

The Focus of Mark 13.24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?

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Mark 13.24-27 is often interpreted as a prediction of the parousia at the consummation of history. In this article the author proposes that these verses, derived entirely from OT texts, metaphorically refer to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. The first part of the article provides the narrative context by focusing on the genre and structure of Mark 13 along with the chapter's narrative proximity to Jesus' criticism of the Temple hierarchy in chapters 11-12. The second part of the article explores the function of cosmic portents, the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of the elect as they appear in the OT and subsequent exegetical traditions. The temporal function of this language provides an important precedent for its function in Mark.

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The prophecies of cosmic catastrophes, the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of the elect in Mark 13.24-27 are often interpreted as references to a final eschatological event when history reaches its consummation in the last coming of Christ.¹ In this study I respond to this prevailing view by arguing that the implied audience of the Gospel

would have understood these prophecies, composed of a series of references to the OT (Isa 13.10; 34.4; Dan 7.13; Deut 30.4; Zech 2.6), as pointing directly to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and not to a future parousia or cataclysmic event that marks the end of the world. I approach this text from a literary-historical perspective; that is, I read the Gospel as a self-contained narrative within the literary conventions of its own day.² This means that certain historical questions such as those raised by source and form critics in the attempt to arrive at a theory of the provenance of the Gospel or its component parts remain secondary.³ The same can be said

¹ E.g. J. Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark," *JBL* 111 (1992) 447; R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 745; D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (London: Penguin, 1992) 343; M. D. Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," *BJRL* 65 (1982) 93; H. C. Waetjen, *A Rediscovering of Power: The Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 197; H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (Greenwood: Attic, 1976) 171; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 404; H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1927) 311; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1970) 275; W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 474-77; D. Wenham, "This Generation Will Not pass ... A Study of Jesus' Future Expectation in Mark 13," *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie* (ed. H. H. Rowden; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1982) 130; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: An Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993) 422-27.

² A similar approach is taken by M.A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); S.E. Porter, "Can Traditional Exegesis Enlighten Literary Analysis of the Fourth Gospel? An Examination of the Old Testament Fulfillment Motif and the Passover Theme," *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. C.A. Evans and W.R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 396-428; J. Barton, "Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation: Is There Any Common Ground?" *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce and D. E. Orton; Biblical Interpretation Series 8; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 3-15.

³ These questions have dominated the plethora of literature on Mark 13. For a detailed discussion of the debates see Beasley-Murray, *Jesus*

about the dating of Mark 13. Whether the final form of the discourse was written prior to 70 or as an *ex eventu* prophecy just after 70 has little bearing on determining the function of the quotations in Mark's narrative world.⁴ The important point from a literary perspective is that the prophecy is attributed to Jesus who, as a character in the story, antedates the destruction of the Temple.

The historical element, however, is not diminished or overshadowed by the literary. Rather it is a vital complement without which the original significance of the story could not be appreciated. One cannot avoid the fact that the author had to assume a hypothetical audience possessing specific beliefs, knowledge and familiarity with conventions, despite our lack of precision in the restoration of that historical community.⁵ Without the historical component the function of the quotations/allusions in vv. 24-27 cannot be understood be-

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cause the significance is partially found either in the original contexts and/or in subsequent exegetical traditions.

The study is divided into two parts. In the first part I propose a literary context for vv. 24-27 by drawing attention to three elements of Mark 13 as discourse: its genre, its location in the Gospel and its structure. In the second part I examine the OT quotations/allusions by probing their function in contexts other than Mark 13 with the hope of finding a relatively consistent pattern of interpretation which Mark may have assumed. While I briefly explore these contexts, I do not presume that Mark's real and/or implied audience would have been familiar with all of them. My aim is to reveal a common interpretation of the OT quotations/allusions and to see if they are consistent with Mark's literary context. It is not inconsistent to assume an awareness of a common interpretive tradition by an audience which may lack specific knowledge of the original context. My approach is admittedly lim-

and the Last Days; D. Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse* (Gospel Perspectives 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984); Gundry, *Mark*, 750-800.

⁴ If the final draft was completed after 70, one could argue that the discourse is an *ex eventu* prophecy, intended to serve as an example of faithful discipleship and Jesus' prophetic ability. Jesus' ambiguity regarding precise timing should not pose a problem here since it is consistent with the prophets throughout Israel's history. The warnings at the end of the discourse to remain alert, likewise, are not a hindrance since they serve as an integral part of the answer to the question raised in v. 4 (see below). Moreover, the admonition may have been intended to explain why some Christians did not survive the Roman onslaught given the warning to flee Judea in v. 14, especially since wars were interpreted as acts of divine judgment.

⁵ P. J. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audience," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1977) 126.

ited, but it is one that needs to be brought into the ongoing discussion of this complex chapter.

I. Towards a Literary Context

Presuming that the entire discourse (vv. 5-37) is a unified body in Mark's narrative world, how does one describe its genre? In answering the question it is important to distinguish between the genre of the discourse in its present state and the genres of the traditions that the author of Mark may have used.⁶ The parts in this case do not determine the whole. This distinction is particularly relevant for Mark 13 since much of the tradition underlying the discourse is often attributed to a specific genre, namely apocalyptic.

The common designation for Mark 13 as a "little apocalypse" has its origin with T. Colani⁷ and W. Weiffenbach,⁸ who posited that the discourse is based on a Jewish or Christian Jewish apocalyptic tractate. Most contemporary scholars who advocate some kind of apocalyptic

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source do not explicitly equate the genre of the discourse with its source(s).⁹ Some, however, make the connection, maintaining that Mark 13 must be understood in the context of apocalyptic literature and the apocalyptic movement in Judaism and Christianity since it includes similar concepts, such as a deterministic and pessimistic historical perspective, an imminent expectation

⁶ See D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 186.

⁷ T. Colani, *Jesus Christ et les croyances messianiques de son temps* (2d ed.: Strasbourg: Treuttel & Wurtz, 1864). The reason for Colani's conclusion resulted from an attempt to determine the authentic sayings of Jesus. The dilemma was: if Jesus prophesied the end of the world in Mark 13, then he was mistaken; but if we assume that Jesus could not have been mistaken, the prophecies were not his. Colani assumed that Jesus was not mistaken, therefore, he deemed the sayings as not authentic. Some recent proponents include R. Bultmann, V. Taylor, and N. Perrin. For a recent criticism of this theory, see A.Y. Collins, "The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13," *The Four Gospels* 1992 (F. Neirynck; ed. F. Van Segbroeck, et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 2. 1125-40.

⁸ W. Weiffenbach, *Der Wiederkunftsgedanken Jesu* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Hürtel, 1873).

⁹ E.g. E. Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik* (FRLANT 134; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984) 13; V. Taylor, "The Apocalyptic Discourse of Mark 13," (*ExpTim* 60 (1949) 94-98; A. Suhl, *Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspielungen in Markusevangelium* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965) 18; N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 174; R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 122; R. Pesch, *Naherwartungen: Tradition und Redaktion in Mk 13* (KBANT; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968) 207-9.

of the end of the world, a dualistic view of human existence and visions of cosmic chaos.¹⁰

While it is true that certain parallels between Mark 13 and Jewish apocalyptic do exist, they should not obstruct the numerous dissimilarities.¹¹ Much of the difficulty in this discussion is ascertaining a precise definition for the genre of apocalyptic, or even establishing standard traits and motifs found in texts which have traditionally been called "apocalyptic." Some progress, however, has been made in this regard by the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project which systematically analyzed a group of texts in order to identify specific traits that distinguish apocalyptic genre from other genres. The following definition was reached: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."¹² Several years later, this definition was expanded by the following addendum: "intended to interpret present, earthly

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circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority."¹³

In light of this definition Mark 13 should not be viewed as an apocalyptic discourse. It does not contain a revelation from an other worldly being, nor does it make men-

tion in the same way of a transcendental reality or a supernatural world. Others have pointed to specific features found in Mark 13 that distinguish it from apocalyptic literature, such as

- (1) the lack of a reference to the deliverance of national Israel from her oppressors;¹⁴
- (2) the reference to "the end is not yet" (v. 7) which acts as a corrective to apocalyptic;¹⁵
- (3) the close connection with parenesis;¹⁶
- (4) the lack of a clearly defined and predetermined view of history;¹⁷
- (5) no mention of the righteous witnessing the punishment of the wicked;¹⁸
- (6) no pseudonymity;¹⁹
- (7) the lack of certainty regarding the actual time of cosmic catastrophe;²⁰
- (8) the omission of the fate of earthly and wicked kingdoms;²¹ and
- (9) the omission of cosmic suffering— as opposed to suffering with Jesus.²²

In my judgment the best option for Mark 13 is the genre of parenesis, or what is commonly called a "farewell discourse," which is characterized by ethical exhortation given by a leader of a community or a patriarch of a family who is facing imminent departure or even death.²³

¹⁰ L. Williamson, *Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983) 236. See also B. Mack, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark," *Forum* 3, 1 (1987) 6-7. G. Theissen (*The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. L.M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991] 134-35) calls Mark 13 an "apocalyptic prophecy," but at the same time recognizes that not everything in the chapter belongs to this genre. His case rests on phrases like δεῖ γενέσθαι (13.7) which he claims reflect apocalyptic and Danielic motifs and types.

¹¹ E.g. J.D.G. Dunn (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* [2d ed.; London: SCM, 1990] 329) acknowledges the following similarities without taking the extra step in associating them with the genre: (1) συντελεῖσθαι in v. 4 is similarly used to designate the end in Daniel and *T 12 Patr.*; (2) worldwide turmoil (vv. 7-8); (3) severe persecution including the foreboding of family members (v. 12); (4) the esoteric sign of the 'Abomination of Desolation' (v. 14); (5) the unprecedented danger and anguish of the final tribulation (vv. 14-20); (6) the cosmic effects of the messianic woes (vv. 24-27); (7) the imminence of the final events; and (8) exhortation to be prepared (vv. 33-37).

¹² J.J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979) 9.

¹³ A. Y. Collins, "Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism," *Semeia* 36 (1986) 7. See also J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 2-8.

¹⁴ G.R. Beasley-Murray, "Second Thoughts on the Composition of Mark 13," *NTS* 29 (1983) 417.

¹⁵ W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969) 173.

¹⁶ L. Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted: The Formation of Some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts and of the Eschatological Discourse Mark 13 par.* (ConBNT 1; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966) 175. Schweizer (*The Good News According to Mark*, 277) makes a similar point regarding the style. The future events are always being interpreted in light of present church concerns.

¹⁷ Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 289; G.R. Beasley-Murray, "Jesus and Apocalyptic: With Special Reference to Mark 14,62," *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; BETL 53; Leuven: University Press, 1980) 418.

¹⁸ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 276.

¹⁹ Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 276.

²⁰ Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," 80.

²¹ Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," 80.

²² Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," 86.

²³ Other proposals include Graeco-Roman peripatetic dialogue (V.K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 178-79, testamentary scholastic dialogue (Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik*, 15), hortatory address (C.H. Dodd: private correspondence quoted in Beasley-

In the story, the Markan Jesus, cognizant of his imminent death, admonishes his disciples to persevere in the suffering which will escalate after his death— a suffering which in many ways

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resembles his own. The positioning of the discourse prior to Jesus' arrest, trial, beatings, humiliation and death encourages the audience to understand how the anticipated suffering is to be faithfully endured by the followers of Jesus.²⁴ Although a variety of parenetic forms are catalogued, it is often recognized that this combination of predictions and ethical admonitions closely resembles the pattern of Jewish parenetic material, such as Genesis 49, *The Assumption of Moses* and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.²⁵ The character of parenesis is further noticed by the frequent use of imperatives²⁶ and four occurrences of temporal clauses followed by imperatives.²⁷ Both of these features are integral to an exhortatory or parenetic address.²⁸

In contrast to the genre of apocalyptic, parenesis is more concordant with the view that Mark 13.24-27 is describing the destruction of the Temple. Prophetic statements in parenetic material are primarily concerned with historical events, and find their fulfillment in the experiences of those who survive the teacher or patriarch giving the

exhortation. Likewise in this narrative, the Markan Jesus is applying the prophecies of imminent suffering and chaos to his disciples. The point is that the prophecies are intended to find their fulfillment in the near future. Apocalyptic, on the other hand, is concerned with a

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transcendent eschatology that points beyond the bounds of history.²⁹ A literary perspective demands that the parts, such as vv. 24-27, which have an apocalyptic flavor be read in light of the discourse as a whole, and not the reverse.

A parenesis at this point in the Markan narrative is thoroughly appropriate since Mark 13 serves as a bridge spanning Jesus' public ministry and the events leading up to his crucifixion. When the context is narrowed to the second half of Mark (beginning with 8.27), two intertwining motifs are unmistakable, faithful discipleship and opposition to Temple leadership. Though some have suggested that the former is predominant (locating the hermeneutical key at 8.34-9.1),³⁰ it does not fully account for the opposition to the Temple leadership in chapters 11-12.³¹ The scene is set for Mark 13 in chapter 11 when Jesus enters Jerusalem only to find its divinely ordained leadership and sanctuary bearing no fruit. He is filled with indignation at the practices he witnesses. This is followed by a parable of indictment against the leadership (12.1-11), reminiscent of Isaiah 5 which describes the fruitlessness of Israel by using the same metaphor of a vineyard.³² At the end of the parable Jesus assures his

Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days*, 98-99), midrash (D. Miller and P. Miller, *The Gospel of Mark as Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* [Lewiston: Mellen, 1990] 295-315, and revelatory discourse (N. Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin* (ed. H. D. Betz; Claremont: New Testament Colloquium, 1971) 36.

²⁴ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 262.

²⁵ E.g. L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (NovTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 42 (adds 1 Sam, Deut 33, Acts 20.17-35, 1-2 Tim, 2 Pet); F. Busch, *Zum Verständnis der synoptischen Eschatologie, Markus 13 neu untersucht* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1938) 44; Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, 171-73, J.R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973) 169; Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," 80; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 331; Williamson, *Mark, 238* (notices a parallel to John 14.17); Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, 287 (see parallels with *Ass. Mos.*; Gen 41.21-49; Deut 31-32); Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 444-45; Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 340 (adds 1 Chron 28-29, Tob 14); Beasley-Murray, "Second Thoughts on the Composition of Mark 13," 415. On the variety of parenetic forms in ancient literature, see D.E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Library of Early Christianity 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 191, 194-97.

²⁶ E.g. βλέπετε (vv. 5, 9, 23, 33), μη θροείσθε (v. 7), μη προμεριμνάτε (v. 11), καταβάτω and είσελθάτω (v. 15), επιστρεψάτω (v. 16), προσεύχεσθε (v. 18), μη πιστεύετε (v. 21), μάθετε (v. 28), γινώσκετε (v. 29), άγρυπνείτε (v. 33), and γρηγορείτε (vv. 35, 37).

²⁷ E.g. όταν δέ άκούσητε πολέμους (v. 7), και όταν άγωσιν ύμάς παραδιδόντες (v. 11), όταν δέ ίδητε τó βδέλυγμα (v. 14), and και τότε άν τις ύμίν είπη (v. 21).

²⁸ K. Grayston, "The Study of Mark XIII," *BJRL* 56 (1973) 376.

²⁹ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 9.

³⁰ E.g. T.J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 99; M.D. Hooker, *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) 156.

³¹ Recently T.J. Geddert (*Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* [JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989] 29) has suggested that a better place to begin in finding a hermeneutical key is 8.11-13, the only text outside Mark 13 where the issue of "signs" is discussed. Geddert warns that if the issue of "signs" and "sign seeking" is not investigated, a premature understanding of Mark 13 results. He recommends that the study of key words in Mark 13 such as σημεϊον (pp. 29-58), βλέπω (pp. 59-87), and γρηγορέω (pp. 89-111) not only points to the unity of the Gospel, but reveals the significance of Jesus' discourse in Mark 13. Though Geddert's approach is useful for showing the unity of the Gospel, there is a danger in assuming that the implied audience would have analyzed the use of these terms. I think Geddert sometimes overlooks larger discourse motifs and ignores the fact that the text was written to be heard, not read, as is suggested, for example, by E. Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1983) 106.

³² There are, however, key differences in need of mention. In Isaiah no fruit is borne even though the gardener did all he could; yet in Mark the fruit is present, but it is blocked by the wicked tenants preventing the owner from receiving it. In Isaiah divine judgment falls upon the vineyard; yet in Mark it falls upon the greedy tenants. In Isaiah the vineyard is destroyed; yet in Mark it is given to someone else (Geddert, *Watchwords*, 120).

listeners that a new cornerstone (quoting Ps 118.22 and Zech 10.4) will be fixed so that righteousness may be established (cf. Mark 11.17). The remainder of Mark 12 is taken up with further disputes between Jesus and the religious leaders, ending with a vivid portrayal of a poor widow who gives all she has to the scribes who “devour widows’ houses” (12.40).

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This scene heightens the audience’s disgust towards the oppressive tactics of the religious leaders serving in the Temple.³³ Mark 13 serves as a divine response of judgment against the oppressive Temple hierarchy, culminating in vv. 24-27.³⁴

Throughout the narrative in chapters 11-13 the Markan Jesus takes on a noticeable role of a prophetic critic who, like other prophets preceding and following him, announces impending judgment against an intolerable religious leadership presiding in and over the Temple.³⁵ Since this section is saturated in OT imagery and allusion, the author of Mark most likely assumed that his audience was familiar with traditions of Jewish prophetic criticism.

While the motif of opposition against the Temple establishment is evident in Mark 11-12, the same, according to the majority of scholars, cannot be said of chapter 13, especially of vv. 24-27. Mark 13 is often understood as referring to two separate events: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and (2) the final judgment and parousia at the end of history. Although a variety of proposals have been suggested in determining exactly what verses correspond to these events, there appears to be unanimous agreement by those who hold this view that vv. 24-27 predict the parousia and the final judgment.³⁶ Some who are willing to accept that vv. 24-27 may refer to the Temple’s destruction still want to retain some kind of secondary reference to the parousia and

³³ For further discussion on the widow’s role in the story see E.S. Malbon, “The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers,” *CBQ* 53 (1991) 589-604; R.S. Sujirtharajah, “The Widow’s Mites Revalued,” *ExpTim* 103 (1991) 42-43.

³⁴ Though the connection between chapters 11-12 and 13 is usually recognized by redaction critics, there is a tendency still to reach chapter 13 in complete isolation. See, for example, Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, 93-95.

³⁵ See Jer 7.14; 26.4-12; Ezek 9.1-10 Dan 9.26; *T Levi* 10.3; 16.4; *T Jud.* 23.3; *Sib. Or.* 3.665; *Liv. Proph.* 10.10-11 [Jonah]; 12.11 [Hab.]; *War* 3.8.3; 6.2.1; 6.5.3-4; *y. Sot.* 6.3; cf. *b. Yom.* 39b; *Abot R. Nat.* A 4; *Lam. Rab.* 1.5. For a discussion on the Qumran perspective see C.A. Evans, “Opposition to the Temple: Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 235-53.

³⁶ See footnote 1. Often this view is predicated upon a source-critical reading of the text.

the final judgment, either on the basis of a prophetic foreshadowing or because of a deliberate ambiguity supposedly created by the author.³⁷ R.T. France has challenged the prevalent view by arguing that the entire discourse up to v. 31 is concerned with the fall of Jerusalem within history, while only vv. 32-37 refer to the parousia.³⁸ Though I agree with France up

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to v. 31, the abrupt shift to the parousia in v. 32, however, seems problematic.³⁹

Instead, I propose that the entire discourse (vv. 5-37) be viewed as a response by the Markan Jesus to the disciples’ two-part question in v. 4, which I regard as referring to the destruction of the Temple. Identifying the events to which this question refers has generated much controversy. Some claim that while the saying in v. 2 and the corresponding question in v. 4 are concerned with the destruction of the Temple, the discourse from v. 5 onward deals with the end of the world since there is no explicit mention of the Temple.⁴⁰ This view, however, isolates the discourse from its literary context. Many argue that vv. 1-2 should be separated from vv. 3-4 on the basis of a shift in location from the Temple precincts to the Mount of Olives. W. Kelber, for example, suggests that the author of Mark, writing after 70 CE, has purposely constructed two scenes to correct the view that the Temple’s destruction is associated with the eschaton. Since the former had occurred, but not the latter, an eschatological crisis had ensued in Mark’s community. The first scene (vv. 1-2), according to Kelber, is simply a

³⁷ See Geddert, *Watchwords*, 228-29.

³⁸ R.T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and his Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971) 231-32. France supports this position by marshalling several arguments: (1) the use of the second person points to the disciples and not a future generation (cf. v. 30), (2) vv. 14-20 lead up to vv. 24-27 and are even connected in Matthew’s account with εὐθὺς, (3) the use of ταῦτα and ταῦτα πάντα in vv. 29-30 and in v. 4 suggests that the question of the Temple’s destruction is still being addressed, (4) the phrase περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἢ τῆς ὥρας in v. 32 introduces a new subject. In other words, “that day or hour” in v. 32 is a reference to a new and distinct time as opposed to “these things” and “those days” in the previous section (vv. 17, 19, 24). A further indication that a new event is presupposed is Jesus’ sudden lack of knowledge in v. 32.

³⁹ It seems inconsistent that France does not extend his argument based on the use of the second person. It is noteworthy that in his “parousia section” no shift in person has occurred. Moreover, the contrast in the Markan Jesus’ knowledge between v. 30 and v. 32 does not necessarily indicate two separate events; rather it is quite probable that while Jesus, playing the role of prophetic critic, foreknew that a series of disastrous events would happen in a generation, he did not know the exact day or hour. Ambiguity regarding precise timing is in continuity with prophetic figures in Jewish tradition.

⁴⁰ E.g. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 343.

prediction of the physical destruction of the Temple and serves as an introduction to the subsequent discourse. The second scene (vv. 3-4) gives the clue for the purpose of the discourse in the phrase ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα, which Kelber regards as specifically referring to the end of all things.⁴¹ While Kelber is correct in pointing out the redactional nature of vv. 1-4,⁴² his suggestion regarding the eschatological crises in Mark's community is highly

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speculative. There is no necessity, in my judgment, to follow Kelber (and many others) in assuming that συντελέω in v. 4 (as well as τέλος in v. 7) indicates an apocalyptic end or some final event at the close of history, especially since the term(s) is used in a context which explicitly deals with the destruction of the Temple. The term is often used simply to refer to a given accomplishment: it contains no inherent meaning that would substantiate the common assumption.⁴³

Since there is no explicit reference to the eschaton in vv. 1-4, I propose that the discourse be structured on the basis of the two-part question in v. 4 in the following way:

Part 1: When will these things be?

Answer: vv. 28-37

Part 2: What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?

Answer: vv. 5-23

The Markan Jesus answers the second part of the question first. He begins by describing the events, or signs, which lead up to the actual destruction in vv. 24-27. The sequence of events includes wars, persecution, a desecration of the holy place and false messiahs. Then, after those afflictions, the Temple will be destroyed. The second question is answered in vv. 28-37. Despite his lack of knowledge regarding the precise day or hour when all

the foregoing events will occur, the Markan Jesus narrows the time to a single generation (v. 30).⁴⁴

The fulfillment of the whole prophecy within a restricted time frame is significant for my thesis. Although it is sometimes argued that ταῦτα πάντα in v. 30 is limited only to the events prior to v. 24, I do not find this view persuasive in light of the natural progression in the discourse (i.e. from crises to climax).⁴⁵ Often, the reasoning is based on an *a priori* understanding of vv. 24-27 as a reference to the parousia. While ταῦτα in v. 29 probably refers to events prior to v. 24 (especially since it is qualified presumably by the Son of Man's nearness), it seems more natural to read (or to hear) ταῦτα πάντα in v. 30 as a reference to the entire prophetic discourse, much like a summary statement of all that has been prophesied up to this point. But if v. 30 refers to the entire discourse, vv. 24-27 cannot refer to the parousia, especially since the authors of Matthew and Luke retain this saying decades later. Certainly their audiences, believing that the prophecy

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was given by Jesus, would have been very puzzled by its lack of fulfillment.

II. Mark 13.24-27 in Light of Early Jewish and Christian Exegetical Tradition

In the foregoing section I have briefly proposed a literary context which favours the destruction of the Temple as the focus of the discourse in Mark 13. If this is the case, how is one to understand vv. 24-27 which appear on the surface to describe the final scenes of history? Since this passage is entirely composed of OT quotations (or allusions, depending on one's definition), an understanding of its significance can be determined by drawing attention to the function of these texts in contexts other than Mark 13. A comparative analysis of these texts reveals that Mark's implied audience would have understood these quotations as symbolic references to a temporal event, namely the destruction of the Temple. As I stated at the beginning, a precise familiarity with the various contexts by even the real audience need not be assumed. A cursory awareness of the function of the OT texts, or even the common use of similar terminology

⁴¹ W. Kelber, *Kingdom in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 111-13. This widely held assumption can also be found, for example, in Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days*, 248; Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 131, 134. For a similar view regarding the eschatological misunderstanding of Mark's community, see Gaston, *No Stone on Another*, 12.

⁴² On the unity of vv. 1-4, see Gundry, *Mark*, 758-59; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 186-87; Collins, "The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13," 1127-28.

⁴³ See BAGD, 792.

⁴⁴ For a similar approach to the structure, see J.R. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (AB Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 345.

⁴⁵ E.g. Gundry, *Mark*, 746-47; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 478.

within the cultural discourse is all that needs to be presupposed.

The Cosmic Portents

In vv. 24-25, the Markan Jesus predicts to his disciples that “in those days, after that tribulation [namely vv. 5-23], the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.” There is a lack of consensus among scholars on how this language should be read, or how it would have been understood by Mark’s audience. Some suggest that the language would have been interpreted “realistically” as a description of the end of the world,⁴⁶ while others maintain that it is simply to be understood metaphorically as an emphasis of the glory of divine intervention for judgment and deliverance.⁴⁷ The latter view is certainly more consistent with the

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use of similar language in the OT and postbiblical Jewish literature. In the OT, cosmic portents are often found in contexts of judgment where a given prophet predicts the imminent arrival of the “day of the Lord”—a time when God will come to exercise his wrath by destroying the political, economic and religious structures of a people.⁴⁸ Although the imagery is of cosmic proportion, the significance of the judgments is temporal. In the following I will show that this kind of metaphorical language is commonly applied to events of destruction and chaos within the bounds of history and not at the termination of history.⁴⁹

The author of Mark begins his series of quotations in v. 24 by citing what appears to be a condensed form of Isa 13.10, though no known version is followed verbatim.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ E.g. F. Hahn, “Die Rede von der Parusie des Menschensohnes Markus 13,” *Jesus und der Menschensohn: Für Anton Vogtle* (ed. R. Pesch and R. Schnackenburg; Freiburg, Herder, 1975) 240-66; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKNT 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1976-77) 2.303; Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 357. Gundry (*Mark*, 745) suggests that the falling stars in v. 25a refer to meteorites.

⁴⁷ E.g. Beasley-Murray (*Jesus and the Last Days*, 42) argues for a metaphorical reading on the basis of similar language used in Rev 6.12-14. See also A. Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos* (Kommentare und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970) 70-71; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 475.

⁴⁸ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962-65) 2. 119-25, 137, 289.

⁴⁹ See also E.P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1896) 250.

⁵⁰ Though most suggest that Isa 13.10 is the referent, Wenham (*The Rediscovery of Jesus; Eschatological Discourse*, 309) argues that Mark probably used Joel 2.10 since Joel’s order of portents, unlike Isaiah’s,

When the immediate context of Isa 13.10 is considered, its temporal significance is unmistakable. The cosmic portents are associated with the coming of divine judgment in the “day of the Lord.” The MT version of Isa 13.9-11 reads:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming
cruel, with fury and burning anger,

To make the land a desolation;
and He will exterminate its sinners from it.

For the stars of heaven and their constellations
will not flash forth their light;

The sun will be dark when it rises,
and the moon will not shed its light.

Thus I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;

I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud,
and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

Despite the universal implication, the superscription in Isa 13.1 along with the oracle’s larger context (13.1–14.23) clearly points to Babylon, whose people are described as being intolerably arrogant and proud, as the future recipient of God’s judgment. O. Kaiser suggests that the image of darkness can include a variety of depictions, such as God’s absence (e.g. Gen 1.2), the reversal of blessing (e.g. Amos 8.9-14) and

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most often judgment (e.g. Joel 2.2).⁵¹ The significance of the heavenly bodies can be explained as a reference to the pantheon of gods since astrology was a common Babylonian practice.⁵² On the other hand, it may simply be a metaphorical expression to vivify the glory and intensity of divine judgment. J. Watts has proposed that the structure of the entire section (Isa 13.1-14.32) points to a central message by the prophet: “Yhwh has broken the scepter of rulers” (Isa 14.4b-7).⁵³ The point which needs to be stressed for the purpose of this study is that the cosmic, universal-type language is used figuratively

is identical to the Markan account. Ezek 32.7 can also be suggested, but the diction is still closest to LXX Isa 13.10. On further examination of the text form, see the analysis of Matt 24.29 in R.H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 51-52.

⁵¹ O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 17.

⁵² J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 609.

⁵³ J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word, 1985) 185.

to describe the demise of a political entity within history. It is not a reference to the closing act of history.

The author of Mark continues his series of references to the OT by alluding to what most suggest is Isa 34.4. Despite the minimal dictional coherence with the extant forms of this text, the imagery is clearly the same. The MT form of Isa 34.4-5 reads:

And all the host of heaven will wear away,
and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll;

All their hosts will also wither away
as a leaf withers from the vine,
or as one withers from the fig tree.

For my sword is satiated in heaven,
behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom,

And upon the people
whom I have devoted to destruction.

The cosmic metaphors describing Yhwh's day of vengeance is directed at another political entity, Edom. The oracle assures Yhwh's people that Edom will be judged and destroyed. The destruction is followed by a divine gathering of Yhwh's people (Isa 34.16-17)— similar to the pattern of events in Mark 13.24-27. Edom has commonly played the role of the wicked persona in exilic and post-exilic times. It is denounced for both its political adversity towards Jerusalem (e.g. 2Kgs 24.1) and its exploitation of the underprivileged.⁵⁴ The key point, once again, is that the original context of the allusion indicates that the cosmic portents have a temporal significance. The metaphors refer to the demise of a political/religious entity within a historical framework.

The same cosmic portents also appear in Ezek 32.7-8; Joel 2.10, 31; 3.15 and Amos 8.9. In each one of these contexts, the imagery is used in a temporal manner to describe imminent divine judgment against

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a given political/religious entity. After the judgments, a promise of gathering and restoration of the righteous ensues. The darkening of the stars, sun and moon in Ezek 32.7-8 refers to the divinely orchestrated demise of the pretentious Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt.⁵⁵ In Joel the

⁵⁴ 3 Esdr 4.50; Ezek 35.10; 1 Macc 5.65; Ant. 12.353. See Kaiser, *Isaiah* 13-39, 354.

⁵⁵ In the Targum, the meturgeman implicitly emphasizes the temporal nature of the portents by using the imagery not as a metaphor, but as a simile. The covering of the land with armies is compared to the covering of the moon and the sun. Tg. Ezek 32.7-8 reads (with the lemma italicized): "Trouble shall cover you when I dim the glorious splendor of

darkening of the sun and the moon may be a description of an enormous locust infestation which the prophet interpreted as divine judgment against the sins of Israel. The darkening of the mid-day sun in Amos 8.9 is used metaphorically to describe Yhwh's coming judgment in response to the social evils in Israel. Amos' prophecy of doom cannot be divorced from the series of political events that led up to the Assyrian invasion. Although there are no references to Assyria, the prophet does predict a series of military disasters (e.g. 2.13; 3.11; 6.14; 9.10).⁵⁶

It is remarkable how the prophecy in Amos 8.1-9.1, especially in the Targum, is thematically similar to the discourse in Mark 13. Both prophecies respond to the exploitation of the poor (Amos 8.4-6 cf. Mark 12.38-13.2), both describe a time of suffering (Amos 8.7-14 cf. Mark 13.8-20), both use the same cosmic imagery, and both predict the destruction of a sanctuary because of sin (Amos 9.1 cf. Mark 13.1-2).⁵⁷ It is difficult, however, to determine whether the author of Mark was influenced by this tradition, especially since Amos is not explicitly quoted in the discourse. In addition, Amos 8.9 closely resembles the prophecy in Mic 3.6, 12 where the destruction of both Jerusalem and the Temple are also metaphorically described using

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the imagery of darkness. Without pushing the correspondence too far, we can say that both of these texts set an important precedent for Mark's use of cosmic portents— if nothing more, there is an intertextual relationship that must be acknowledged.⁵⁸

your kingdom from the heavens; and the people of your armies who were as numerous as the stars, shall be reduced. A king shall cover you with his armies like a cloud that rises and covers the sun, and like the moon, whose light does not shine during the day. All the lanes of your roads, which are kept in good repair and guarded in the midst of you, behold, they are like the shining lights in the heavens; I will ruin them for you, and trouble shall cover your land like thick darkness, says the Lord God." Translation is from S.H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel* (The Aramaic Bible 13; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987) 92.

⁵⁶ G. von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 105.

⁵⁷ Tg. Amos 9.1 reads (with the lemma italicized): "The prophet said, 'I saw the glory of the Lord; it ascended by the cherub and rested on the altar, and he said, 'If my people Israel will not return to the law, extinguish the lamp; king Josiah shall be slain, the temple shall be laid waste, and the temple courts shall be destroyed; and the vessels of the Sanctuary shall be taken into captivity. The last of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall escape, and not one of them shall survive.'" Translation is from K.J. Cathcart and R.P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible 14; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989) 94.

⁵⁸ On Mic 3.6-12, see 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* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967) 153.

In Jewish pseudepigraphal literature the imagery of the darkening of the sun and the moon is used metaphorically to describe an awaited eschatological judgment which precludes the new age of restoration. There is, however, no indication that the judgment is to be equated with the final act in history. For example, in *As. Mos.* 10.1-10 the author anticipates a judgment of Israel's enemies, followed by an age when Israel will experience happiness because God will establish his rule on the earth. The prediction should probably be read in the context of Roman intervention in Palestine during the first-century CE, an event which the author most likely experienced.⁵⁹ The darkening of the celestial bodies, however, is not equated with the end of history; rather it marks the shift from one age to another. The anticipation of the fall of Rome probably serves as the bridge.

The same picture is painted in 4 Ezra 5.4-5 where the author enumerates several signs of the end of the age.⁶⁰ This passage should be read against a background of despair and suffering during the domination of Rome at the end of the first century CE when the Temple was destroyed and the hope for a liberated Israel was waning. The author of 4 Ezra continually wrestles with the perennial question of injustice: Why do the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper? He attempts to address the question by splitting history into two ages: the present age, marked by suffering; and the age to come, marked by restoration. The author explains that the end of the present age is marked by the darkening of the celestial bodies, which most likely refers to the divinely instituted desolation of Rome (cf. 5.3). An abundance of parallel examples in apocalyptic literature yield the same results: the darkening of the celestial bodies metaphorically describe the demise of political/religious entities which are hostile to Israel's religious and political freedom.⁶¹

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The imagery functions in the same manner in tannaitic literature. For example, *Mek. on Exod 15.5-6 (Shirata §5)* likens the darkening of the sun and the moon in Ezek 32.8 and Isa 13.10 to the drowning of the Egyptian army. The midrash interprets the phrase "the deeps cover them" in Exod 15.5 by explaining that the water, which

⁵⁹ J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (SVTP 10; Leiden, Brill, 1993) 122.

⁶⁰ 4 Ezra 5.4-5 reads, "And the sun shall suddenly shine forth at night, and the moon during the day. Blood shall drip from wood, and the stone shall utter its voice; the peoples shall be troubled, and the stars shall fall."

⁶¹ See, for example, 1 *En.* 1.5; 6.2-8; 12.3-6; 14.3-6; 15.4-16; 80.4-7; *Jub.* 4.15; 5.1; *T Levi* 4.1-5; *T Reub.* 5.6-7; *T Naph.* 3.5; 2 *En.* 7.18; *Sib. Or.* 3.796.

covered the Egyptians, obstructed their view of the sky, thus darkening the celestial bodies. Here, the cosmic portents are applied to a past event of divine judgment against a political aggressor.

Finally, there is clear evidence in early Christian literature that the imagery is interpreted in the same temporal manner. In Acts 2.14-21, Peter associates the celestial portents with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The prophecy in Joel 2.28-32 concerning the eschatological age or the "last days" when God will pour out his Spirit on every person who calls on the name of the Lord is now considered fulfilled by Luke (and Peter?). Although the event(s) to which the cosmic portents point is difficult to determine, its fulfillment, and thus its temporal function, seems clear.⁶²

C.K. Barrett, however, has recently suggested that the darkening of the celestial portents serves as the immediate prelude to the "glorious day of the Lord" in v. 20 which he regards as the return of Christ. Consequently, Barrett does not regard the darkening of the celestial portents as being part of the fulfillment experienced by the early Church. He argues that the term ἐπιφανής in Acts 2.20 (quoted from LXX Joel 3.4) recalls the NT use of ἐπιφανεῖα which refers to the manifestation of Christ at the end of history (2 Thess 2.8; 1 Tim 6.14; 2 Tim 1.10; 4.1,8; Titus 2.13).⁶³

While I agree with Barrett that Luke's story lies within an interim period between the resurrection and the ascension on the one hand and the parousia on the other, I find his interpretation of Acts 2.20 problematic for a number of reasons. First, some of the texts he cites as evidence specifically refer to the present and past, but not future, experiences of Christ's manifestation (2 Tim 1.10; 4.1, 8). Second, the difference between ἐπιφανής, which is often translated "glorious" or "splendid," and ἐπιφανεῖα, which is often translated "appearance," is not considered. Third, it seems odd for Luke to extend the quotation of Joel to include portions of prophecy which are not yet fulfilled, since the entire quotation is predicated upon the quotation formula in Acts 2.16 which indicates fulfillment. And fourth, if v. 20 is not yet

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fulfilled, it would follow that v. 21 is likewise unfulfilled. This would, however, be antithetical to the missionary enterprise stressed throughout Acts.

⁶² The celestial portents may refer to the death of Jesus, the judgment of evil supernatural entities, or simply may be used as a metaphorical hyperbole to emphasize the Pentecost experience.

⁶³ C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Volume 1: Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I-XIV* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1994) 138.

In sum, the cosmic portents in the Hebrew scriptures and in early Jewish and Christian interpretation function metaphorically to describe an act of divine judgment against a given political and/or religious entity which threatens either Israel as a nation or its righteous remnant. An aftermath of judgment is often anticipated in terms of restoration when Israel's god will gather his people and reign over the nations of the earth. The imagery is used in a temporal manner to describe a divine judgment in history and not the termination of history. In light of this function, the imagery in 13.24-25 can be read as yet another prophecy of judgment against a group whose agenda is viewed as antagonistic toward Yhwh's expectations. In essence it is the retelling of the story of political/religious demise as encountered throughout Israel's history in the prophecies against Babylon, Edom, Egypt and Rome. But this time it is Jerusalem and the Temple establishment that takes on the role of adversary.⁶⁴

The Coming of the Son of Man

The Markan Jesus continues the series of apocalyptic images in 13.26 by telling his audience that the Son of Man will be coming in clouds with great power and glory by quoting an unfamiliar form of Dan 7.13. This text is the crux for those who claim that Mark 13.24-27 refers to the parousia and not the destruction of the Temple. Rarely, however, is this claim defended. I admit that a *prima facie* reading of the quotation points in this direction; but I do not think it can be adequately sustained as the only option in light of the proposed literary context of Mark. Two additional factors can also be raised in support of the quotation in Mark 13.26 referring to the destruction of the Temple: (1) the original context of the quotation as it appears in Daniel, and (2) the future use of Son of Man throughout Mark's narrative. My focus in this section is not to engage in the stimulating and seemingly perpetual discussions on the identity or the origin of the Son of Man;⁶⁵ instead my interest is limited to the function of the Son

of Man in Mark 13.26 in light of Dan 7.13.⁶⁶ In particular, I will attempt to show that Mark's implied audience may have understood the coming of the Son of Man as a reference to divine judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple establishment.

In the context of Daniel the coming of "one like a Son of Man" must be read in contrast to the preceding four beasts who represent four nations hostile toward Israel. The beasts are judged in a heavenly courtroom and consequently lose their power and dominion over the earth and, most importantly, over Israel. Subsequently, a cryptic human figure or someone who appears as such is presented an eternal kingdom by the Ancient of Days. The kingdom is then given to the "saints of the Most High." Since the four beasts function in the context as symbols for kings and their kingdoms, the same symbolic reference should be extended to the figure who resembles the Son of Man.

In this regard, the figure not only represents a ruling authority— perhaps even the angel Michael as many argue today— but also functions as a literary representation of Israel. The contrasting symbolism evokes the idea that the people of God are true humanity while the hostile kingdoms are merely animals. The important implication for my thesis is that Israel, though besieged, is about to be vindicated by its God and exalted to its awaited place of dominion over other nations.⁶⁷ In essence, it is the retelling of the story of Yhwh's visitation which includes both the destruction of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous. This time the judgment is directed against the onerous agenda of Antiochus Epiphanes. The arrival of the Son of Man figure is ex-

⁶⁴ A similar conclusion is reached by N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 395-96. Wright's approach does not include a comparison of the function of cosmic portents.

⁶⁵ Some of the important literature regarding these issues include R. Bauckham, "The Son of Man: 'A Man in My Position: or Someone?'" *JSNT* 23 (1985) 23-33; M. Casey, "General, Generic, and Indefinite: The Use of the Term 'Son of Man' in Aramaic Sources and in the Teaching of Jesus," *JSNT* 29 (1987) 21-56; idem, *Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979); Hooker, *Son of Man in Mark*; B.D. Chilton, "The Son of Man: Human and Heavenly," *The Four Gospels* 1992 (F. Neirynck: ed. F. Van Segbroeck, et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 203-18; A.Y. Collins, "The Origins

of the Designation of Jesus as 'Son of Man,'" *HTR* 80 (1987) 391-407; J.A. Fitzmyer, "Another View of the 'Son of Man' Debate," *JSNT* 4 (1979) 58-68; D.R.A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); S. Kim, *The Son of Man as the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); B. Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); H. E. Tódt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965); C.M. Tuckett, "The Present Son of Man," *JSNT* 14 (1982) 58-81; G. Vermes, "The Son of Man Debate" *JSNT* 1 (1978) 19-32; W.O. Walker, "The Son of Man: Some Recent Developments," *CBQ* 45 (1983) 584-607; T.B. Slater, "One Like a Son of Man in First-Century C.E. Judaism," *NTS* 41 (1995) 183-98.

⁶⁶ Ideally this approach may require an evaluation of the implied audience's familiarity with the literary context of Daniel. I have assumed a certain degree of familiarity since Dan 7.13 is explicitly quoted and since the book of Daniel served as an important source of influence not only in Mark, but throughout the communities of the early church.

⁶⁷ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 291-92. See Wright (pp. 291-97) also for a defense of the narrative unity of Daniel, which underlies my approach. For contrast, see J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 277-310.

pressed primarily in political fashion whereby the “coming” (Theod. ἐρχόμενος; LXX ἔρχητο) is intended to reflect a com-

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ing to God to receive power instead of a messianic descent to earth.⁶⁸ Some have also hinted that it closely resembles the idea of a Jewish enthronement festival (cf. Ps 2).⁶⁹ The overall picture in Dan 7 is one of political transition in which the old hostile kingdoms are destroyed and replaced by a new everlasting kingdom ruled by God’s people.

In subsequent Jewish interpretations of Dan 7.13, the ambiguity regarding the identity of the Son of Man is removed. The figure is identified either as God’s son (4 Ezra 13) or as the anointed one (1 En. 48.10; 52.4).⁷⁰ Throughout Jewish apocalyptic literature the function of the Son of Man, like the traditional concepts of a Davidic messiah, was to destroy the enemies of Israel’s righteous and to institute an age of unending peace.⁷¹ The messiah as the warrior king constituted the core of Jewish messianism at the turn of the era, and undoubtedly became a significant influence in early Christian portrayals of Jesus as messiah.⁷² The divine judgment which was leveled against Antiochus Epiphanes is in the above texts applied to the contemporary oppressor, Rome. A common example is 4 Ezra 12.10-35 where the unspecified fourth beast in Dan 7 is identified as an eagle, a common symbol in the first century CE for Rome. Despite the variety of opponents, the motif of judgment against Israel’s enemies and the vindication of the righteous remains constant.⁷³ Extending this motif to the reading of the Son of Man’s function in Mark 13 is fitting, for the narrative context which focuses on the opposition against the Temple establishment by Jesus demands a similar conclusive promise of judgment and restoration. Moreover, there appears to be nothing in the narrative that would steer the implied audience to interpret the Son of Man’s function in an alternate direction— that is, away from the motif found in the exegetical traditions.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 169, 236.

⁶⁹ E.g. N.W. Porteous, *Daniel* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 110.

⁷⁰ See Slater, “One Like a Son of Man in First-Century C.E. Judaism,” 195-96

⁷¹ J.J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (AB Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1995) 68.

⁷² Cf. 1 En. 62.5 where the son of man judges rulers and landlords who oppress the righteous.

⁷³ For a summary of the interpretative traditions of the son of man in Jewish literature, see Collins, *Daniel*, 79-89.

⁷⁴ Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 266) claims that the coming of the son of man in Mark 13 .26 is completely positive. There is no necessity in her

In Mark none of the references (8.38; 13.26; 14.62) to Dan 7.13 include the notion of the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days

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to receive a kingdom. This may have been deliberately excluded— especially in the last two references where Daniel is explicitly quoted— to emphasize the idea that the Son of Man comes to deliver judgment.⁷⁵ In Mark’s story, Jesus as Son of Man has already been invested with power and authority from the moment of his baptism, and thus the notion of receiving a kingdom can be presupposed. For those, however, who are unaware of Jesus’ identity, like his inquisitors, the matter will become clear after his death and resurrection when he comes to judge his opponents through the destruction of their beloved Temple. This notion of vindication through judgment underlies the conflation of Dan 7.13 and Ps 110.1 in 14.62. In this respect, the “coming in [or with] clouds” in Mark 13.26 and 14.62 does not reflect Daniel; rather it recalls Merkabah imagery in which God is seated on his chariot throne as a warrior dressed for battle, coming with a twofold mission: to dispense judgment upon the wicked and to bring vindication to the righteous.⁷⁶

This imagery, however, does not necessarily imply a reference to the Final Judgment in history. Although a primitive notion of parousia and the final act of history may be intended in other NT texts such as 1 Thess 4.15 and Rev. 1.7 where similar imagery of the Lord (not Son of Man) coming in/with clouds is used, the literary context of Mark militates against this.⁷⁷ The preaching of the Markan Jesus is best predicated upon his announcement of the kingdom of God as an answer to the long-awaited promise of restoration, not as the final act of history. I do not read the eschatological perspective in Mark, developed primarily via the concept of the kingdom of God and related symbols, as referring to God’s final action or

mind to bring divine judgment upon the wicked authorities, since their evil practices result in their own downfall. Although there is obviously a positive element here in the eyes of the righteous, I cannot agree with Tolbert when she limits, or even denies, the meting out of divine punishment. This simply ignores the function of Dan 7.13 in other contexts, and the retelling of the eschatological story of the divine judgment of the wicked and the vindication of the righteous which was integral to the worldview of Mark’s audience.

⁷⁵ Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man*, 108.

⁷⁶ J. Schaberg, “Mark 14.62: Early Christian Merkabah Imagery?” *Apocalyptic in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards; JSNTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 69-94; H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 133. Cf. Ps 18.5-19; Jer 4.11-13; Ezek 1.

⁷⁷ Unlike Mark, 1 Thess 4.15-17 includes a rapture scene and a collective resurrection.

cessation of history, but as God's intervention in history. As R.A. Horsley describes it, "God's action in the coming of the kingdom would be 'final,' not in the sense of 'last' or 'the end,' but only in the sense of 'finally!' or 'at last!'"⁷⁸ Furthermore, as I have suggested, Mark 13.24-27 stems from Jesus' Temple action in chapters 11-12 and the question about the Temple's destruction in 13.4.

Likewise, the coming of the Son of Man in Mark 14.62 must be read in light of the destruction of the Temple. During the trial scene, Jesus is falsely accused of claiming that he will destroy the physical

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Temple and in three days build a spiritual replacement. It is difficult to know why Mark considers the accusation false in light of similar early Christian testimonies (John 2.19; Acts 6.14). While it is possible that the author of Mark may have wanted to differentiate between what Jesus said (13.2) and what others maintained he said (14.58),⁷⁹ I suspect that the scene is deliberately ironic. Unknown to the accusers, their testimony is accurate.⁸⁰ The implied audience would have probably understood the accusation in this way after 70 CE. K. Bailey has suggested that the despair experienced by the Jewish Christians of Mark's community over the destruction of the Temple would have turned to joy when they realized that the new temple was already rebuilt through the resurrection.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the destruction of the Temple is an integral part of the trial scene, and thus should underlie Jesus' words of judgment and vindication in 14.62.⁸²

It is also significant that, unlike the other predictions in the discourse of Mark 13, the coming of the Son of Man in v. 26 is not experienced by, or directed at, the disciples. Throughout the discourse, the Markan Jesus addresses his disciples most often by using the second person plural; yet in 13.26 he uses the third person plural ὄψονται. Who is it, therefore, that sees the coming of the Son of Man if it is not the disciples? I think that a probable answer can be found in 14.62 where the same verb is used to refer to a future coming of the Son of Man along with the same reference to Dan 7.13. Here,

⁷⁸ R. A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 168.

⁷⁹ D. Lürmann, "Markus 14.44-64: Christologie und Zerstörung des Temples im Markusevangelium," *NTS* 27 (1981) 457-74.

⁸⁰ See also D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 31; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977) 56-57.

⁸¹ K.E. Bailey, "The Fall of Jerusalem and Mark's Account of the Cross," *ExpTim* 102 (1990) 104.

⁸² The imminence of the son of man's vindication is further supported in the parallel accounts by the additions of ἀπ' ἄρτι in Matt 26.64 and ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν in Luke 22.69.

the Markan Jesus responds to the inquiry of the Temple hierarchy, by telling them, "you will see (ὄψεσθε) the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." In essence it is a prediction of both the divine judgment directed against the hierarchy and the vindication of Jesus. Most likely, given the OT patterns of judgment, the implied audience would have understood the prediction to be fulfilled in a physical and temporal act of destruction, and not in a spiritual sense as a reference to a post-death punishment.

Thus, on the basis of 14.62, the subject of ὄψονται in 13.26 could conceivably refer to the Temple hierarchy.⁸³ They will see the Son of Man's coming in a metaphorical way, realized in the destruction of

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Jerusalem and the Temple. The point of the imagery in Mark is to show that Jesus is directly associated with the imminent divine judgment which he foretells. To the early readers of Mark, the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction as it is realized in Jerusalem's demise becomes an attestation of his vindication.⁸⁴

The Gathering of the Elect

In Mark 13.27 the Markan Jesus completes the pericope by telling his disciples that after the judgment angels, or messengers, will be sent by the Son of Man to gather the elect. A prediction of restoration immediately after a prophecy of judgment is a common pattern found throughout Israel's history. In the OT and postbiblical Jewish literature, no prophecy of judgment, be it apocalyptic or prophetic by nature, is entirely complete without a promise of national unity and vindication.⁸⁵ Often

⁸³ Several scholars simply claim that the subject of ὄψονται in 13.26 should be identified as "all people." See, for example, Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 267; Gundry, *Mark*, 745; Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 406; Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 312.

⁸⁴ France (*Jesus and the Old Testament*, 236-37) has argued that the Matthean parallel (24.30) to Mark 13.26 appears to support further the view that the entire discourse is concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The significant addition in Matt 24.30 is the phrase καὶ τότε κόψονται πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς ("And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn"), which France suggests is a loose quotation from Zech 12.12 ("and the land shall mourn, each family by itself"). France argues that τῆς γῆς in Matt 24.30 should be translated as "land" rather than "earth," because both the MT use of הארץ and the LXX use of ἡ γῆ in Zech 12.12 refer to the land of Palestine where the tribes of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei are described as mourning. If Matthew's use of Zech 12.12 is controlled by the original context, it suggests that Matt 24.30 most likely intends to picture a national grieving as opposed to an international one, presumably as a response to the national tragedy of the Temple's destruction.

⁸⁵ See Deut 30.4; Pss 105.47; 116.7; 146.2; Isa 11.11,16; 27.12; 35.8; 49.22; 60.4; Jer 23.3; 29.14; 31.8, 10; 32.37; Ezek 11.17; 34.13; 36.24; 39.27;

the gathering of dispersed people is the corollary of obedience and perseverance within a situation of turmoil and hardship, such as political exile. The point to which I would like to draw attention is the fact that the gathering is understood as a recurring event and thus should be interpreted typologically in Mark 13.27. For example, in Deut 30.3-4 (a text to which the author of Mark is most likely referring), the people of Israel are told that they will be gathered again from all the peoples of the earth, provided that they continue to obey the laws of God. Deut 30.2-4 reads:

return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and soul . . . then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you . . .

Another text which is often suggested as an echo in Mark 13.27 is Zech 2.6-11, where the prophet tells the people of Israel that, though

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they were dispersed "like the four winds" (v. 6), they can now return home from Babylon. Neither of these texts which possibly influenced the author of Mark is eschatological in its implication. They are simply predictions of historic regatherings from exile and dispersion.⁸⁶ In Mark they appear to take on eschatological significance, but not in the final sense as a termination of history. The implication is a restoration, and even perhaps a vindication, of community within the framework of history.

Usually in the OT it is Yhwh who gathers his people, but in Mark 13 .27 it is the angels (τοὺς ἀγγέλους) who do the gathering. This may reflect an apocalyptic motif in which the angelic forces play a key role in the transition from judgment to restoration. Another possibility is that τοὺς ἀγγέλους refers to "messengers," as it is often translated.⁸⁷ Several scholars have identified these messengers with the preachers of the gospel who will gather the elect through the missionary enterprise.⁸⁸ It is diffi-

Zech 2.6-11; 10.6-11; Mic 4.1; Sir 36.11; Tob 13.13; 14.7; Bar 5.5-9; Pss. Sol. 11.3; 17.26; 1 En. 57; 90.33; 2 Macc 2.7; *T Naph.* 6.

⁸⁶ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 238. One can also add Isa 11.11-16 where the prophet predicts a time when Yhwh will gather his people from Assyria as he did in the past when he brought them out of Egypt. Repetition is also clearly stated in 2 Macc 2.7-8 where Jeremiah rebukes those who try to find the location of the hidden ark by predicting that its location will remain unknown until "God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy."

⁸⁷ E.g. Luke 7.24, 27; 9.52; Jas 2.25; Mark 1 .2; Matt 11.10.

⁸⁸ E.g. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 238.

cult to exclude one view in favour of another since the immediate context can well support both. Consequently, the elect will be gathered and not one shall be missed, for this is the primary imagery in the phrase "from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven."⁸⁹

The omission of a collective resurrection in v. 27 also militates against (though, to a certain degree, from silence) the position that the parousia or the final act of history is in view. Though the idea of a bodily resurrection as part of an eschatological construct was not believed by every group in postbiblical Judaism,⁹⁰ it was, nevertheless, a popular notion during the first century CE.⁹¹ Many of those texts which do not explicitly refer to a resurrection presume some concept of immortality or postmortem recompense.⁹² In the NT there appears to be a widespread belief in a collective resurrection either at the return of Christ⁹³ or at the end of history.⁹⁴ Since the author of Mark also presupposed a collective resurrection in 12.18-27, it appears

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odd that he did not include it as part of 13.24-27 if this passage is referring to the parousia and the consummation of history.

Conclusion

I see no reason why the series of OT quotations/allusions in Mark 13.24-27 must refer to an event other than the destruction of the Temple when the text is read from a literary-historical perspective. In the first part of the study, I argued that three features of the literary context support a temporal act of judgment as opposed to a final one. First, the discourse reflects the genre of parenthesis in which the Markan Jesus warns his disciples about the affliction which they will soon experience. Second, the immediate motif, developed in chapters 11-12 and continued in 13.1-4, is Jesus' indignation towards the oppressive tactics of the Temple establishment. And third, the discourse is best understood as an answer to a specific two-part question in v. 4 about the destruction of the Temple. In the second part of the study, I examined the function of the quotations in light of their origi-

⁸⁹ Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 313. Cf. Deut 4.32; 13.7; 30.4; Pss 18.7; 28.7; 116.7, Jer 12.12; 25.16; 49.36; Zech 2.6,10; 1 En. 57.2.

⁹⁰ E.g. *Ant.* 18.1.4 §16.

⁹¹ E.g. *1 En.* 102.4-103.4; Dan 12.2; 2 Macc 7.22-29; Pss. Sol. 3, 13-15.

⁹² E.g. *Jub.* 23.11-31; 4 Macc 13.17.

⁹³ E.g. 1 Thess 4.15-17.

⁹⁴ E.g. John 5.27-29; 6.39; Heb 6.2.

nal contexts and their early Jewish and Christian interpretations. First, a comparative examination of the cosmic portents in vv. 24-25, derived most likely from Isa 13.10 and 34.4, demonstrates that this imagery is commonly applied to temporal acts of divine judgment against hostile political/religious entities. Second, the coming of the Son of Man in v. 26, quoted from Dan 7.13, also yields a temporal function when it is compared with its use in Daniel, postbiblical Jewish interpretation, and most significantly Mark 14.62. And third, when the gathering of the elect in v. 27, derived most likely from Deut 30.4 and Zech 2.6, is viewed against the original backdrop, the same notion of temporality appears. The gathering of the righteous in these and other texts is associated with a temporal act of judgment, thus there is no need to interpret them eschatologically if by this term one means a final historical event. The series of quotations/allusions which the author of Mark has bound together unmistakably reflects the pattern of judgment and vindication found throughout the Hebrew scriptures and the literature of postbiblical Judaism. The author of Mark has interpreted the OT texts typologically and described another "day of the Lord." This time, however, God's visitation is not directed against Edom, Egypt or Rome, but against the Temple and its oppressive hierarchy.