

THE PENTATEUCH: THE HYPOTEXT OF MARK 1:1–4:34

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A Gospel of Secrets?

Interpreters of Mark fall into two categories: the exotericists and the cryptographers. The exotericists believe that although the book possesses ironies, complexities, and a rough sort of plan, it contains neither intentionally-disguised meanings nor a single overarching principle of organization. To be sure, understanding Mark's message requires attention to his vocabulary, narrative art and historical context, but his work does not require "decoding." The cryptographers disagree. Although Robert Gundry is an exotericist, his dictum is the starting point for the cryptographers: "The basic problem of Marcan studies is how to fit together these apparently contradictory kinds of material in a way that makes sense of the book as a literary whole."¹ Examples of cryptographic work are two recent books alleging that another major text underlies Mark's Gospel, serving as its "hypotext."² Although these

1. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 2.

2. The works are David G. Palmer, *The Markan Matrix: A Literary Structural Analysis of the Gospel of Mark* (Paisley: Ceridwen Press, 1999); and Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). They have been assessed unfavorably: for Palmer, see W.R. Telford, *Journal of Theological Studies* 52.1 (2002), pp. 240-45; for MacDonald, see Robert J. Rabel's online review, *Bryn Mawr Classics Review* 00.09.16. Rabel criticizes MacDonald for "procrustean and reductive methods of interpretation" in making Mark depend on Homer. Another example of cryptographic analysis of Mark is Wolfgang Roth, *Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone, 1988). Roth locates Mark's hypotext in the Elisha cycle of 2 Kings. The term "hypotext" is used to mean a template, model and (implicitly) authority for a later text. "Hypotextuality" in semiotics refers to "the relation between a text and a preceding 'hypotext,' a text or genre on which it is based but

works have not won widespread acceptance, they betoken the persistence of a critical heuristic held by the cryptographic school that Mark is massively referential and that a totalizing structure arising out of that referentiality can be recovered.

This article cautiously takes the side of the cryptographers. While the explication of the Gospel's entire scheme is beyond the scope of a single article, I will show that there is indeed a specific hypotext for the first major division in Mark, which I delimit as 1:1–4:34. That hypotext is the Pentateuch. Of course, this assertion must be qualified, since it is easily proven that Mark uses other canonical and extra-canonical sources intertextually and typologically. Also, a strict cryptographic view of Mark would imply that he actually meant to conceal his hypotext, but concealment would have worked against his major purpose in writing, as I will argue in the conclusion. What this assertion does mean, however, is that Mark writes with conscious reference to a textual hierarchy *cum* numerology common to Second Temple Judaism, which ascribed to the Pentateuch a paradigmatic perfection in both substance *and* form. Its fivefold division supplied Mark with a template for arranging the contents of this section of his Gospel. Thus, there are five major subdivisions in this section, knit together internally by means of typology, theme, chiasm and *inclusio*. These unifying devices point to Mark's imitation of the sequence Genesis–Exodus–Leviticus–Numbers–Deuteronomy. While there is an intrinsic narrative logic to this section as well, the final ordering of this abruptly segmented text has been shaped extrinsically and “cryptographically” by the Pentateuch.

It is clear that the fivefold Torah was a model for the organization and content of much Second Temple literature: the five acrostics of Lamentations, the five Megillot and the “Enochic Pentateuch.”³ The outstanding canonical example is the five books of the Psalter, with a poem in praise of Torah study at its head to emphasize the evocation. It is certainly plausible to suggest that that the form and content of the

which it transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>

3. According to H.F.D. Sparks, cited in Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 77-78.

Torah supplied Mark with a model for his own composition.⁴ In fact, I believe that Mark's formal imitation of the Pentateuch exists at both microstructural and macrostructural levels. In other words, Mark organizes his material into five-unit subsections I will call "pentads," and each of the five pentads in Mk 1:1–4:34 is tied closely to a single book of the Pentateuch. Thus: Pentad I (Genesis) = Mk 1:1-13; Pentad II (Exodus) = Mk 1:14-25; Pentad III (Leviticus) = Mk 2:1–3:6; Pentad IV (Numbers) = Mk 3:7-35; Pentad V (Deuteronomy) = Mk 4:1-34. The hypothesis of the pentad is important because it supplies the vista from which the influence of the Pentateuch on the Gospel's form becomes visible. The smaller units of text within each pentad I will term "lexias,"⁵ which often, though not always, coincide with recognized pericopes. To summarize: 5 lexias = 1 pentad (the entire pentad linked to a single book of the Pentateuch) and 5 pentads = 1 complete pentateuchal cycle.

The grouping of the lexias into pentads is sometimes done through the construction of unities of time or location or genre, and each pentad hangs together topically and typologically. In addition, each pentad is organized internally according to the principle of chiasm, that is, it is arranged in an ABCB'A' pattern.⁶ It should be recognized that the chiasm of prose is not as rigid as the chiasm of poetry. Nonetheless, one will generally find the outer lexias, A-A', clearly linked together by subthemes, a common typology, and verbal or topical *inclusios*, while the inner triplet, B-C-B', displays its own topical unity; at other times the more evident connections are A-C-A' and B-B'. In each case, the overall unity of the pentad and interplay between the five lexias reinforce the principal thesis, that the organization of Mk 1:1–4:34 is

4. That Matthew arranged his discourses in imitation of the Pentateuch is an old (though still disputed) thesis. The Pentateuch's powerful influence on the form and content of Mark has not been adequately addressed thus far.

5. "Lexia" refers to text blocks in nonlinear environments. Mark's Gospel is in some respects linear, but its segmentation invites comparison with the nonlinear lexia. The use of a new term allows the analysis to free itself from the constraints imposed by existing theories of Mark's unit structure and the sometimes misleading paragraphing of printed texts.

6. R.T. France, in his fine commentary, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 13 n. 29, states his suspicion of "neat, symmetrical patterns (especially when bolstered with the name 'chiasm')." I will try to show that the evidence for a "neat, symmetrical and chiastic" pattern does exist.

governed by formal, semantic and thematic features derived principally from the Pentateuch.

In order to make the case for pentads, I will first look at a few pentads that lie on the surface in other sections of Mark. Next, I examine in more detail the theological and literary features of Mk 1:1–4:34 in order to show that these have been arranged in conscious imitation of the pentateuchal order. Lastly, I discuss how Mark's design was important apologetically and how it helps to illuminate the nexus between Gospel and Torah.

A Quinpartite Gospel

The first obvious pentad is the *Streitfragen* of 2:1–3:6, widely acknowledged as a unitary composition composed of five distinct parts.⁷ A second is found in 4:1–34: Jesus tells five parables to the crowds who gather to him at the seashore: the sower, the lamp, the measure, the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed.⁸ The parables pentad is followed by another that is clearly distinct from what precedes and what follows, that is, 4:35–6:6a: the stilling of the storm, the Gadarene demoniac, the woman with a hemorrhage, Jairus's daughter, the synagogue in Nazareth. This subsection features the most stupendous of Jesus' miracles and is consciously framed by the rebuke of unbelief (cf. 4:30 and 6:6). To see it as a pentad, it is necessary to distinguish the woman with a hemorrhage and Jairus's daughter as two separate stories. While related in various ways, they are certainly distinct encounters, each with a distinct denouement; they have been artfully intercalated to emphasize Jesus' sovereignty over time, since it is clearly the delay caused by healing the woman which results in the death of Jairus's daughter. This pentad is followed by a rather different sequence in 6:6b–56, but it is again distinguishable as a set of five: the disciples' mission, John's martyrdom, feeding the five thousand, walking on water, Genessaret healings. Again, an intercalation occurs that produces in this case three lexias: vv. 7–13, 14–29, 30–44. A subtle, numeric *inclusio* is seen in the fact that the disciples constituted six groups since they were dispatched in pairs and ministered through

7. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (Anchor Bible Commentary, 27; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), p. 214.

8. The first parable undergoes considerable expansion. It is, nonetheless, a single parable, with what might be called two substantial appendices.

miraculous healings, which makes Jesus the seventh and consummate agent of miraculous healing in the final lexia, 6:53-56. A final reasonably obvious pentad is found in 7:1-23. After a preface about Jewish customs, we have a set of five separate dominical speeches, found in vv. 6-8, 9-13, 14-15, 18-19, 20-23. There is no obvious narrative requirement for splitting up Jesus' statements in this fashion; the reason for the division, I argue, is formal; that is, Mark is again constructing a pentad. As in a different synoptic controversy with regard to purity laws (Lk. 7:36-50), a parable is made the central literary feature of a chiasm.⁹ At the same time, the *inclusio* is plain, since the first and last speeches refer to the evils of the heart (cf. Mk 7:6 and 21).

It should be noted in passing that the compositional units I am calling "lexias" vary substantially in length, with the consequence that the pentads also vary. Nonetheless, they are framed by means of verbal and/or thematic *inclusios*, and are knit together generically or substantively as well.

We have so far seen that postexilic writing and editing imitated the Pentateuch's fivefold form and that Mark's Gospel contains four or five blocks of text whose structures are plausibly quinpartite, though each of these theses could be worked out in much greater detail. But there is at least a *prima facie* case for believing that Mk 1:1–4:34 is also arranged into pentads. While no attempt at a verse-by-verse commentary on this section is possible here, an awareness of Mark's hypotext goes far to cast light on typologies in this section that seem to have gone undetected.

Pentad I: Adam-and-Eve, Noah and Jesus (1:1-13)

If we accept the first 13 verses as a pentadic prologue, it can be outlined in the following way:

- A. Prophecy of a wilderness way and messenger, preparing for the royal son of God (1:1-3)
- B. John preaches repentance, multitudes baptized by John in the Jordan (1:4-5)

9. Cf. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), II, pp. 1-21.

C. John prophesies the imminent coming of the Messiah-King (1:6-8)

B'. Jesus baptized by John in the Jordan: the Spirit descends, the Father speaks (1:9-11)

A'. Jesus in the wilderness, tempted by Satan, refreshed by angels (1:12-13)

It may seem like splitting hairs to insist on a division of the text into such small units, and since the most widely-used Greek New Testament paragraphs the text differently, there is an inherent prejudice against accepting the divisions suggested above.¹⁰ But if Mark is consistent in using chiasmic/quinary patterns, then this schema should help to recover the original conception and intention of the narrative. Thus, A-C-A' all work together to manifest the royal dignity of the Christ. (A) His "way" is heralded in the wilderness by a latter-day ἄγγελος, John; (C) John announces King-Messiah's coming; (A') the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with Satan; he is subsequently visited by ἄγγελοι. Like a divine king, God's messengers go *before* and *after* him (cf. Mk 11:9).¹¹ ἄγγελος-ἄγγελοι thus constitute the verbal *inclusio* delimiting the prologue. Meanwhile, B and B' speak of the baptizing activity of John, establishing a similarity between the crowds coming from Judea and Jerusalem on the one hand and Jesus on the other, and setting up an inner correspondence in the passage as well. The verbal parallels are tightly constructed in vv. 5 and 9, where we have the following descriptions of what happens to the crowds and to Jesus: ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ and ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου. In both verses Mark has used the passive voice to focus attention on the persons being baptized, employed the genitive with ὑπό to reiterate the agency of John, and repeated the location of baptism (thus the otherwise redundant εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην in v. 9). He has carefully delineated the provenance of the baptized parties, and the geographic references parallel one another, since in both verses we have a city and a province, though the second reference inverts the order of mention: Judea-Jerusalem; Nazareth-Galilee. At the same time, a contrast is drawn between the mass and the individual: the crowds come to perform a rite of purification but Jesus

10. *The Greek New Testament* (ed. Barbara Aland *et al.*; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 4th edn, 1993).

11. Evocations of Elijah are also present, as has often been noted; and the kingly status of Jesus is also expressed by a divine voice citing Ps. 2:7, in lexia B'.

is singled out as the recipient of the Spirit and the “beloved son.”¹² Finally, lexia C stands apart as unique, in offering a description of John’s clothing and food (recalling Elijah), and in recording his richly metaphorical prophecy of the Coming One.

The five lexias in this pentad are related fundamentally to the distinctive diction, characters and etiologies of Genesis. The echoing of the first words of Genesis in the first verse of Mark is a transparent hypertextual usage; its significance as a point of contact between the Testaments was emphasized by Origen.¹³ An Adamic typology is operative, since Adam is “son of God” (cf. Lk. 3:38); contrasts and similarities between Jesus on the one side, and Adam and Eve on the other, are multiplied in A’ as Mark recounts Jesus’ temptation by Satan.¹⁴ The desert setting is introduced because Jesus, the second Adam, must accept and reckon with the consequences of primeval sin, that is, expulsion from the garden and hostility between humans and animals. Like Eve, Jesus is alone when he faces temptation; unlike Eve, he resists Satan and withstands the terrors of the beasts. While Adam and Eve are barred access to the garden by the cherubim, the angels serve Jesus, the royal champion who has triumphed over Satan and his bestial allies.

If Adam-and-Eve form one composite model for the Jesus of Mark’s prologue, connections to other figures in Genesis are also present. Above all is Noah, the archetype of new beginnings. The baptism Jesus undergoes at the hands of John is implicitly compared to the flood through which Noah passed, and Mark’s simile has the spirit descending upon Jesus “like a dove.”¹⁵ The Noah-dove typology is

12. France, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 75-76, analyzes the contrast in greater depth.

13. See Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Mark* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 2: “The beginning can be viewed either as the entire Old Testament, with John the Baptist being its summarizing type, or (because he stands at the juncture of the new with the old) the final stages of the old covenant.”

14. The duration of the temptation, forty days, has many possible connections, including Noah, Moses, Israel and Elijah. Here, it seems best to link it to 1:3 (lexia A), and to accept the typology which sees Jesus as undergoing tests similar not only to Adam but to Israel (also son of God in, e.g., Exod. 4:22-23), but unlike Adam and Israel, triumphing over the tempter. See Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 75-77.

15. The Spirit’s movement in Gen. 1:2 is also described as dove-like in Jewish reflections on this passage. See “Holy Spirit,” in Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler

supported by very early views that saw the Flood as a type of Christian baptism (1 Pet. 3:18-22). This reference gains in significance if Mark, as patristic writers held, was the interpreter of Peter, and if the first epistle of Peter is both early and genuine. The latter case has been convincingly argued by Marta Sordi in her analysis of the political conditions reflected in the letter, which obtained in 63–64 CE and not before or after.¹⁶ The Noah-dove typology is also prominent in patristic interpretations of the events at Jesus' baptism. Thus, Gregory Thaumaturgus writes: “[The Father] opened the gates of the heavens and sent down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, lighting upon the head of Jesus, pointing him out right there as the new Noah...” Tertullian stands as an earlier witness to the same typology: “[a]fter the deluge, by which the iniquity of the old world was purged away, after, so to speak, the baptism of the world, the dove as herald proclaimed to the earth the tempering of the wrath of heaven...”¹⁷ Furthermore, the heavenly voice says that Jesus is the Son “in whom I am well pleased,” recalling not only Isa. 42:1 but also the assessment of Noah in Gen. 6:8, and all the more so as Noah, like Jesus, is an individual set against an undifferentiated mass.

The inner trio of lexias, B-C-B', betrays several parallels to Noah's career. First, Noah is distinguished among the ancient worthies of Genesis as a “preacher (κηρυσξ) of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5); he is said in rabbinic tradition to have preached repentance to his wicked contemporaries.¹⁸ John also preaches (κηρύσσω) a repentance sealed by a ritual washing.¹⁹ A more profound allusion is found in John's oracle, which stands out by virtue of its central position within the prologue: “I have baptized you with water but he will baptize you with holy spirit” (Mk 1:8). The parallelism is carefully constructed: first agent / action /

(eds.), *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906), VI, pp. 447-51.

16. Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (London, UK: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 32-34.

17. Oden and Hall, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, Mark 12–13.

18. “Noah,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, pp. 318-23. Apocryphal and rabbinic literature says of Noah's preaching: “On being informed of the end of the world, Noah exhorted his contemporaries to repentance, foretelling them that a flood would destroy the earth on account of the wickedness of its inhabitants” (p. 320).

19. For a detailed consideration of the relation between repentance and baptism, see Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 88-100.

object / first medium: second agent / action / object / second medium. The contrasts are found in the agent (John: Coming One) and in the medium (water: holy spirit). Once “holy spirit” has been de-theologized and seen as a *liquid* set in opposition to water, the antithesis can be correlated with Noah’s life history in Genesis. He is, as 1 Peter says, “saved through water,” and the first interval of his life is taken up with preparing for the flood. But he is also remembered for planting a vineyard and making wine. Indeed, the Noah narrative suggests that *wine* is the prophesied comfort he will bring to humankind, since wine is the drink of consolation, as well as of celebration, in Jewish tradition. And more importantly, it is the holy “spirit,”²⁰ since its use is an integral part of the sanctifying ceremonial, the Kiddush. The identification of wine as holy spirit is reinforced by the metaphors often used to express how it is imparted and how it affects its subject. This interpretation also supplies a specific and contextually-consistent explication of John’s statement that his successor will be “stronger” (ἰσχυρότερος) than he, as wine is stronger than water.

An analysis of Mark’s language, imagery and structure thus indicates that his presentation of the ministry of John and the baptism of Jesus in B-C-B’ is based in haggadic midrashim on the story of Noah. First, John calls the people to repentance, in imitation of Noah the preacher of repentance. Next, Jesus is foretold as the mighty one who will baptize with holy spirit, recalling Noah the vintner. Then Jesus undergoes baptism, passing through the waters as Noah passed through the flood. Next, Jesus is endowed with the dove-like spirit from on high, consummating the unfinished story of the dove’s post-diluvian search for habitation. Finally, Jesus is the one with whom God is pleased, recalling the Genesis characterization of Noah as the one who found favor in the eyes of Yahweh.

In summary, themes and typologies of Genesis govern Mark’s prologue. Jesus the son of God and victor over Satan is contrasted to

20. The double meaning of spirit as the essence of personhood and as alcoholic beverage goes back very far in more than one language. The double meaning is present in Isa. 19:14, in which the spirit mixed by Yahweh for Egypt is metaphorically a powerful drink; in Isa. 29:9-10, where the spirit of deep sleep “poured out” upon Jerusalem is compared to wine; in Joel 2:28, the prophecy of the spirit of Yahweh being poured out, cited at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-21; note that Luke records that scoffers accused the Galileans of being “filled with new wine”); and in Eph. 5:18, where Paul uses wine as a contrastive parallel for being “filled with the spirit.”

Adam and Eve in the frame; the inner lexias compare John and Jesus to Noah, the preacher of righteousness and the favored servant of God, who, as the agent of a wine-like spirit-baptism, becomes the source of consolation and blessing to humankind.

Pentad II: Moses Redivivus and the Kairos of the Kingdom

The Exodus pentad begins at Mk 1:14 and is structured as follows:

- A. Jesus preaches in Galilee (alone), after John's arrest; calls four fishermen-disciples (1:14-20)
- B. Jesus' in the synagogue teaches and exorcises; his fame spreads (1:21-28)
- C. Jesus' heals and exorcises at the door of Simon's house (1:29-34)
- B'. Jesus prays, renews his vocation, preaches and exorcises in Galilee (1:35-39)
- A'. Jesus cleanses a leper; the leper "preaches;" Jesus isolated (1:40-45)

This section is bracketed by an *inclusio* of preaching: in 1:14, Jesus proclaims (κηρύσσω) the kingdom of God; in 1:45, it is the leper who proclaims (κηρύσσω) the word. Spatially, the pentad begins with Jesus outside of any settled community, moves to Capernaum and other Galilean towns; and ends with Jesus once more in the wilderness (linking lexia A' in pentads I and II). Other bracketing motifs are explored below. In contrast to his passivity in the first pentad, having been baptized by John and "driven out" by the Spirit, Jesus is the active and commanding agent throughout.

The main clue to interpreting this section is the declaration that "the *kairos* is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus' words indicate that, according to the divine calendar, an era is closing. The typological connection is to Israel's bondage in Egypt. Thus, Abraham dreams of a four-century interval of oppression (Gen. 15:13); Exodus interprets Yahweh's mighty acts in Egypt as a fulfillment of the covenant-promises to Abraham (Exod. 2:24). Moreover, this four-hundred year period in Egypt is an attested fact of Jewish historical consciousness in the first century. It is a marked feature of New Testament reflections on the history of Israel.²¹ This interval is very close to the

21. See Acts 7:6; Gal. 3:17; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.185; 2.204.

duration of time between the work of Ezra, after whom prophecy is said to have ceased,²² and the appearance of John the Baptist. Given the reiteration of this periodization in the New Testament, it seems not only possibly but probable that some writers, including Mark, linked the *kairos* of the Gospel to the *kairos* of the Exodus on the basis of this correspondence; but in any case, Mark's language and imagery point to the book of Exodus as his operative hypotext in this pentad.

In Exodus, the agent of divine liberation was Moses; here Mark portrays Jesus as the "prophet like Moses." In lexia A, this correspondence is conveyed in Jesus' kerygma with its Exodus-like evocation of a divine visitation. The Exodus is indeed the prototype of the establishment of the kingdom of God over all worldly and idolatrous powers; and Israel sang its first hymn to Yahweh's kingship at the Red Sea.²³ The kingdom is advanced by the gathering of the disciples, just as Moses was commissioned to gather the elders of Israel in Exod. 3:16, who will "hearken to your voice" when he informs them that Yahweh had appeared to him. Here again, the breaks embedded in the published Greek text have obscured the fact that 1:14-20 should constitute a single literary unit. Besides the correspondences to Moses indicated, that is, the declaration of Yahweh's visitation and the gathering of the elders, the other major unifying feature is the ominous absence of John the Baptist in 1:14-20. According to Mark, Jesus' mission is ignited by John's arrest, and his call to the fishermen in 1:17 to come ὀπίσω μου echoes John's prophecy (the ὀπίσω μου of 1:7) and emphasizes his status as John's legitimate successor. The Gospel of John's account of the Galileans' previous association with the Baptist supplies the other clue needed to place the accent where it belongs in this passage: as you *once* followed John, so *now* you must follow me. Finally, the idea of successorship implied in the ὀπίσω μου of 1:7 is not missing here: along with the Baptist's betrayal and arrest noted in 1:14, Jesus' future betrayal and arrest are hinted in the ὀπίσω μου of 1:17, spoken first to Simon, the leading figure of the Twelve (cf. Mk 3:16).

In lexia B, Jesus' teaching has self-authenticating authority like that of Moses, it is not derivative like that of the scribes. Again like Moses, Jesus triumphs in a struggle with the spirits. For Moses, the battle was

22. Josephus, *Against Apion* 40-41. Josephus dates the cessation of prophecy to the reign of Artaxerxes, that is, 465-423 BCE (if he and Ezra are referring to Artaxerxes I).

23. "Kingdom of God," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 502.

against magicians of Pharaoh; for Jesus, the demons of Galilee. It is significant in this context to note that Jesus is named by the unclean spirit in 1:24, the “holy one of God,” an appellation recalling Deut. 33:8 and Ps. 16:10. In both texts, it is clear that the “holy one” is, individually or corporately or metaphorically, Levi. The inclusion of the reference to the “holy one of God” is Mark’s way of saying that Jesus is, functionally, a Levite, and again a “prophet like Moses.” Certainly he discharges the teaching ministry of the Levites authorized by Deut. 33:8.²⁴

In the central literary unit of this pentad, *lexia C*, Jesus’ fame brings the entire community to the door of Simon and Andrew’s home at sundown. For Mark, drawing on Exodus, the place and time are critical. The climactic moment in the struggle between Moses and his enemies comes on the evening of Passover, when Yahweh goes forth as Destroyer. As noted in *lexia A*, time is a central element in Jesus’ conception of his mission, as it was in Israel’s liberation from Egypt. Exodus 12 makes the month in which the exodus occurred the “beginning of months,” just as Jesus’ kerygmatic ministry heralds a new and decisive moment, the coming of the kingdom of God. So here, in *lexia C*, the time is defined closely and significantly. The Capernaum crowd arrives in the evening at sundown, where they gather around the door. It has been suggested that their arrival at this hour signals the end of their sabbath observance.²⁵ This is true but misses the larger meaning of the passage, which becomes clear when it is juxtaposed with Exodus 12. In this passage, the fall of darkness is the signal for the going forth of the Destroyer. Spatially, the door becomes the site of Israel’s salvation, as the blood of the passover lamb is smeared on the doorframe and the people are confined indoors. Read with the Exodus parallels in mind, the events in Capernaum evoke the first Passover night, since the crowd arrives at sundown and experiences the saving power of Yahweh *at the door*.²⁶

24. There may be a hint here, as well, of Jesus’ role as the levitical Messiah anticipated, for example, in the Testament of Levi, to whom “all the words of the Lord shall be revealed” (18:2); cited in D.S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 123.

25. France, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 108-109.

26. A possible objection to be raised here is that the instructions given through Moses lay it down that no Israelite is to venture forth before the morning. But the story as told in Exodus 12 is equivocal: the Israelites are told to remain indoors

The argument for an evocation of Passover in this passage is emphatically confirmed by the description of events of the following morning, as Jesus rises in the early morning to “go forth” and pray. His action imitates the Israelites who “went forth” (Exod. 12:41) on the first Passover and are commanded to “go forth” in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. Indeed, the Greek verb, ἐξέρομαι, stands out here as both a description of Jesus’ activity and, even more pointedly, as a declaration of his vocation. This verb is used seven times in this pentad (1:25, 26, 28, 29, 35, 38, 45), another indication that Mark has conceived this subsection as an antitype of the “going forth” from Egypt. And it is more than just a matter of the word’s frequency, since this verb is twice made part of Jesus’ speech, in 1:25 (B) and 1:38 (B’).

There is one other significant feature of Jesus’ “going forth” for morning prayer as depicted by Mark. Mark is specific about the fact that Jesus arose long before anyone else, in the darkness before dawn. Why? The answer can be recovered through an imaginative reading of the ritual requirements laid down immediately after the narration of the events of Passover night. These requirements include the consecration of the first-born to Yahweh, defined in Exod. 13:2 and 12 as “whatever is the first to open the womb.” In fact, it was Levi and his descendants, “the holy one of God” with whom Jesus is identified in 1:24, who were accepted in lieu of the first-born of Israel (Num. 3:11-13; 8:5-19). They become the divinely-ordained substitute for all who are “first to open the womb.” So here, Jesus is the “first-born” of the week’s first day, pre-empting the sun; he comes forth from the “womb of morning;” on analogy with the vocation of Levi, he will therefore be taken in lieu of Israel’s first-born.

Mark is employing here mythic notions of the dark, early-morning hours as possessed of a “womb” out of which the sun is born each day. The image, common in Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures, is found, for instance, in Aeschylus’s play, *Agamemnon*, where Clytemnestra says: “Good news, if the proverb’s true, should break

until the morning, but the remainder of the story and the entire Passover tradition suggest that they went forth that very night. Thus, Pharaoh is said to have summoned Moses and Aaron that night (Exod. 12:31) and the people are said to have left in haste, it being implied again that they left by night (Exod. 12:33-34).

with sunrise from the kindly womb of night.”²⁷ An occurrence of greater direct relevance is in Ps. 110:3, where the Psalmist refers to the dew of youth coming from the “womb of morning” (this psalm is cited again in Mk 12:35-37). The healings and exorcisms of that eventful night in Capernaum and the rising for prayer in the dawn that followed are deployed to connect Jesus to the historic Passover and its ritualized reenactment, and to evoke the integrally-related rite known as the Redemption of the First-Born.

It has also been observed that the sequence B-C-B' is held together by a unity of time that is rarely explicit in Mark, since the events in this passage take place during a single and identifiable twenty-four hour period (Saturday to Sunday morning). D.E. Nineham sees this unity as Mark's way of presenting a “specimen day” in the ministry of Jesus.²⁸ There are however two problems with the idea of a specimen day as an organizational device. First, it is incomplete. It ignores the pentateuchal echoes that make this, as we have seen, not a specimen day but a kairotic day, marking the intervention of God in a manner reminiscent of Passover and proving that the kingdom is indeed at hand. Second, by failing to set Mk 1:21-39 in its immediate literary context, it leaves the events before and after the specimen day, lexias A and A', in an interpretive limbo.

This is a particular problem with regard to the story of Jesus' cleansing of the leper. This pericope not only doesn't fit into the specimen-day but also falls outside the clearly demarcated series of disputes beginning at 2:1. However, a recognition of the integrity of the entire pentad as an echo of Exodus and of Mark's chiastic plan supplies a credible explanation both for the placement and meaning of this pericope. It is found just here because it harks back to the commissioning of Moses. Thus, when Moses protests to Yahweh that the Israelites will not believe in his commission, he is given several signs, one of which is power over leprosy (Exod. 4:6-8). Jesus as Moses redivivus offers proof of his Moses-like mission to proclaim the kingship of God by exercising power over leprosy. Provocatively, Jesus charges the cleansed leper to show himself to the priest, εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς

27. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 264-65. The same thought is repeated in 279: “In this very night that brought to birth this glorious sun,” *The Oresteian Trilogy* (trans. Philip Vellacott; London, UK: Penguin, 1959), p. 52.

28. D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1963), pp. 73-82.

(1:44). Ched Myers comments that the phrase in Mark connotes a witness in the face of skepticism or hostility, as seen by its appearance in 6:11 and 13:10, contexts which are germane to the coherence of the frame *lexias*.²⁹ In fact, in comparing *lexia* A' with A, an intriguing thematic and verbal contrast emerges. The leper's unfulfilled task is an anticipation of the work later entrusted to the disciples, that is, to "witness" to the Jewish leadership of Jesus' authority. The connection here is supported by the fact that the only other uses of εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς are in imperatives given to the apostles as part of their commission to declare the gospel to Israel and its leaders. This *lexia* is thus linked with both Jesus' warning of the imminent arrival of the kingdom in 1:15 and the disciples' transformation *cum* commissioning in 1:17. The pervasive Moses-related diction and imagery in this pentad explain why the first mention of Moses in Mark's Gospel occurs here, in 1:44.

In all, power over leprosy is the proof of Jesus' divine commissioning, as it was for Moses. It is a fitting climax to a pentad that portrays Jesus as the levitical Messiah who, like Moses, would declare the nearness in time of God's triumph over his foes, a victory ritualized in the Passover and enacted typologically in Jesus' first day of ministry in Capernaum.

Pentad III: Rabbi, Priest, and Sacrifice (2:1–3:6)

The Leviticus pentad depicts the first overt opposition to the ministry of Jesus. This subsection has already been shown to exhibit the chiasmic and quinpartite features that I believe characterize Mk 1:1–4:34 throughout.³⁰ However, recognizing that this pentad draws its inspiration from Leviticus explains why it occurs where it does and makes its themes more accessible. Thus, the relationship to Leviticus explains why this section of Mark contains the only reference to a disciple named Levi; it also reveals why we have here the first mention of a high priest and two disputes over sabbath regulations.

An outline of the pentad yields the following:

29. C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 153.

30. J. Dewey, "The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1–3:6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973), pp. 394–401.

- A. Jesus forgives and heals the paralytic, provoking a silent accusation of blasphemy (2:1-12)
- B. Levi called; Jesus eats with Levi and other “tax-collectors and sinners;” responds to an implied criticism of his conduct by restating his vocation (2:13-17)
- C. Jesus, questioned about his disciples’ neglect of fasting, responds with three parables (2:18-22)
- B’. Jesus answers a charge against his disciples’ gathering grain to eat on the sabbath by referring to David and Abiathar; declares his authority over the sabbath (2:19-28)
- A’. Jesus heals the man with the withered hand on the sabbath, provoking a silent conspiracy to destroy him (3:1-6).

The story of the healing of the paralytic reveals Mark’s principal typology in this pentad. Whether Jesus is exculpating or absolving the paralytic,³¹ the significant fact is that he assumes the prerogatives of a *priest* in addressing the paralytic. Like John the Baptist, his action seems presumptuous because he offers forgiveness outside the sacerdotal system. How can it be justified? Undoubtedly, part of the answer lies precisely in his claim to continue John’s ministry. But the more theologically-nuanced answer lies in an implicit return to the situation described in the Pentateuch, whose priesthood and sacrifices antedate the temple. It is Leviticus that lays down the requirements for this priesthood and the protocols for obtaining forgiveness.

Seen in this light, the house in Capernaum becomes a new “tent of meeting,” with Jesus as the chief priest of the sanctuary. It is important here to note that the priests actually named in Leviticus are Aaron and his four sons. In the protocol of animal sacrifice, the four sons of Aaron are assigned the task of preparing the offering, but the final presentation of the victim upon the altar is for Aaron to perform. So here, four men bring a man who is presented offering-like before Jesus, laid upon the wood of his *κράβαττος*, probably a simple framed pallet. The scribes’ unspoken objection is not that the forgiveness of sins is impossible for men to pronounce, but rather that this prerogative has been reserved by God for a specific class of men, that is, the Jerusalem-

31. On Jesus’ word as performative, see France, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 125-26. On the other hand, the use of the divine passive is a consistent feature of Leviticus. If this pentad is reappropriating tropes from Leviticus, Jesus’ word should be construed as passive. John S. Kselman, “Forgiveness (OT),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), II, p. 831, says regarding Leviticus: “the passive verb makes the point that forgiveness does not inhere in the priestly rites, but in the action of God.”

based priesthood, who are authorized to offer it at a specific place and time and in consequence of prescribed sacrifices. The implication in their words is that, as there is one God, so there is one way in which sins can be forgiven.³² In contrast with the existing priesthood, bound as it is to unchanging and immovable structures and to a single holy precinct, Mark likens Jesus to the high priest of the tabernacle, since his authority is personal, mobile and unaffected by fixed spatial boundaries. Indeed, this correspondence explains why Jesus insists upon the right of the Son of Man to forgive sins anywhere on earth (2:10).³³

This absolution cum healing is followed by three lexias, B-C-B', in which the subject of eating is at issue and the Pharisees are the antagonists. The regulation of eating was part of the purity apparatus of Jesus' day and of great significance to the Pharisees. It is certainly no accident that dietary regulations form a significant element in Leviticus' legal corpus.

The first issue is one of company. One of the few uncontested facts about Jesus is that he took meals with social outcasts. For a man of piety and learning, this raised a serious problem: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Why indeed? Analysis has tended to focus on the inclusiveness or egalitarianism, or in Crossan's terms the "open commensality," of the kingdom of God as proclaimed and practiced by Jesus.³⁴ While this is a salient point, the pivotal question for the Pharisees would be how this behavior could be justified under the Torah. The answer is that Jesus is again assuming the role of a priest since the priest was required by levitical law to eat together with those who brought the so-called peace offerings for sacrifice. It is the pre-eminent example of the holy and the profane being brought together in intimate communion in the Torah, and it is repeated in the experience of Jesus and his disciples as they partake of food and drink with the "sinners" of their society. The medical metaphor Jesus uses is relevant since the prophets sometimes employ disease as a metaphor for sin (e.g. in Isa.

32. France, *Gospel of Mark*, p. 126, suggests that monotheism itself is at stake in the minds of the scribes.

33. Thus also France, *Gospel of Mark*, p. 129.

34. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 104. A summary and critique of Crossan's conclusions in this regard is found in Ben Witherington, III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 67-68.

6:10 and 53:5), and that is certainly its meaning here. Moreover, priests like physicians must make themselves available to people regardless of social status.³⁵ Thus, Jesus makes himself available indiscriminately. It is perhaps ironic that Jesus assumes the position of a priest in answering the Pharisees, both because of their well-documented frictions with the Jerusalem priesthood, and because their socio-religious agenda was based on a belief in the “priestly sanctity of the whole people of Israel.”³⁶

Lexia C takes up the issue of fasting. Jesus responds with three elliptical parables. The metaphors employed (bridegroom, garment, wine) are interrelated and easily recognizable as the elements of a wedding. But they may also be related to the consecration and cultic activity of the priests in Leviticus. I suspect that these parables are again intended to present Jesus as the antitype of Aaron the high priest; if this is true, his disciples enact the role of Aaron’s sons. The connection is made clearer by noting the way in which Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons. A ritual washing, clothing and crowning take place (Lev. 8:1-13), a pattern essentially identical to the ceremonial followed by attendants of the bridegroom in a traditional Near Eastern wedding. Admittedly, the connection with the parable of the wineskins is more obscure. But the main point is that the eating of the sacrifices was *compulsory* for the priests (Lev. 6:26, 10:16-18). The protocols of a wedding and the levitical mandates for the priests follow the same trajectory, that is, that eating and drinking are in certain circumstances not only *de rigueur* but an integral and irremovable element of the sacred event itself. In sum, Rabbi Jesus offers a *halakhic* adaptation of laws applicable to priests, making them apply to himself and his disciples, an interpretation in harmony with the spirit, if not the letter, of Pharisaic reform.

Lexia B’ continues the theme of the regulations concerning eating. In this case, sabbath law is also involved, since the disciples’ action violated the *halakha* derived from Exod. 34:21, which forbids

35. Like Jesus, Asklepios, the Greco-Roman god of healing, was renowned on account of his care for the outcast. His “sons,” that is, physicians, were bound to emulate his self-sacrificial behavior. On the physician’s obligation to treat all persons alike, see James E. Bailey, “Asklepios: Ancient Hero of Medical Caring,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 124.2 (15 January 1996), pp. 257-63 <http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/124/2/257>.

36. “Pharisees,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, pp. 661-66, esp. p. 661.

harvesting crops on the sabbath.³⁷ The Pharisees query Jesus regarding their behavior and he responds with what seems to be an irregularly constructed *halakhic* midrash on 1 Sam. 21:1-6. Again the background to this story is taken from the period of Israel's history before the temple was built, and it is significant that Jesus' argument includes the seemingly unnecessary and problematic reference to the high priest, Abiathar.³⁸ In fact, the mention of the high priest is vital to the meaning and connects this *lexia* with B and C, since, in all three, the holy food of the priest is in question. In *lexia* B, the comparison is to the peace offering that is shared between the priest and the people making the offering; in *lexia* C, the peace offering, the sin offering, and perhaps other offerings as well; in *lexia* B', the showbread made available to David and his companions. Matthew's version of the same incident reflects this orientation and refers explicitly to the priests (Mt. 12:5). In other words, Jesus seems to cast himself in the role of Abiathar. The thrust of his message is that the Pharisees' aim, that is, to universalize regulations that were restricted historically to the levitical priesthood, implies an extension of priestly prerogatives as well.

The final *lexia* in this pentad, A', is obviously linked to the preceding one by its concern with sabbath law, though the preaching in A and the feasting in B also probably took place on the sabbath. More significant are the close correspondences of event, theme and structure between A and A', which have been noted elsewhere.³⁹ Where are the echoes of Leviticus? In point of fact, Jesus' question about killing on the sabbath is emphatically not rhetorical, and is intended to remind the hearers of facts with which they were familiar. Thus, a routine "violation" of sabbath law took place each week during Israel's history as the priests killed the sacrifices required for the sabbath. The protocol for these sacrifices is laid down in Leviticus. But Leviticus' regulations regarding feasts also raised an important legal issue that had been settled by Hillel, probably in Jesus' own lifetime. In brief, what was to be done if Passover coincided with the sabbath? Could the people of Israel kill the Passover sacrifice and prepare the Passover meal on the sabbath? The judgment handed down by Hillel and subsequently

37. Cf. France, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 142-48, where the problems of using *haggadah* to establish *halakhah*, are discussed.

38. On why Abiathar is wrongly named, see France, *Gospel of Mark*, p. 146 n. 52.

39. See Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 132-37.

endorsed by other rabbinic authorities was Yes, the requirements of Passover override the sabbath law.⁴⁰ Indeed, Pharisaic calculations of the period between Passover and Shavuot reckoned the first day of Passover as a “sabbath.”⁴¹ There was thus a firm juridical precedent for the act of killing on the sabbath, and the discussions regarding the priority of Passover form a crucial part of the background to Jesus’ question. It is to be noted that, in the case of the Passover sacrifice, the law mandates killing *in order to save life*, since the Passover commemorates the rescuing of Israel from Egypt and the salvation of Israel’s first-born.

Mark employs his fine sense of irony here as the Pharisees silently reject Jesus’ liberal interpretation of sabbath law, even though it leans on the authority of their master Hillel. The irony and foreshadowing are deepened by the fact that they plot to kill him, again presumably on the sabbath. Once the connection of Jesus’ question with Hillel’s judgment is recognized, we realize that Jesus is speaking prophetically. The killing of Jesus at Passover, like the killing of the lambs in the original Passover, is a killing *in order to save life*, and the entire lexia points forward to the coincidence of Passover and sabbath at the death of Jesus, as chronicled by Mark.

Pentad IV: Of Crowds and Conflict

The Pentateuch’s fourth book is, as its Greek title suggests, about numbers, about the hundreds of thousands of Israelites crossing the Sinai. In this, the corresponding pentad in Mark, the theme of the great numbers who followed Jesus is immediately prominent. Although Mark mentions the increase in Jesus’ popularity several times before (cf. 1:32-33, 37, 45; 2:1-2, 13, 15), he focuses here on the uncontrollable growth in the size of his following. Also, in Numbers there are several confrontations between Moses and his detractors, some of them from his own tribe and family, who question his singular authority.

40. “Passover Sacrifice,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, pp. 556-57: “This regulation, that the Sabbath yielded the precedence to the Passover, was not definitely determined until the time of Hillel, who established it as a law and was in return elevated to the dignity of nasi by the Bene Bathyra (Pes. 68a).”

41. Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 158.

Likewise, this pentad contains slanderous attacks on Jesus' personal character as well as on the origin of his supernatural powers.

The pentad may be diagrammed thus:

- A. Jesus and disciples withdraw but are pursued and pressed by a mixed multitude; demons confess him son of God (3:7-12).
- B. Jesus ascends the hills, calls and commissions the Twelve (3:13-19a)
- C. Crowds reappear, converge on Jesus and disciples; family intervention anticipated (3:19b-21)
- B'. Scribes descend from Jerusalem, accuse Jesus of demon-possession; Jesus responds in parables (3:21-30)
- A'. Family intervention rejected by Jesus; Jesus addresses the crowd, redefines family relations (3:31-35)

Given the conspiracy of 3:6, Jesus withdraws because he realizes that he and his disciples are in jeopardy. But withdrawal has become impossible because of the crowds seeking him out. The point about the vast numbers is unmistakable in the repetition of "great multitude" (πολὺ πλῆθος in v. 7, πλῆθος πολὺ in v. 8). If there were dangers in staying in Capernaum, there were also dangers in the behavior of the masses pursuing Jesus, as they threatened to crush him to death. There are echoes here of Moses' despair in Numbers 11, as he cries out in the face of the people's insatiable needs. Thus he speaks of the injustice of having to carry the "burden of all this people" (Num. 11:11). As the crowds were on the verge of crushing Jesus, so Moses finds himself overwhelmed by the people's demands, indeed pressed almost to death (Num. 11:14-15). But this *lexia* in Mark also contains one curious addendum without a corresponding element in Numbers, that is, the worship and confession offered by the demons who declare him son of God. Jesus' relationship to the demons and his true identity will form important thematic elements throughout this pentad.

The frenzied crowd is the antecedent to the next part of the story. The pressure causes Jesus to withdraw again, this time to the highlands. As Yahweh responded to Moses' desperation by ordering the appointment of seventy elders to receive "some of the spirit" and to share the burden of command with him, so Jesus ascends the hills to escape the crowds, to call "those whom he desired." Out of the many called, he constitutes the Twelve, who hold a special commission as "apostles." Their kerygmatic commission in turn echoes the commission of the spies in Numbers 13, who are likewise named and sent (ἀποστέλλω in

LXX) to survey the land in advance of the conquest. It has been acutely observed that Jesus is not reckoned in the numbering of the Twelve.⁴² Like Moses in Numbers 13, he stands apart. In light of his presentation as a priest in the preceding pentad, it may be worth noting that neither is Levi represented in the twelve “apostles” sent by Moses into Canaan. An even more telling detail connecting the two episodes is the renaming of several of Jesus’ disciples, especially the designation of the leading apostle, Simon, as Peter. Moses had renamed the spy who became the pre-eminent personality in the next generation of Israel’s leaders, that is, Hoshea/Joshua (Num. 13:16).

This brings us to the intercalated stories, 3:19a-35, lexias C-B'-A'. The crowd reappears in lexia C, tying this unit of text to both A and A'. As in A, the press of the crowds prevents a resumption of a normal life to the point that Jesus and his disciples are prevented from taking meals together. The fact that they were accustomed to take their meals together reminds us that the disciples have become for Jesus a surrogate family. This was a manifestation, perhaps even a cause, of friction with his natal family. In any case, the abnormality of his life prompts a movement toward the intervention of his kin that will be completed in A'. Mark attributes their intervention to the belief that he is deranged, using the term ἐξίστημι, part of his “amazement” vocabulary and a verb he has used before to describe the right and proper response of the crowds to Jesus’ mighty works (2:12; cf. 5:42, 6:51). But the accusation of bizarre behavior also evokes the phenomenon of ecstatic prophecy, and, in this context, of the irrepressible spirit that lay hold of the seventy elders in Num. 11:25. There Joshua objects to the deportment of men under prophetic inspiration and is rebuked by Moses (Num. 11:26-30). More to the point in comparing this passage in Mark with the traditions in Numbers is the opposition of Moses’ own family to his actions as found in Numbers 12. We will return to this episode in the discussion of lexia A' below.

The question of the driving force behind Jesus’ actions is continued in lexia B'. There are numerous parallels, both contrastive and synonymous, between this and other lexias in this pentad, especially in the counter-positioned lexia B. In B, Jesus and his disciples go up; in B' the scribes come down. In both lexias Jesus summons (προσκαλέω) first disciples, then adversaries. Jesus sends out his disciples on his own

42. Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, pp. 159, 181.

authority; the scribes are sent by the authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus asserts his authority as he renames his disciples: the scribes try to assert their authority by assigning to Jesus an evil name. The roster of the Twelve ends with the betrayer, Judas: Jesus' response to the Jerusalem scribes ends with a warning about an unforgivable sin. Jesus implies that Judas's future betrayal is, in fact, the sin in question, and the link is strengthened by the fact that Judas offered his services to the Jerusalem scribes in plotting Jesus' arrest (14:1, 10-11, 43). In both B and B' there is specific mention of the power to cast out demons, though in B this power is not exclusive to Jesus, since it is part of his delegation of authority to the Twelve. Indeed, the other Synoptists amplify the report of Jesus' argument against the scribes by adding a reference to the exorcising activity of other Jews. This *lexia* is also tied to *lexia* A in virtue of the scribes' accusation, which reflects their positive belief in Jesus' supernatural power and their tacit acceptance of reports that the demons acknowledged him as son of God. Since Satan was regarded as one of the "sons of God" (Job 1:6, 2:1), the accusation had a certain logic, and Jesus seems to accept its superficial plausibility by offering a substantive response.

The connection with the Pentateuch is seen in Mark's editing of his account of the verbal duel between Jesus and the scribes, with Korah's rebellion against Moses in mind. The gravity of the challenge lay in the fact that Korah was a Levite and therefore a custodian of the tabernacle. Moreover, his confederates are said to have been "leaders of the congregation, well-known men" (Num. 16:2). Similarly, the challenge to Jesus in Mk 3:22-30 is the first direct confrontation with "leaders of the congregation," in this case a delegation sent out from Jerusalem. Moreover, the conflict in Numbers 16 turns on the question of holiness. Thus, Korah and company reject the alleged self-consecration of Moses and Aaron. Likewise, in this *lexia*, consecration and holiness are very much in question. Jesus' authority is not derived from Jerusalem and the only apparent explanation for his unaccredited power is that it originates with Satan. Moses had been accused of making himself a "prince" (ἄρχων in Num. 16:13, LXX): Jesus' alleged self-exaltation is said to be the result of possession by the demons' ἄρχων. Jesus' dialectical response comprises a solemn pronouncement about the consequences of blaspheming Jesus' holy, empowering spirit. To sharpen the emphasis on the question of holiness, Mark, in repeating the scribes' charge in 3:30, alters it slightly but significantly to say that the scribes

had attributed to Jesus an ἀκάθαρτος spirit. As in Numbers 16, the contending factions are polarized by a conflict over the vocation of Yahweh's agent, as shown by the fact that they use *precisely the same terms* in their accusations (Num. 16:3, 7). By this point in Mark's story, Jesus and his opponents have also exchanged *precisely the same charge*, that is, blasphemy. In Mk 3:28-30, there is a midrashic explication of Numbers in Jesus' establishment of two categories of sin. In the first category are those sins susceptible of remission; in accord with Num. 12:22-29, they are sins that atonement removes both for Israelites and aliens. This is the basis of Jesus' statement that "all sins will be forgiven the sons of men," envisioning, on the basis of the Torah, a forgiveness made available irrespective of religious or ethnic origin. The second category contains only one type of sin, the sin of the malefactor who "reviles Yahweh" (Num. 15:30). The scribes' attack on Jesus, their ascribing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, is reckoned as the equivalent of reviling Yahweh: it is a sin committed "with a high hand," and therefore without atonement.

The final lexia in pentad IV has the crowds of A and C reappear, and Mark returns to the subject of the tension between Jesus and his kin mentioned fleetingly in C. The setting is again the house and the personae are three: Jesus, the crowd attending to his teaching, and his family members who remain "outside."⁴³ The Torah's prototype of this conflict is found in Numbers 12 where Miriam and Aaron contest the exclusive supremacy of Moses. An unusual detail in Numbers 12 is the mention of Miriam before Aaron. The implication throughout this episode in Numbers is that Miriam instigated the challenge to Moses, since she alone is expelled from the community. In Mk 3:31, we have several significant parallels to the events in Numbers. First, a woman, Jesus' mother, is introduced before the men, his brothers; and "Miriam" is Mary. Second, the punishment of Miriam is replicated after a fashion, since Mary remains outside the house as Jesus repudiates his family's intervention. Third, Yahweh's speech in Num. 12:6-8 makes Moses the trustee of Yahweh's entire house and insists on the intimate relationship between Yahweh and Moses, rejecting the kin-based claims of Miriam and Aaron to share authority with him. Similarly

43. France, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 177-80, analyzes Mark's use of spatial imagery in this passage to accentuate the gulf between "insiders and outsiders;" he links it, insightfully, to the insider/outsider contrast in Jesus' statement about why he speaks in parables in 4:10-11.

Jesus' statement in Mk 3:34-35 makes it clear that it is one's unconditional obedience to God, which in the immediate context means a willing submission to Jesus' teaching authority, that establishes a familial bond between any individual and himself. Kin-based claims have no validity if they compromise that obedience. But it must also be noted that no one may claim to stand in paternal relationship with Jesus by doing the will (θέλημα) of God. This final lexia concludes with a reminder that God is Jesus' father, confirming the demons' declaration in the first lexia of this pentad.

Pentad V: "Hear, O Israel"

As Deuteronomy is the only book of the Pentateuch comprising a series of speeches, so the last pentad in Mk 1:1–4:34 comprises a series of speeches. Jesus' speeches here are, of course, parables, but while Jesus has told parables before (e.g. in Mk 3:23-27), these parables are different in that they are not part of a dialogue or polemic, which makes them similar to Moses' monologue in Deuteronomy. These formal similarities are again evidence of Mark's conscious use of a pentateuchal model. As if to expose this connection, Jesus opens his first parable with a command to his audience, ἀκούετε, employing the same verb as LXX in its rendering of the imperative in the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4).⁴⁴ This verb is of enormous importance for the interpretation of this entire pentad, being repeated 11 times. The same verb is prominent throughout Deuteronomy, where it occurs a total of 33 times. Five times it is used in solemn pronouncements to call forth the attention of the entire nation: "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 5:1; 6:3, 4; 9:1; 20:3). But they do not hear: the Israelites' deafness to the message of God is the result of the fact that they have not received from Yahweh "ears to hear" (Deut. 29:4), a statement paralleling Isa. 6:9-10, which passage is incorporated into Jesus' speech in Mk 4:12. Another very interesting parallel in structure is seen in the fact that Deuteronomy comprises Moses' farewell discourses, since he is not allowed to cross over into Canaan but is fated to die before the beginning of the conquest. There is a farewell in Mark 4 as well, and it presents us with a provocative twist on the story of Moses. Jesus' day of teaching by the sea is followed immediately by

44. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, p. 134, notes the echo of Deuteronomy and that this imperative is absent in the other Synoptics.

a departure, not into the promised land but out of it, into a zone inhabited by Gentiles.⁴⁵

No diagrammatic or detailed analysis of the complexities of Mk 4:1-34 can be essayed here; only one impressionistic observation must suffice to suggest the basic substantive link with Deuteronomy. That link is seen in the fact that, as in Deuteronomy, Jesus' first and paradigmatic parable directs our attention to the issue of land. In particular, when we come to the fourth sowing, it is said that the seed falls "into the good land" (εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν καλήν). In using this language, Jesus' re-deployment of a deuteronomic theme is unambiguous, since "the good land" occurs no less than ten times in Deuteronomy 1-11.⁴⁶ Indeed, the parable keeps the land in focus throughout, as does the entire book of Deuteronomy. The Hebrew *eretz* occurs no less than 188 times in Deuteronomy. As Israel stands poised for conquest, the realization of the promise concerning the land is the pre-eminent theme of Deuteronomy. But Deuteronomy also makes plain that only obedience to the Torah can qualify the Israelites to *remain* in the covenanted land. In this parable, Jesus subtly extends this spiritual and ethical concept of land tenure in a new direction. His covert midrash on Deuteronomy directs his hearers away from a material conception of land toward an understanding of "good land" as "good community," faithful to the word of God and bearing the fruit of good deeds.⁴⁷ This radically new interpretation of "land" is certainly one of the secrets Jesus seeks to reveal about the kingdom of God.

Conclusions

Sufficient evidence has been assembled to suggest that the Pentateuch is indeed the hypotext of Mk 1:1-4:34. Several important conclusions build upon this foundational insight.

A first thesis is methodological. The cryptographers are in principle right. Analysis of the organization of Mark's early chapters reveals a consistently-applied principle of organization. Similar to other authors of Second Temple literature, he is consciously imitating the fivefold

45. While it cannot be explored here, this typology may cast light on the meaning of Jesus' encounter with the demoniac in Mk 5:1-20.

46. Deut. 1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21-22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17. The Septuagint uses the same words as found in Mark 4.

47. *Gen. Rab.* 16:3, cited in Taylor, *The Immenser*, p. 99.

form of the Pentateuch. Moreover, the Pentateuch's substantive influence on the arrangement of Mark can be apprehended by means of a quinpartite grid consisting of pentads and lexias, or their equivalent. A corollary is that, once this analytical grid is applied, Mark's use of chiasm becomes apparent. Nothing surprising here, since chiasm, as a form of parallelism, is the "one shape of elevated speech" in Hebrew literature.⁴⁸ Kenneth Bailey has demonstrated its pervasiveness in Luke, in the parables and in the total plan of the Travel Document.⁴⁹ This section of Mark stands as a still earlier example of New Testament conformity to this Semitic literary norm.

A second thesis is that Mark's worldview was Torah-centered. He was mainly interested in the Gospel's *continuity* with the enscriptured world in which he and other Jews lived. This continuity was apologetically necessary to secure a hearing for the new faith and to establish its legitimacy. A Gospel grounded in the prophets and hagiographa would have been a weak reed.⁵⁰ Later Christian readings of the Hebrew canon tend to equalize the authority of its constituent parts, but early Jewish-Christian conceptions of Scripture would have differed on this point. The Pentateuch was the core of the Hebrew canon, and for the Gospel to carry authority for Jews, it had to be presented in such a way as to demonstrate its organic relationship to the Mosaic corpus. The Gospel was emphatically not self-referential but was validated by its relationship to the Torah.

But the Torah itself is not a static text, and Mark's conception of the Gospel–Torah nexus is based on a dialogical interpretive strategy in which the Torah's themes are elaborated with reference to the Gospel. This occurs in at least three ways. First, the Torah begins with stories

48. Alan Cooper, "On Reading Biblical Poetry [Review of James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981)]," *Maarav: Journal for the Study of Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures* 4.2 (Fall 1987), p. 229.

49. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, I, pp. 79–85.

50. Contra Joel Marcus in his fine study, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). Marcus is certainly right in focusing on Mark's extensive use of Second Isaiah, but the basic framework for his Gospel is supplied by the Torah. A similar criticism applies to the intriguing hypothesis of Roth, *Hebrew Gospel*. While Mark certainly uses Elisha typologically, 2 Kings is not his primary model.

about God's relationship to humankind as a whole. The divine intentions of salvation and judgment for all humankind are operative in the primeval histories, and especially in the story of Noah, whose patterns and motifs are reappropriated with midrashic imagination in Mark's account of John's ministry and Jesus' baptism.⁵¹ Second, the Torah records the history of Israel before the building of the temple. The presence of Yahweh in the Torah is expressed in the cult of the tabernacle, a mobile tent-shrine that by comparison with the temple apparatus of Jesus' day was an extremely humble affair. Yet Israel's greatest prophet spoke with Yahweh face to face in this simple dwelling. No contemporary priest could claim an authority like that of Moses, nor could the splendor of Herod's temple match the brilliance of the divine presence inhabiting the tabernacle. As we have seen, Mark has shaped several of his pericopes to indicate that the advent of Jesus marks a return to the simplicity, mobility and intimate spirituality of the era of the tabernacle. Third, the Torah ends before the people come into possession of the land. The promises of a vast posterity, of a legally-structured nationhood and of the manifestation of Yahweh's presence, were all realized *before* the conquest of Canaan. And Israel's greatest prophet had never even entered the land.

To take the point here, it is necessary to realize that the pre-history of the Passion was something of a problem for the Evangelists because it took place in the backwater province of Galilee. In the minds of many, his provenance alone would cast doubt on the extraordinary claims made for Jesus.⁵² Significantly, there is no mention of Galilee anywhere in the New Testament outside of the Gospels and Acts. Yet this backwater was the place where Jesus spent most of his life; no one could possibly have wanted to make up a fact like this: "Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee" (Jn 7:52). Faced with this problem, Mark's use of the Torah in presenting the Galilean prophet served two purposes simultaneously. First, it supplied an

51. See Isaac M. Kikawada, "Noah and the Ark," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), IV, pp. 1123-31.

52. Sean Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 297, describes the tensions between Jerusalem as center and Galilee as periphery in the geographic imagination and social relations of first-century Jews. Although he does not relate it to the modeling of the Gospel on the Pentateuch, he discusses the Christian need for a "riposte to those who argued from their superior knowledge of Scripture that neither prophet nor the Messiah could come from Galilee."

analogy to Jesus' situation: Moses spent most of his life wandering around in the wilderness of Sinai, but there was no question about his spiritual stature. Second, the stories of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, which might otherwise be dismissed as a ragged collection of tales about a bucolic rabbi, were endowed with gravitas when they were arranged in order to evoke the Pentateuch. This evocation was redoubled by editing the individual incidents in Jesus' Galilean ministry to conform to Torah-inspired typologies, as we have shown.

Beyond Mk 1:1–4:34, it may be observed heuristically that mimetic cycles based on the Pentateuch appear to continue throughout Mark. Thus, the stilling of the storm in Mk 4:35–41 can be connected to Genesis and other mythic poetry about the creation, as Elohim subdues the watery chaos, which would form a fitting beginning to Pentad VI (Mk 4:35–6:6a). Pentad VII (6:6b–56) contains clear echoes of the Exodus narrative (e.g. Mk 6:8–9 / Exod. 12:11; Mk 6:35–44 / Exod. 16). Pentad VIII (Mk 7:1–23), like Pentad III, is linked to Leviticus; it is certainly striking, and strong evidence of a continuing pentateuchal mimesis, that Mark interrupts his narrative here to plunge into a controversy over purity laws. Obviously, much further research would be required to elaborate the progression adumbrated here, but the recognition of the Pentateuch as Mark's hypotext must set the agenda for that work.