God by teaching that proper ritual would bring protection and safety. The attitude of the heart had been distorted and the faithful attitude to God was missing.

When Jesus quotes the OT in Mark, new meaning is given to the Scriptures. It is very possible that in Mark 11:17 Jesus cites Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 in order to uncover the parallels between the post-exilic people and the people of his day.[523] Just like those in Jeremiah’s day, the religious adherents of Jesus’ day had the moral character of robbers in a den. They had neglected the faithful actions of the covenant and become corrupt. As did Jeremiah, Jesus brings a powerful accusation against the religious leaders. “In Jesus’ lament for Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-38=Luke 13:34-35) there are significant parallels to Jeremiah, the prophet who had severely criticized Jerusalem’s first Temple (Jer 7:14, 34; 12:7; 22:5; 26:9), whose criticism Jesus may have had in mind when he took action in Jerusalem’s second Temple (Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:7).”[524]

Jesus is condemning the entire religious action in the Temple as being without faith in his prophetic message. His action of overturning the tables and chairs and driving out the buyers and sellers can be understood as prophetic symbolic actions of inevitable and imminent judgment.

It is important, of course, to grasp the nature of such prophetic signs.[525] As Painter says, a “prophetic sign of impending destruction should be understood as

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(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 172.
[522] Qualls, “Mark 11:15-18,” 399.
[523] Qualls, “Mark 11:15-18,” 400.
[524] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 168.
[525] For more understanding, cf. Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

warning of disaster that may be averted by responding positively to the sign."[526] But the Temple authorities' response to Jesus' action in the Temple was hardly positive. The ruling priests and Scribes in 11:18 "were seeking how they might destroy him."[527] God is not rejecting the whole of Israel, but rather their corrupt leaders. His rejection and judgment is emphasized by the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12. Thus, the Temple under the religious leaders of the Temple establishment, especially the chief priests, who do not believe in Jesus and his message and who reject him, stood now under God's judgment as prophesied by Jeremiah (11:17c and Jer 7:11-14; cf. 11:12-14, 20).[528]

Since the story of the Temple is enclosed by the story of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-21), there is little doubt about what connection the implied author is trying to make between them. Indeed the setting of the temple story within that of the barren fig tree, suggests that Mark may have seen it in terms of the accomplishment of eschatological hopes. The Temple establishment faces ruin if it does not change its ways. The fig tree could not produce anything and so fell under judgment. If the Temple establishment cannot, or will not, do better, then it too will fall under judgment. When Jesus comes to Jerusalem, he expects the promises to be fulfilled, that is, that the fig tree should provide fruit, and that the temple of God should be holy. But the tree does not provide its fruit, and the Temple is a den of robbers rather than the house of prayer for all nations. Therefore, eschatological hopes involve judgment. No doubt Jesus' protest in the Temple implied that his opponents have not repented and believed in Jesus' prophetic messages and actions, so that the divine judgment would follow them. How serious this judgment would be is emphasized in the parable of the vineyard tenants (12:1-12), and in Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple (13:1-2). His action in the Temple is consistent with the typical of Israel's prophets.[529] His condemnation was directed emphatically against the religious leaders,

[526] Painter, *Mark*, 158.
[527] In 3:6 the scribes begin seeking to destroy Jesus. In 12:12 they seek to arrest him. In 14:1 they seek for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth. In 14:1 Judas, having reached a bargain with the ruling priests, begins seeking an opportune time to betray Jesus. After his arrest, the Sanhedrin in 14:55 begins seeking damning testimony against Jesus.
[528] R. A. Guelich, "Anti-Semitism and/or Anti-Judaism in Mark," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, eds. C. A Evans & Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 92.
[529] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

especially the Temple authorities Therefore, if the Jewish religious leaders, who have not believed in Jesus and his prophetic message and had rejected him, now do not repent their sins and accept him, they will fall under judgment as well.

Consequently, the implied author intends the reader to perceive Jesus' action as a sign of imminent judgment on the Temple establishment. A prophetic sign of impending punishment should be understood as a warning of tragedy that may be prevented by responding positively to the sign.[530] The sign is then to be seen as a correction to the Temple situation. The crowds saw Jesus' action in the Temple and were amazed at that. While the chief priests and scribes saw his action, they then rejected the correction and sought to destroy him (11:18), because their hearts are hardened, their eyes are blind, and their ears are deaf. Therefore, they cannot avoid the impending divine judgment.

2.6.2 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard (12:1-12)

In the rhetorical structure of Mark 12:1-12, Mark strengthens the hostility on the unbelief and rejection of the Jewish religious leaders toward Jesus.[531] Although some scholars resist seeing the parable as an allegory,[532] most interpreters read the parable of the wicked tenants allegorically[533] and understand it as a representation of Israel's continued unbelief and rejection of God's message.[534] "The allegorical features have transformed the parable into an allegory of God's dealing with stubborn Israel, Israel's persecution and murder of the prophets, the final killing of God's Son Jesus, and judgment on Israel and vindication of Jesus."[535] The primary purpose of this section is to study the motif of judgment on unbelievers in the allegorical parable.

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[530] Painter, *Mark*, 158-59.
[531] H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1952), 150.
[532] C. H. Dodd, *The Story of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet &Co., 1936), 124-132; J. Jeremiahs, *The Parable of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 70-77. Both felt that in its main lines, the history is natural and realistic in the political and economical situation of first-century Palestine. Both Dodd and Jeremiahs, therefore, felt that the entrance of the son was demanded by logical rather than theological motivation.
[533] Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, vol 1 (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr 1888), 65-85.
[534] K. R. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 73.
[535] Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 216.

2.6.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

Jesus' parable of the Wicked Tenants is transparently an account of the religious leaders in Israel as unwilling to receive God's word sent to them by the prophets, as 12:12 demonstrates.[536] In the previous section (11:27-33), they indicated their unbelieving rejection Jesus' authority over the Temple. The parable says that in these actions they are guilty of rejecting those sent to them by God and are like their ancestors who had rejected the ministry of earlier prophets. But the parable not only interprets the previous encounter between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, it also provides the background for the incidents that follow. There, the religious leaders debate with Jesus in attempts to trap him into making an incriminating statement (12:13-34), and Jesus rebukes them (12:35-44).[537]

According to Blomberg, the form of the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants is triadic: 1) God, who is described as a 'Man' in this passage, is patient and tolerant, even in the face of unbelief and rejection; 2) the day will come, however, when God will punish those who do not believe in his will and are rejecting that; and 3) despite the rejection by Israel, God's purpose will be fully fulfilled; that which his tenants tried to oppose and destroy, God has affirmed.[538]

The structure of 12:10b-11appears in a chiastic (ABBA) pattern:

12:10b The stone the builders rejected	A
12:10c This has become the capstone;	B
12:11a The Lord has done this,	B'
12:11b it is marvelous in our eyes'?"	A'

This form of an ABB'A' pattern indicates two characters' action: God's divine action framed by human responses (part B and B'), and human action to cause God to act (parts A and A'): the rejection of the stone by the builders and the finding of the stone's vindication to be marvellous by 'us.'[539]

2.6.2.2 The Exegetical Perspective on Judgment

The vineyard was a well-known metaphor for Israel and here it again symbolizes

[536] Hurtado, *Mark*, 190.
[537] Hurtado, *Mark*, 190.
[538] C. L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 247-51.
[539] Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 112.

Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:7; Jer. 2:21).[540] Thus, the symbol of the tenants in the vineyard can be interpreted to mean the representatives of Israel who have responsibility to keep the vineyard according to the owner's plan.[541] Whereas the vineyard is critiqued in Isa. 5, the criticism in the Markan text is directed towards the tenants, the Jewish leaders, not the vineyard itself.

The Biblical Theme in Isaiah 5

As in some other parables, Jesus was taking a well-known biblical theme, in this case from Isaiah 5:1-7[542] and developing it further.[543] Outside of these opening lines, Isaiah's parable contrasts sharply with Mark's insofar as it introduces no tenants. Jesus' parable does not develop the image in the same way: in Isaiah it is the vineyard which has failed, in Mark the vineyard will be entrusted to new tenants.[544] After detailing the careful preparation made by "my beloved," God's expectation immediately follows: "He expected it to yield [good] grapes, but sour grapes were all that it gave" (Isa. 5:2, 4). A few lines later, Isaiah explains this to mean, "He [God] expected justice, but found [unlawful] bloodshed; [expected] integrity, but only [found] a cry of distress" (Isa. 5:7). What follows from this? The prophet registers God's complaint (Isa, 5:3-4) and delivers God's judgment:

> Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it (Isa.

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[540] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 456.
[541] John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press 1992), 235.
[542] Willis argues that Isaiah 5:1-7 must be understood as a parable since the passage possesses the elements which are regarded necessary to the parable genre: 1) a simple lesson is intended; 2) correspondence between parabolic figures and real characters is present; 3) legal elements often found in other parables are present (e.g., 2 Sam 12:1-7; 14:1-24; 1 Kgs 20:35-42), and 4) a specific situation is depicted rather than a typical condition; J. T. Willis, "The Genre of Isaiah 5:1-7," *JBL* 96 (1977): 360-62 in 337-62. Sheppard has proposed that Isa. 5:1-7 is indeed an instance of the juridical parable; G. T. Sheppard, "More on Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 45-47. He has concluded that the parable is not incomplete when it is understood that Isa. 3:13-15 "contains the missing parts of an original, juridical parable preserved mostly in Isa. 5:1-7" (Sheppard, "Isaiah 5:1-7," 46). Thus it would appear that a consensus has emerged in which Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard is understood as an instance of the genre juridical parable.
[543] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 74-76.
[544] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 456.

5:5-6 NIV).

When one investigates the mood transitions within Isaiah's extended parable, the following three movements are evident: expectation-disappointment-judgment.[545]

When the parable of the wicked tenants in Mark's Gospel begins with a recitation of the deeds of a man building a vineyard, the reader/hearer might be disposed to expect a parable in which the same mood transitions flow.[546] By using and noticeably modifying a familiar opening, the narrator evokes the mood and theme of a familiar parable, while at the same time signalling that a new version (Mk. 12:1-12) of the old parable (Isa. 5:1-7) is about to begin.[547] Thus, in Mark's Gospel, continuity evokes the familiar mood transitions, while discontinuity signals that a novel production is about to unfold.

The Markan Gospel provides the point of departure from which the new parable may be constructed. In this version of the parable there is concern with the vineyard tenants rather than with the quality of the fruit.[548] God expects the fruit from the tenants in the vineyard. But, the wicked tenants refuse to hand over the fruit of the vineyard to its owner, committing a series of murderous offences against his servants and son, the result of which is divine judgment and destruction. That this parable functions as a juridical parable is suggested by the by the question of 12:9a: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (ti Îoun poihsei o kurioj tou ampelwnojÈ) Although Mark supplies Jesus' answer (v. 9b), the answer is obvious and would be acknowledged by his audience.[549] The juridical nature of the parable becomes unmistakably clear from the Markan conclusion: "And they tried to arrest him…for they perceived that he had told the parable against them…" (12:12)

Even though the evangelist does not denote who this group (autoij) is in the introduction of the parable (12:1), it is clear from Ch. 11 that he is thinking of

[545] Milavec, "Mark's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," 294.
[546] Hurtado, *Mark*, 191.
[547] Milavec, "Mark's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," 295.
[548] C. A. Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12," *BZ* 28 (1984): 83 in 82-86.
[549] Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables," 83.

Jesus' opponents, the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem (the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders, 11:27; cf. 12:12).[550] In 11:27 they have refused to accept that Jesus' authority is from in heaven.[551]

The absentee landlord sends his servants[552] to collect the payment from the tenants (12:2). The word 'servant' (douloj) is a frequent designation in the OT for the prophets whom God sent to the peoples (1 Kings 14:18; 15:19; 18:36; 2 Kings 9:36; 10:10; 14:25; and the phrase "my servants the prophets" in Jer. 7:25; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7). The treatment of the servants in the parable surely called to mind the ill-treatment of the prophets.[553] The first is beaten and sent away (12:3), the next is struck on the head and treated shamefully (12:4), and the last is killed (12:5). Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:2), but in later apocryphal legends about prophets, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Habakkuk had been killed. Popular wisdom in the time of Jesus believed that prophets inevitably were rejected and suffered a martyr's fate (Matt 5:12; 23:31-39; Luke 13:31-33; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb 11:36-38).[554]

Lane comments on 12:5 as rejection:

> The detail in verse 5b, however, that the owner sent many others, was intended by Jesus to force his listeners beyond the framework of the parable to the history of Israel. In the OT the prophets are frequently designated "the servants" of God (cf. Jer 7:25f; 25:4; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6) and it is natural to find a reference to their rejection in the words "beating some, and killing others."[555]

The Markan account has three successive servants (doulon, allon doulon, allon) who are, respectively, beaten, wounded in the head (ekefaliwsan) and treated shamefully, and killed (cf. 12:3-5). "This begins to characterize how in the biblical tradition the past leaders of Israel continually rejected, abused and killed

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[550] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 320.
[551] Hooker, *Mark*, 273. Gundry treats 11:27-33 and 12:1-12 together as a single section (*Mark*, 656).
[552] The Jewish leaders were like their ancestors who, when they had authority, killed the prophets and wise men God sent to Israel (cf. Mt. 23:28-29). In this generation's rejection of Jesus, the blood-guilt of the ages was coming to rest on them.
[553] Garland, *Mark*, 452.
[554] Garland, *Mark*, 452.
[555] Lane, *Mark*, 418.

God's prophets (1Kgs. 18:13; 2Chr. 36:15-16; Neh 9:26), who were often referred to as 'servants' sent by God (Jer 7:25f; 25:4; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6)."[556] It is natural, therefore, to consider that in the parable, Jesus is referring to the prophets as the fore-runners of himself.[557] Obviously, the metaphor has been shaped by the traditional idea of Mark and represents the persecution of the prophets and the slaying of Jesus.[558] Thus, the servants are interpreted allegorically as the prophets, and it is historically appropriate natural to speak of a long succession of servants.

Beloved Son

The landlord "had one left to send, a son, whom he loved" (12:6a). He sent his son to them expecting that they would respect him. However, they seized, killed, and threw him out of the vineyard (12:7-8). The son is on a different level from the servants, and the owner sends him, because he assumes that the tenants will "respect him" (12:6b).[559] The son's mission is the same as that of the servants before him. The owner gives the tenants every opportunity to repent and to pay their rent—to give him the required fruits in due season (see Ps 1:3).[560] Two other instances of the adjective 'beloved' (agaphtoj) in Mark involve the identification of Jesus as God's beloved son[561]: the heavenly voice ("my beloved son") at the baptism (1:11) and at the transfiguration (9:7).[562] At least at the Markan level of the parable's history, the beloved son is Jesus. Matera points out

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[556] Hurtado, *Mark*, 191; Heil, *Mark*, 235. The term douloj Kuriu is used of Moses (LXX Jos 14:7, Ps 104: 26), Joshua (LXX Jos 24:29), and David (LXX 2 Kgs 3:18), and then regularly of the prophets (Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6 Jer 7:25 etc.). Snodgrass holds that the killing of the prophets is a frequent New Testament theme. Since this view of the prophets' fate was that held by the early Church, it is sometimes suggested that this feature is an argument for the origin of the parable in the early church; *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 78.

[557] Taylor, *Mark*, 474; E. P. Gould, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 221.

[558] Schweizer, *The Good News*, 240-41.

[559] The verb "respect" is used in the LXX to refer to people "humbling themselves" before messengers of God (see Ex. 10:3; Lev 26:41; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron 7:14; 12:7, 12; 36:12).

[560] Garland, *Mark*, 453.

[561] There is no agaphtoj in Matt. 21:37. Mark and Luke uses it by each supplying his own introduction and drawing out the Christological implications; J. A. T. Robinson, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: A Test of Synoptic Relationship," *NTS* 21 (1974-75): 454 in 443-61.

[562] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 338.

that the exact form of the title that appear in 1:11,[563] "beloved son," re-surfaces in the parable of the vineyard (12:1-12), a parable that emphasizes the opposition to Jesus and echoes Psalm 2, also in the use of the term 'inheritance' (Ps. 2:8 LXX).[564] Though in this specific case the human opposition to Jesus is the centre of focus, in Mark's Gospel as a whole, it is clear that the opposition reflects a supernatural one.[565] Therefore, the son represents Jesus himself. In the NT and later Christian writings en tw hgaphmenw (Eph. 1:6) and o agaphtoj become Messianic designations.[566] Thus, just as their ancestors had rejected God's servants, that is, the prophets, so the religious leaders will put to death the Son himself, the Messianic king.[567] "The point of the parable is the obduracy and criminal irresponsibility to the tenants."[568]

The Unbelieving Plot

In Mark 12:7 the sentence, "Come, let us kill him," (deute apokteinwmen auton) is the same as the LXX version of Gen 37:20. It expresses what Joseph's brothers planned to do to him prior to deciding to sell him into slavery. "There may be hint of Joseph/Jesus typology here, especially with regard to the theme of both as innocent suffers. A more promising motif is the jealousy or envy that motivated Joseph's brothers as a type of what motivated the tenant farmers (who in the parable represent Jesus' opponents; see 12:1a, 12; 15:10)."[569]

The tenant farmers threw the beloved son out of the vineyard (12:8). At the most basic level this implies that the tenant farmers refused to give the beloved son a decent burial (cf. 15:42-47)—an indignity even beyond what they did to the servants. Heb 13:12-13 provides a possible parallel with 12:8: "Jesus also suffered outside the city gate…. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp…"[570] Both Mark 12:8 and Heb 13:12-13 may reflect that Jesus was crucified outside

[563] Hurtado, *Mark*, 191.
[564] Matera, *Kingship of Jesus*, 176.
[565] Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 71.
[566] Taylor, *Mark*, 475.
[567] Gould, *Mark*, 221.
[568] Hooker, *Mark*, 276.
[569] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.
[570] Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.

the walls of Jerusalem.

The conclusion of the parable is intentionally eschatological—the landlord will return and put to death the tenants (12:9). Thus, whoever has rejected the owner's son has rejected the owner. The owner will in turn destroy (apolesei)[571] them and give the vineyard to others, "among whom Mark's audience would have presumably seen themselves."[572] The word apolesei echoes 3:6 and 11:18, where the aim of the religious leaders is to eliminate (apoleswsin) Jesus: the tables will be turned,[573] but the destruction of the tenants does not mean the end of the vineyard (contrast Isa. 5:5-6); new tenants will be installed.

The Judgment of the Tenants

In 12:9, the punishment of the tenants is indicated by the rhetorical question and answer form, which, in itself, is quite common as a parabolic conclusion. According to Mark, he answered his own question by saying that the tenants would be destroyed and the vineyard given to others. In other words, the punishment in the parable is an allegorization of the opponents' destiny. Mark describes the religious leaders, who are rejecting the final messenger, the Son of the God, who will not let them escape from the imminent disaster.

There is a theological dimension to the canonical context of the vineyard parable that is quite important. Israel is God's choice vineyard. But their election was no guarantee that God would not bring destruction and take away the institution (e.g. the Temple and altar) he had given them.[574] The Israelites would have to learn that God is sovereign, and is free to destroy and recreate.[575] It is this same theology that finds expression in Mark's vineyard parable; the point is being made that God has the right to destroy the Temple establishment and to bring a new

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[571] What then will God do? The question is answered by Jesus' prediction of the temple destruction in Mark 13. It is not hard to understand "**...**why, on the basis of a parable like this and the teaching in Mark 13, the early church concluded that the judgment that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was God's response to the rejection and death of Jesus by the Jewish leaders (see Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.7. 7-9)"-- Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 321.
[572] Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 321.
[573] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 461.
[574] Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables," 86.
[575] J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon*(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 54-55.

community through faith.[576] Thus, not only does the vineyard parable in Mark parallel the form and function of Isaiah's juridical parable, but also, more significantly, it has caught the essence of the prophetic critique against unwarranted supposition about God's election.[577]

Quotation of Psalm 118:22-23

The author of Mark's Gospel also knew of the resurrection of Jesus. Thus Jesus asks, "Haven't you this scripture?" quoting from Psalm 118:22-23.[578] The early Christians understood and used this text as referring to the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Rom 9:32; Eph 2:20).[579] Here the themes of rejection, reversal, supremacy, the work of God, and amazement, all contribute to the understanding of the preceding parable of the rejected son and his vindication and the subsequent turning of the tables by the intervention of his father.[580] What the parable did not contain was any concept of the vindicating rejected son himself being and taking the supreme place; indeed, the imagery of the parable did not allow any event outside the parable situation to include the possibility of resurrection after death.[581] In the present context, the quotation serves to complete the parable of the son, who has been killed by the tenants. This figure was understood to represent Jesus: it seemed unnecessary to refer to the resurrection.

Marcus argues that the link between the two parts is strengthened by a series of verbal and thematic correspondence:

> [T]he rejection of the stone corresponds to the rejection of the servants and the son in the parable, its vindication by the Lord corresponds generally to the action of 'the lord of vineyard' in 12:9, and the words "builders" and "head" are reminiscent of the building of the tower (12:1) and the wounding of one of the servants in the head (12:4). The link between 12:1-9 and 12:10-12 makes it probable that in Mark's mind the main characters in the two parts are to be unidentified: the wicked tenants are the rejecters of the stone, the stone itself is the son, and the 'Lord of the vineyard' is God.[582]

In this form of rejection and vindication the stone functions as a continuation and epilogue of the parable by predicting the transformed status of the "son," who is

[576] Painter, *Mark's Gospel,* 162.
[577] Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables," 86.
[578] Hooker, *Mark*, 277; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.
[579] Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 162; Hooker, *Mark*, 277.
[580] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.
[581] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.
[582] Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 111.

rejected and slain: the Liqon, represents Jesus as the one whose humiliation is turned into exaltation.[583] In rabbinic literature the rejected stone (אֶבֶן) of Ps. 118:22 was understood as referring to individuals (e. g. Abraham, David or the Messiah).[584] Josephus uses the wordplay between אֶבֶן and בֵּן in the Jewish Wars 5.6.3. §272:

> [A]ccordingly the watchmen that sat upon the tower gave them notice when the engine was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out aloud in their own country language, "THE SON COMETH:" so those that were in its way stood off, and threw themselves down upon the ground; by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm.[585]

"The phrase o uioj ercetai in the 'native tongue' has prompted some discussion, but regardless of whether Hebrew and Aramaic was meant, the warning obviously contained a corruption of אֶבֶן and בֵּן."[586] The wordplay between the words is also reflected in the NT. The occurrence of the words for 'stone' and 'son' in close proximity may be due to coincidence in some cases;[587] "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham (Mt 3:9; cf. Mt 4:3;

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[583] Kefalhn gwniaj probably refers to the keystone of the arch, not the foundation stone (cf. J. Jeremiah, "liqon liqonj," *TDNT* IV, 174).

[584] Lane, *Mark*, 420; Taylor, *Mark*, 477. See LmR IV.1; ExR XX. 9; XLVI. 2; and EsR VII. 10. In the OT passages אֶבֶן is found in connection with בֵּן, e.g., יִשְׂרָאֵל אַבְנֵי זִכָּרֹן לִבְנֵי (memorial stones for the sons of Israel) in Exodus 28:12. Similar wordplay between אֶבֶן and בֵּן is also found in the OT (Ex 28:17, 21; 39:6, 7, 14; Jos. 4:6-7; Lam. 4:1-2; Zech. 9:16). The talmudic literature, likewise, confirms the link between אֶבֶן and בֵּן: "This is an argument from minor to major: if with the stones of the altar which do not see and speak, eat or drink, because they make peace between Israel and their Father in heaven as the Torah declared, 'Thou shalt lift no iron tool upon them' (Deut 27:5), the children (בֵּן)of the Torah, who are an atonement for the world, how much more [should they not lift up an iron tool against each other!] Similarly Scripture declares 'Thou shalt build the altar of the Lord thy God of whole stones (Deut 27:6)…if with stones which do not see or hear, speak or eat or drink…must be 'whole' before the Holy [blessed be He], how much more the children of the Torah…must be 'whole' before the Holy One, blessed be He" (*b Semahoth* 47b-48a); Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 114-15.

[585] Translation is based on William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Edition* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1987), 710.

[586] Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 115.

[587] Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 117.

7:9; Lk 19-39-40).[588]

The appropriateness of the quotation must have been as obvious to Jesus as it was to the apostles,[589] while the use of anegnwte has a dominical flavour.[590] Mark claims that Jesus' utilization of the text has the purpose of stimulating repentance on the part of the Jewish leaders by identifying his rejection with the rejection of the stone that was subsequently vindicated by God's own hand.[591] Marcus describes the correspondence between the parable and the quotation from the Psalm:

> The rejection of the stone must represent the murder of the son, that is, the execution of Jesus. This identification is cemented by the fact that the verb apodocimazein (to reject) occurs in only one other place in Mark, in 8:31, where Jesus uses it to prophesy his own rejection by the Jewish leaders. The raising of the stone to the head of the corner, then, must correspond to the resurrection of Jesus, since resurrection is represented in the three passion predictions as the reversal of the humiliation of the crucifixion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In Mark 12:10-11, therefore, Jesus uses Ps. 118:22-23 to prophesy his death and resurrection.[592]

By this scripture, Mark constructs a bridge between the Son of Man (8:31; 9:12) and the rejected only Son in the parable (12:6, 10-11).[593] Mark makes an explicit Christological claim in the citation of Ps. 118:22.

Jesus' parable is directed against the religious leaders and predicts their future destruction, but it is of course, their rejection of Jesus (and his teaching) which leads to their own rejection by God.[594] The authorities recognize that the parable is spoken against them; they are the wicked tenants.

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[588] Thus the wordplay in Mark 12:10 is evidence of the early existence of Messianic proof-texts, and "serves as a warning that God will reverse the judgment of men with regard to his final messenger in a startling display of his power, turning apparent defeat into triumph (cf. Acts 4:11; I Peter 2:7)"; Lane, *Mark*, 420.

[589] Taylor plausibly suggests that the church's widespread use of the verse goes back to the memory of Jesus' own teaching (Taylor, *Mark*, 477).

[590] E. Earle Ellis, "Midrash, Targum and New Testament Quotation" in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, eds. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 67.

[591] Jeremiah, "liqon liqonj," 275.

[592] Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 114.

[593] Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 94.

[594] J. D. Crossan, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," *JBL* 90 (1973): 455 in 451-65.

The pericope is clearly an allegory; God's vineyard will be taken from the evil authorities of Israel and will be given to the Gentiles (cf. 21:43); these authorities have rejected the OT prophets and will kill Jesus whom God has now made the corner stone. For Mark, the reference to the beloved son must have seemed a clear messianic claim.[595] What Mark emphasizes here is what the Sanhedrin does not understand about Jesus, as the Son of God, because of their hardness, deafness, and blindness.[596] In other words, placing this parable following the incident of the Sanhedrin's failure to understand Jesus, Mark continues the theme in the parable of the rejection of Jesus by the wicked tenants.

As an allegorical representation of Israel's continued rejection of God's message and as the climax of her rejection of Jesus, Mark uses the parable of the wicked tenants for his theological purpose:

> The citation of Ps. 118:22 at the end of this parable confirms the eschatological prospect by stating the fact of rejection and vindication and proclaims the establishment of the messianic foundation stone. By indirectly identifying himself as the rejected stone (i.e., son of the vineyard owner), Jesus views his impending rejection as a step toward the establishment of a new messianic rule. Despite (and we might add "through") rejection God will establishes his Messiah.[597]

Through this parable Mark expresses his theological view that a new messianic rule will be established in the eschatological sense.

Mark 12:12 makes very clear that the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Jesus for using this illustration because they realized he was pointing at them - they were the wicked farmers in his story. But they were afraid to touch him because of the crowds. Mark's description of the events leading to the passion is full of dramatic irony: Jesus' parable is directed against the religious leaders and predicts their future destruction, but it is, of course, their rejection of Jesus which leads to their own rejection by God.[598]

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[595] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.
[596] Gundry, *Mark*, 691.
[597] H. F. Bayer, "Prediction of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel*, eds. J. B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshal (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 631-632.
[598] Hurtado, *Mark*, 277.

2.6.3 Summary

Mark may well have combined the stories about the fig tree and the Temple's cleansing to emphasize the opponent's rejection and their destruction. Jesus enunciates the opponents' sins with the incident of the Temple cleansing. However, they refused to accept Jesus' warning of the impending judgment, and they looked for a way to arrest and kill him (11:18; 12:12; 14:1). Thus, they will not avoid God's punishment (Mark 13). What the fig tree, as withered all the way from the root (cf. 4:6) foreshadows, would happen to the Temple and Jerusalem, (in A. D. 70, perhaps). This termination is likely paralleled by 13:28-32, in which the fig tree is described again as a symbol of the end time.

The parable in 12:1-12 defines 'unbelief' as the wicked tenants' consistent rejection of God's servants, i.e. the Jewish ancestors' rejection of prophets. Its climax is rejection by the current Jewish leaders, i.e. the death of the son (Jesus). Although the Jewish leaders know he has spoken the parable against them, they do not repent of their sins, but they continually reject Jesus (12:12; cf. 3:5-6), because their hearts are hardened. And they hand him over to death. Therefore, Jesus' opponents who have rejected Jesus, Son of God, will not escape from imminent judgment. Their wilful rebellion necessarily excludes them from obtaining the forgiveness of God, and from the kingdom of God (cf. 3:29).

However, significantly, in the midst of Mark 12 there is hope—even for a scribe, because 12:28-34 tells the story of one person who agrees with Jesus about the two greatest commandments. And while the Jewish leaders in general are roundly denounced (12:12-21; 12:1-12, 38-40), Jesus speaks of this one member of the group, "You are not far from the kingdom of God (12:34). "The opponents as a group are hopeless outsiders, yet to the individual with an open heart—even a scribe—the kingdom beckons."[599]

2.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of chapter 2 was to consider and clarify the development of Jesus' opponents' unbelief in Mark's Gospel. To be more specific, I was interested in the following matters: the nature of the opponents' unbelief, the major cause of the

[599] S. H. Smith, "Inside and Outside in Mark's Gospel," *The Expository Times* 102 (1991): 365 in 363-367.

unbelief, the relationship between the language ‘hardness of heart’ and the motif of unbelief, and the eschatological judgment as a predicted result of the unbelief.

In the ‘conflict episodes,’ Mark describes various groups, and the different ways in which they do not believed in Jesus as the Son of God. In 2:1-12 Mark indicates that the scribes rejected Jesus’ authority over the forgiveness of sins. In 6:1-6, Mark emphasizes that Jesus’ hometown people (even his family) refused to accept Him as the Messiah. Further, the opponents’ unbelief lies in their rejection of the Baptist’ call to repentance and his message of the coming Stronger One (11:30), with the consequence that they exhibit opposition toward Jesus from the very beginning of his mission (cf. 2:6-10). Due to Jesus’ arrogance of blasphemy (2:1-12), his humble family and social position (6:1-6), his public honour, and his apparent powerlessness (15:29-32), they are unable to accept Jesus as a divine messiah, the Son of God, despite his evident authority over sin (2:5, 10), sickness (2:11; 6:2; 15:31), and even the Temple system (11:28).

The opponents’ unbelief is understood as the rejection of Jesus and his salvation message. Jesus’ response against the antagonists’ unbelief was their exclusion from the kingdom of God. Their unbelief, which is refusal to accept Jesus’ prophetic claim in 1:14-15, contrasts with the centurion’s faithful confession (15:39). Jesus indicated the definition of the new covenant family, that is “whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (3:35), as God’s eschatological community.

The opponents’ unbelief is illustrated by the language of hardness of heart (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up the people’s opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Due to their hardened hearts, the opponents have not believed that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor did they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death (3:5-6). Their plot, which is caused by their hardened hearts, is repeated (11:18; 12:9) and expanded in the following way: seizing, beating, striking, and killing him (12:1-12). Accordingly, the opponents’ hardness will cause God to judge them. Even though the opponents know he has spoken the parable of the wicked tenants in 12:1-12 against them,

they do not repent of their sins, but they continually reject Jesus (12:12; cf. 3:5-6), because their hearts are hardened. And they hand Jesus over to death. Therefore, the opponents who have rejected Jesus, the Son of God, will not escape from impending judgment. Their wilful rebellion necessarily excludes them from obtaining the forgiveness of God, and from the kingdom of God (cf. 3:29).

Mark considers 'hardness of heart' as the highest expression of unbelief and an utter insensitivity to man's needs and problems.[600] Although the people had seen many instances of God's work revealed in Jesus' teachings and miracles, they did not want to accept it. They regarded it impossible to open up and accept the new principle in the kingdom of God. The reason is that they have shut down the possibility, through resisting the willingness and the ability to open up and think about what is going on. Human volition does not want to open up to what God wants to do, and does not want to realize that God is in Jesus' works (3:6; 12:1-10; 14:1-2; 15:1). Human volition wants a spectacular sign from God, or like the devil, a great display of divine power (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). However, it does not want God to become a human being, to be like one of us (cf. John 1:11).[601] The greatest obstacle to faith is the unwillingness of the human heart to accept the God who condescends to us simply in only the son of Mary.

Nevertheless, Satan stands behind human volition. In Jewish literature, the wicked who are ruled by the spirit of darkness (1QS 3:18-21) walk in the way of darkness with blindness of eyes, deafness of ears, stiffness of neck, and hardness of heart (1QS 4:11), so that they will never understand God's word. Hence, they will not escape from the imminent judgment (1QS 2:25-26).[602]

The depiction of the wicked in the Qumran texts is attributed quite similarly to those described as 'the one outside' in 4:12. In Mark's Gospel the outsiders are

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[600] Edward J. Mally, "The Gospel According to Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol 2, eds. Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 236. Cf. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.
[601] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 175.
[602] A Dupont-Sommer, A. *The Essene Writing from Qumran* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1976), 82-83.

Jesus' opponents who have deliberately excluded themselves from the circle of salvation (the kingdom of God) by their attitudes of hostility to Jesus (cf. 1:22, 39; 2:1-3:6; 7:1-23; 8:11-12 etc.).[603] Similar to 1QS 3:18-21, in Mark 4:15 the opponents' refusal to understand Jesus' message of the Kingdom is the result of Satan-inspired opposition. In the parable of the sower, the first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. There the earth is so hard that the seed stays on the surface and birds come and eat it (4:4). Jesus interprets this action as Satan's coming to take away the Word (4:15). Since Satan prevented the opponents from listening to Jesus' message, they did not understand it and rejected him and eventually brought about his death (3:6).

Through the portrayal of the unbelief of the opponents and the judgment on them, Mark warns those who reject Jesus' teachings and vilify Jesus' ministry. In Mark's Gospel, the motif of unbelief is a negation. It would seem that Mark was, indeed, using the negative motif to force the reader/hearer to seek the positive counter-balance.[604]

[603] Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 306.
[604] Wolfgang. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 12.