

Christ's Baptism and Crucifixion: The Anointing and Enthronement of God's Son

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Introduction

If one did not already recognize it, redaction criticism showed what should have been obvious to all—that the Gospel writers play a creative role in shaping the theological import of their narrative accounts concerning Jesus Christ. After the entrance of redaction criticism and the emergence of literary criticism, New Testament scholars have focused upon the narrative techniques of the evangelists. Literary criticism, also, has simply uncovered what is truly present within the Gospel narratives, which to our shame got blurred, distorted, or even lost to Christians who thought that to read Scripture as literature diminished the Bible. Rediscovery of the Bible as literature, in the hands of Christians who critically engage modern criticism of the Bible, need not result in treating the Bible simply as any other good literature. Rightly seen, the Bible is the original that classic literature has imitated. Scripture's literary patterns and features significantly influenced great literary works far beyond mere quotations and allusions.

Passé is the claim that the author of the second Gospel "was a clumsy writer unworthy of mention in any history of literature."¹ The same is true of the notion that Mark was theologically artless. Mark's Gospel, formerly passed over because its contents were assumed to be incorporated into the larger Gospels of

Matthew and Luke, has taken priority in contemporary scholarship. Early literary and source critics assigned priority to Mark as the first of the four Gospels. More recently the programmatic work of Rhoads and Michie has given fresh impetus to the study of Mark's Gospel and to all the Gospels, an impetus that has endured for two decades.² Generally, their work continues to stimulate interest in reading each of the Gospels as story. In particular, they provide guidance concerning Mark's narrative patterns and story-telling techniques.

An atomistic reading of Mark's Gospel, or any of the Gospels, gives the impression that the storyline consists of "a series of disparate episodes strung together like distinct beads on a string otherwise unconnected to each other."³ A holistic reading, however, yields recognition of a storyline that integrates each episode into a whole by way of a complex variety of story-telling techniques. Mark gives structure to his story by repeating words and phrases for literary effect and theological significance. He uses foreshadowing and reflection. Recurrence of comparable settings and events assists readers to see and to hear the message that escapes the Twelve whose vision and hearing are impaired. Mark frequently wraps one episode around another by telling the beginning of one episode only to interrupt it with another and then to return

to finish the first.⁴ By so doing, Mark not only signals for readers a relationship between the two stories, but by wrapping one episode around another, his arrangement of the two episodes makes a point that one episode alone would not signify. Another of Mark's features is chiasm or "episodes in a concentric pattern," such as in 2:1-3:6 with the A-B-C-B¹-A¹ pattern.⁵ Numerous studies show that chiasm occurs at multiple levels in Mark's Gospel, from the text's smallest level, such as short proverbial statements, to the entire text, including the whole Gospel narrative.⁶ Yet, the complexity of Mark's narrative arrangement yields numerous, if not competing, interpretive structural arrangements of several chiasms within a large chiasm. Some are elaborate while others are modest.⁷

While reading Donald H. Juel's *A Master of Surprise*, I first encountered the suggestion that Mark envelopes his Gospel narrative with an inclusio.⁸ He calls attention to what I had read numerous times without proper attention, that Mark uses *schizō* once at either end of his Gospel, in 1:10 and 15:38. He notes, "The images form an inclusio: A pattern that begins here at Jesus' baptism ends with his death."⁹ Juel continues, "When the heavens are torn, the Spirit enters Jesus and a heavenly [sic] voice addresses him as 'son.' At the moment of his death, he 'breathed out his spirit' (15:37, au. trans.); the temple curtain tears; and a centurion—not God—makes a declaration about Jesus' sonship."¹⁰

Juel stirred my imagination by observing, "Reflection suggests that the relationship between both ends of the inclusio are complex, not simple, and merit further study."¹¹ His own work, however, simply touches upon this complexity while challenging readers to advance the study. Two

earlier short studies that call attention to Mark's apparently intentional use of *schizō* in both 1:10 and 15:38 to form an inclusio yield more insights.¹² Lane's classic study of Mark provocatively calls for these studies by observing, "It is probably significant that in the preface to the Gospel there is a rending of the sky and the proclamation that Jesus is the divine Son (Ch. 1:11) to which correspond the rending of the temple veil and the confession that Jesus is Son of God in Ch. 15:38f."¹³ This essay seeks to fill out Lane's pithy but undeveloped comment concerning the narrative and theological significance of Mark's inclusio.

The Literary Complexity of Mark's Inclusio

Van Iersel finds the two ends of Mark's Gospel connected by way of symbolic representation, linking "desert" and "tomb."¹⁴ Some scholars agree, identifying 1:2-13 and 15:42-16:8 as Mark's inclusio, treating 1:1 as a title.¹⁵ The parallels they identify, however, are primarily conceptual associations that depend heavily upon an interpretive level of reading the text that admittedly moves beyond what the text itself says.¹⁶ Careful reading shows that stronger verbal linkages occur between 1:1-13 and 15:33-39. Prominent catchwords in these two pericopes suggest that these two portions form Mark's inclusio, featuring Jesus' baptism and crucifixion as anointing and enthronement respectively.

With van Iersel or Wallis, one might expect to find Mark's "bookends" or inclusio in 1:1-13 and a corresponding portion at the end in 15:40-16:8. However, upon reading these portions, one does not find many verbal linkages between the two. One finds Mark's mention of John's

camel hair garment (1:6) and the young man's robe (16:5).¹⁷ Though Mark's mention of clothing is admittedly unusual and significant within each of the two passages, stronger verbal linkage of the wilderness and tomb settings would have made the connection unmistakable. A clearer link might be the explicit mention of Jesus' movements, in the opening scene "from Nazareth of Galilee" (1:9) and at the tomb "the Nazarene" is going "into Galilee" (16:7). Yet, there is little in 15:40-16:8 that commends this portion as the closure of the inclusio. In fact, Mark's story resists closure at 16:8. Instead, "Mark's Gospel ends with both hope and disappointment."¹⁸ The final two verses end the narrative by sustaining tensions of the story, tension "between blindness and insight, concealment and openness, silence and proclamation. The tension is not resolved."¹⁹

Thus, lack of strong verbal linkages with 1:1-13 and lack of closure to the story in the resurrection narrative (15:40-16:8) is less than satisfying. The crucifixion pericope in 15:33-39 is more promising as the closing member of the inclusio begun in 1:1-13, for here one discovers a cluster

of recurring terms, expressions, cognates, and associate ideas that naturally link with 1:1-13. Motyer notes a clustering of motifs that occur in Mark's account at both Jesus' baptism (1:9-11) and his death (15:36-39) including (1) declaration that Jesus is the Son of God (at baptism, God's voice; at death, the centurion); (2) a tearing of the sky and of the curtain; (3) descent of the Spirit and descent of the tear in the curtain (from top to bottom); (4) Elijah is symbolically present (at baptism, in John; at death, in the mocking of the people); and (5) reception of the Spirit (*pneuma*) at baptism and departure of Christ's spirit at death (*exepneusen*, 15:37, 39), signified with the double use of the noun's cognate Greek verb as a euphemism.²⁰ Do these exhaust the verbal linkages between the two portions? Juxtaposing the text of both portions holds promise for identifying more links.

By laying the two passages side by side, even in English (but better in Greek), one discovers several catchwords and synonym phrases that link the two pericopes as shown in Table 1.

Mark's narrative of Jesus' baptism foreshadows the crucifixion narrative

Table 1
Catchwords and Synonym Phrases that Form the Inclusio

Mark 1:1-13		Mark 15:33-41	
1:1	Son of God	15:39	Son of God
1:2	a voice cries out	15:34	Jesus cried out with a loud voice .
1:10	heavens torn open	15:38	temple curtain torn open in two
1:10	Spirit descending into him	15:37, 39	he yielded his spirit
1:10	descending	15:38	from top to bottom
1:11	a voice came from heaven	15:37	Jesus released a loud voice
1:11	a voice came from heaven	15:33	darkness came upon the earth
1:13	he was with the wild animals	15:39	[the centurion] who stood by in hostility to him
1:13	[angels] were ministering to him	15:40	[women] were ministering to him

with catchwords and synonym phrases. Both portions of the inclusio include clear affirmation of Jesus' identity but in reverse order. The evangelist begins the story about Jesus with the titular declaration, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the *Son of God*" (1:1). The surprising Gentile centurion's confession, "Truly this man was the *Son of God*" (15:39), brings the evangelist's narrative to an ironic climax.²¹ This irony is by design, for Mark tells how Jesus, throughout his ministry, reveals himself with veiled speech and action to eyes that see but do not perceive and to ears that hear but do not understand. Now, Jesus' final act upon the cross ironically unveils his true identity as *Son of God*, not to one of his followers but to his executioner whose confession comes in response to the manner of Jesus' death. Because Jesus yields his spirit of his own volition, unveiling his identity, he sheaths the executioner's sword. By his death he elicits from his enemy what none of his followers confessed: "Truly this man was the Son of God."²² So, as Mark's story begins it also ends with a plain affirmation of Jesus' identity, but ironically from an unlikely character.²³

Upon the cross and with a loud *voice* Jesus cries out in the darkness that has come upon him (15:34). "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" punctuates with lament the story that begins with another *voice* crying out but in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight paths for him" (1:3). Isaiah's "highway for the Lord" reaches its zenith in the crucifixion with Jesus' crying out, forsaken by his Father whose *voice* of approbation he heard in the wilderness when he was baptized, "You are my Son, the beloved one; in you I am well pleased" (1:10-11). In the

wilderness Jesus is blessed by the voice that *comes from heaven*, speaking God's Word of anointing to him from Psalm 2:7, a royal psalm (cf. Isa 42:1; 2 Sam 7:14; Gen 22:2, 12, 16). On the cross, heaven's silence accompanies heavy darkness that *comes upon the whole earth*, reminiscent of God's judgment of darkness that came upon the whole land of Egypt (Exod 10:21-23). Jesus cries aloud his lament of abandonment, quoting Psalm 22:1, in the middle of the day when the sun ordinarily shines. In keeping with Mark's allusive reference to Scripture, darkness at the sixth hour of the day is God's eschatological judgment, as in Amos 8:9, "'And on that day,' declares the Lord GOD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.'"

Mark's narrative draws a contrast between Jesus' baptism and crucifixion while at the same time linking the two inseparably for mutual interpretation. At his baptism Jesus hears the heavenly voice of approbation (Mark 1:11). At his crucifixion heaven is silent and covers Jesus with the darkness of judgment (15:33). At his baptism in the wilderness the *voice from heaven* speaks approval to Jesus, evidently for him alone, for there is no mention of others hearing (1:11; cf. Matt 3:17; Luke 3:22). At his crucifixion, Jesus' *voice from earth* speaks lament to God, directed to him alone, but bystanders hear without understanding and mock him (15:35). In the wilderness Jesus experiences the abiding presence of God by way of angels who *minister to him* (Mark 1:13). At his crucifixion Jesus undergoes abandonment by God, by angels, by his followers, and even by women who were faithful to *minister to him* in Galilee (15:40). Jesus' announcement of his God-appointed mission comes to pass—"The Son of Man did not come

to be ministered to but to minister" (10:45). Significantly Mark's dual use of *diakoneō* in this passage echoes its use in the baptism episode (1:13) and foreshadows its use in the crucifixion account (15:40). These are the only uses of the verb in Mark's Gospel.

Besides causing the centurion's confession—"Truly this man was the Son of God" (15:39)—Jesus' loudly voiced yielding of his spirit *tears open* the temple veil from top to bottom into two pieces. These two effects of Jesus' dying—(1) the tearing of the curtain and (2) the centurion's confession—signify that this is not the close of a tragic life but the ironic disclosure of the same Jesus who saw the heavens *torn open*, into whom the Spirit *descended*, and who heard a voice acclaim, "You are my Son, the beloved one; in you I am well pleased" (1:11). Three eschatological events occur at once—(1) the rending of the heavens (Isa 64:1), the anointing by the Spirit descending into him (Isa 61:1), and the voice originating from heaven (Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7).²⁴ These three signify that Isaiah's prophecy concerning the "Way of Holiness," where no unclean person will travel, is now fulfilled (Isa 35:8) as Jesus submits to John's cleansing rite, not to confess sins as others do (Mark 1:5), but as God's beloved Son who pleases the Father to lead God's people from exile into promise.

In keeping with Jesus' anointed call, the Spirit, given to Jesus, casts him out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days, replicating Israel's experience in the wilderness for forty years.²⁵ In the wilderness Jesus dwells among Satan's allies, he is *with wild beasts* but not alone, for angels *minister* to him (1:12-13; cf. Ps 91:9-13). Though Mark's description of the wild beasts is brief (*en meta tōn theriōn*), it

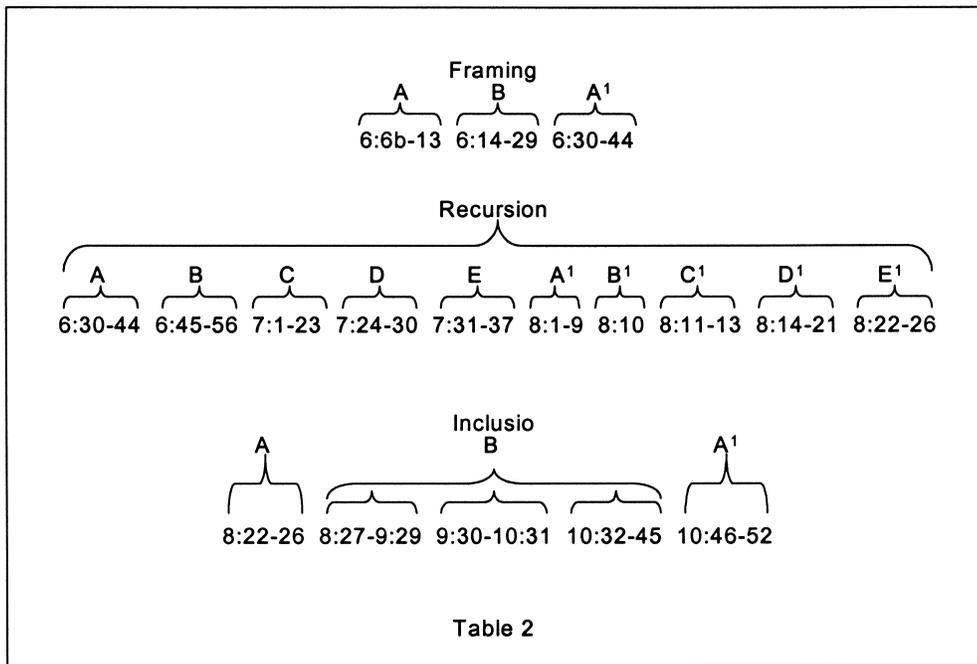
seems to foreshadow his description of the Roman centurion.²⁶ The wild beasts, hostile foes in the wilderness, correspond to all who approved Jesus' crucifixion, but in particular to the centurion who stood by the cross in hostility toward Jesus (15:39; *ho parestēkōs ex enantias autou*).

Mark's baptism narrative also implicitly foreshadows his crucifixion narrative with reference to Elijah. The drama begins with the eschatological Elijah preaching in the wilderness and administering purification rites for repentance of sin in the Jordan River (Mark 1:2-9). The prophecies cited (1:2-3; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3) and the unambiguous notation on clothing by which Elijah was identified (Mark 1:6; 2 Kings 1:8) make it evident that Mark views John as the last days Elijah who serves as the herald for one to come who is "more powerful" (Mark 1:8).²⁷ This allusive reference to Elijah foreshadows the bystanders' taunting anticipation of Elijah's imminent appearance to take Jesus down from the cross (Mark 15:35-36). The taunting crowd's mockery—"Look! He calls for Elijah"—responds to Jesus' loud cry in Aramaic, "*Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani!*"²⁸ Because they fail to recognize John as the promised Elijah figure (11:27-33), they also do not acknowledge Jesus as Son of God (12:1-12).

The Literary Significance of Mark's Inclusio

As stated earlier, the structure of Mark's Gospel is complex with various episodes tangled together so that they bear more than one literary relationship. For example, consider Table 2.

Notice that Mark 6:30-44 has two literary roles. First, it provides the second half of the frame that begins in 6:6b-13 and wraps around 6:14-29. Second, Mark



6:30-44 is the first episode of five, with each having corresponding recursive episodes in 8:1-26. So, 6:30-44 (feeding of the 5000) correlates to 8:1-9 (feeding of the 4000) which begins the five recursive episodes. Similarly, 8:22-26 functions pivotally for two literary portions. First, it is the final episode in the recursive cycle that spans 6:30-8:26. Jesus' giving sight to the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26) corresponds to Jesus' giving unimpaired hearing and speech to the deaf-mute man (7:31-37).²⁹ Second, Jesus' giving sight at Bethsaida (8:22-26) begins the midsection of the Gospel, which recounts Jesus' three explicit announcements that feature his impending death with brief mention of his resurrection after three days (8:27-9:29; 9:30-10:31; 10:32-45) and ends with Jesus' giving sight to blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). The two episodes of Jesus' giving sight to blind eyes form an inclusio around 8:27-10:45. Because Mark entangles his episodes this way it is difficult to outline the Gospel with firm literary boundaries.

While the baptism episode (1:1-13) is discernable as the prologue and can be

outlined as a distinct unit, the corresponding inclusio portion to which it links literally (15:33-41) is inseparably embedded in the crucifixion narrative (15:21-41). As shown above, this is the difficulty that Mark's complex literary arrangements pose for identifying structure, even more so for analytical outlines for teaching and preaching.

What is the significance of Mark's whole narrative inclusio? Discussion above already hints at much of the significance. The question is worthy of some focused reflection.

Mark's Gospel uses inclusio to envelope a single episode or to enclose an extended narrative portion. An example of a single episode inclusio is the Parable of the Soils with Jesus' call at its outset to "Listen!" (4:3) and his appeal at its close, "Let the one who has ears to hear listen!" (4:9). This brief inclusio signals hearers about the importance of hearing the parable for understanding. One who heeds Jesus' call to listen recognizes that the parable is about hearing and various levels of impaired hearing. Thus, one who hears

does not need to ask for an explanation of the parable. The fact that the Twelve ask Jesus for an explanation indicates that their hearing is yet impaired.

Two examples of *inclusio* that span longer narratives are (1) giving sight to the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) with giving sight to blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (10:46-52) enclosing the narrative of Jesus' three announcements to the Twelve concerning his impending death while traveling toward Jerusalem (8:27-10:45); and (2) the widow who, from her poverty, places all her wealth into the temple treasury (12:41-44) with the woman who anoints Jesus with extravagant perfume (14:1-11) bracketing Jesus' Mount of Olives Discourse that calls for watchfulness and perseverance to remain loyal disciples (13:1-37).

Inclusio, similar to sandwiching (also called framing), is Mark's built-in interpretive assistance for his readers that calls attention to the literary relationships among the enclosed narrative episodes. Mark's narrative of Jesus' baptism foreshadows the crucifixion narrative with catchwords and synonym phrases not for literary curiosity nor even for literary beauty but for theological understanding. Mark forges these intra-textual verbal links to signal readers that Jesus' baptism and his crucifixion are theologically inseparable and that these two bookends bind the whole narrative together so that, without them, what lies between them will not be properly read or understood. Yet, the literary relationship is mutual, for proper understanding of Jesus' baptism and of his crucifixion receives its fullness from the narrative encased within Mark's literary book covers.

All this prompts a question: Why does the *inclusio* not enclose the resurrection

narrative? Crucial as the resurrection narrative is to the full story of Jesus, Mark does not feature it within the Gospel or as his literary *inclusio* or by giving it much length.³⁰ With numerous catchwords and synonym phrases that link the baptism and crucifixion narratives, Mark features Christ's crucifixion, not his resurrection, as the climax of the story, placing the burial and resurrection episodes beyond the featured climax. The manner with which Mark ends his Gospel in a kind of narrative suspension has long impelled readers to look for a suitable story climax.³¹ Mark's *inclusio* identifies the climax to be Christ's crucifixion as his glory and enthronement as the Son of God. For it is here that one properly recognizes and confesses Jesus' true character, identity, and mission. It is as the crucified Son of God that Jesus receives subjects into his kingdom, where enemies yield and are made confessing subjects like the centurion who acknowledges, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Significant as Christ's resurrection is, Mark's Gospel features the crucifixion in both the *inclusio* and the narrative bounded by the *inclusio*. Each of the three announcements of Jesus' approaching death in Jerusalem provides increasing detail concerning the manner of his death with the same attachment, "after three days he will rise again" (*kai meta treis hēmeras anastēsetai*; 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Mark's feature of the crucifixion is evident from the midsection of the Gospel, as hinted at in the earlier discussion of the literary arrangement of Mark 8:22-10:52. This, the heart of Mark's Gospel, is where we find catchwords and synonym phrases from the baptism and crucifixion episodes intersecting. Jesus' triple announcement of his impending crucifixion features his

sacrificial death as his glorious enthronement and thus the climax of Mark's Gospel. We will focus attention upon two pericopes: Jesus' transfiguration (9:2-13) and James and John's unusual request (10:35-45).

The inclusio of Jesus' giving sight to blind eyes bounds Mark 8:22-10:52 which features him giving instruction three times to all his disciples concerning the purpose of his impending death and a fourth time privately to three disciples at his transfiguration. As shown earlier, Jesus' opening eyes at Bethsaida is as literarily linked to his gifts of speech and hearing to the deaf mute (7:31-37) as to his giving sight to Bartimaeus (10:45-52). By healing impaired hearing and speech (7:31-37) and vision (8:22-26) Jesus symbolically dramatizes his teaching role with the Twelve. Several features make it clear that Jesus designed these two signs to represent symbolically the disciples with their dull ears, imperceptive eyes, and their inability to announce with clarity Jesus' true identity. The disciples are like these two men whom Jesus heals. As with these two men, Jesus also has drawn the Twelve aside from the crowds to give special attention to them to unstop their deaf ears and to open their blind eyes (cf. 4:11-12; 7:17ff). Like the deaf and mute man, the Twelve hear only faintly what Jesus is teaching about himself. Their impaired speech fails to confess plainly who Jesus truly is because their ears are not properly hearing what Jesus has been saying (cf. 4:10ff; 7:17ff). Jesus performs his sign with the blind man before the disciples' eyes, but they fail to perceive its true significance (cf. 6:52; 8:17-21). The disciples perceive only dimly who Jesus is. They hear only faintly what Jesus is teaching concerning himself. Even after

Peter confesses, "You are the Christ!" (8:29), he, with the other disciples, immediately shows how faintly he hears and how dimly he sees Jesus' true identity (cf. 8:31-33). Like the blind man at Jesus' first touch, their senses lack clarity and definition. Accurate as Peter's confession is, it lacks completeness, which Jesus begins to make plain by saying that he will suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders and will rise again after three days. Peter's patronizing and swift rebuke exposes the inadequacy of his confession.³² To acknowledge Jesus without accounting for his crucifixion at the hands of the religious leaders is inadequate and in need of further instruction.

Beginning in the baptism pericope and running throughout Mark's Gospel is a "voice (*phonē*) motif" with words expressing recognition of Jesus as God's Son, for, in part, the plotted conflict the narrative captures develops around rival voices. "A voice crying in the wilderness" appointed to "prepare the way of the Lord" (1:3) is joined by a "voice from heaven" saying, "You are my Son, the beloved one; in you I am well pleased" (1:11). This private divine investiture of Jesus with the title "Son of God" finds rival voices from demons who seek to preempt Jesus' self-disclosure in the appointed time by publishing his identity openly. "And crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!'" (5:7). Even though demons correctly identify him as God's Son (cf. 1:23-26, 34), Jesus consistently rebukes them because he intends to unveil his own identity with his own voice in his appointed time and manner.

So, Mark features at the center of his Gospel the transfiguration of the Son of

Man when the divine voice comes from the cloud to identify Jesus unambiguously as “Son of God.”³³ Other features besides the divine voice link the transfiguration episode (9:2-13) with the baptism account (1:1-13) and with the crucifixion narrative (15:33-41). These three accounts reporting apocalyptic events literarily form a chiasm (A-B-A¹; see Table 3).

(9:7; *egeneto nephelē episkiazousa autois*). The cloud foreshadows the darkness that comes upon the whole earth at midday when Jesus is crucified (15:33). The voice heard at Jesus’ baptism speaks again. Mark’s narrative echoes are unmistakable. In the wilderness at Jesus’ baptism *the voice comes out of heaven* (1:11). On the mountain at Jesus’ transfiguration *the voice*

Table 3 Inclusio and Chiasm Apocalyptic Events in Mark’s Gospel ³⁴					
A Mark 1:1-13		B Mark 9:2-13		A ¹ Mark 15:33-41	
Baptism		Transfiguration		Crucifixion	
1:10	Heavens torn	9:3	Garments become radiant white	15:38	Temple curtain torn
1:4-9	John as Elijah	9:4	Elijah appears with Moses	15:34	“Behold, he calls Elijah.”
1:10	Spirit descends	9:7	Cloud descends	15:33	Darkness comes
1:11	Voice from heaven	9:7	Voice from the cloud	15:33	Jesus’ loud voice
1:11	“You are my Son, the beloved one, in you I am well pleased.”	9:7	“This is my Son, the beloved one. Listen to him!”	15:39	“Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

Six days after Jesus’ first explicit announcement of his God-appointed crucifixion, he takes Peter, James, and John to a high mountain for a private apocalyptic disclosure, signifying visitation of God is at hand. On the mountain he is joined by two significant characters from Israel’s past, Moses and Elijah. Just as God had visited Israel in theophanies on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15-18; 1 Kings 19:8), so Jesus momentarily lifts the veil of his humanity to shine with radiant splendor while speaking with Moses and Elijah, indicating that the time of salvation prophesied by the Law and the Prophets has now come in Jesus.

Echoes from Jesus’ baptism narrative reverberate in the transfiguration episode. Likewise, the transfiguration narrative foreshadows elements found in the crucifixion account. The glory of Jesus’ transfiguration becomes shrouded with a *cloud that comes overshadowing* everyone present

comes out of the cloud (9:7). The cloud that once shrouded Mount Sinai (Exod 24:15-16), that covered the wilderness tabernacle as the glory of the Lord inhabited it (Exod 40:35), and that later filled Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) now overshadows the transfigured Jesus, his ancient companions, and three disciples, signifying the presence and glory of God. Heaven and earth converge in Jesus; in him God dwells bodily among humans.³⁵ On the high mountain the Son of Man is visibly and audibly revealed as the Son of God and witnessed by three of his disciples whom Jesus forbids to tell anyone of what they had seen until the Son of Man would rise from the dead (9:9). On the mountain Jesus’ divine designation and his heavenly glory starkly contrast with his plain speech of humiliation that “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and

after three days rise again" (8:31).

The presence of Elijah *with* Moses bears significance subtly developed in Mark's Gospel for all who have eyes to see and ears to hear.³⁶ Elijah's presence with the Son of God on the mountain is an echo from the baptism episode. John, the last days Elijah (cf. 6:14-29), foretold of the Coming One "who is more powerful than I." Likewise, in the presence of the transfigured Son of Man, Elijah yields to the Son of God whom he and all the great line of prophets in Israel that followed him foreshadowed and prophesied. Jesus confirms the significance of Elijah's presence on the mountain as he responds to the disciples' question during the descent, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (9:11). Jesus recasts their question of curiosity about Elijah. "When Elijah comes first he restores all things. And why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I say to you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they desired, just as it is written of him" (9:12).

The significance of Moses' presence is confirmed by the divine voice from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. *Listen to him!*" (9:7; cf. 1:11). The voice does not speak to Jesus as at his baptism (1:11) but to the three disciples. The words "Listen to him!" are a clear allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15—"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." The "prophet like me" that Moses prophesied has come, and he is greater than Moses. He is also greater than the covenant institutions that came through Moses, including the tabernacle and its successor, which had been filled with the cloud of the Lord's presence from which God's voice came. Thus, on the mountain,

the coalescence of Moses' presence, of the cloud of the Lord's presence, of the words spoken by the divine voice, and of the glorious display of the Son of God bears great significance. It foreshadows what takes place when Jesus breaths out his last loud cry from the cross and the temple curtain is torn from top to bottom. Likely, the torn curtain refers to the outer veil, between the Court of Israel and the outer courts, visible to the Gentile centurion.³⁷ If so, this divine tearing signifies a triple fulfillment. It fulfills Isaiah 56:6-7, speaking of Gentiles, "these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (ESV). Tearing of the curtain fulfills Jesus dramatized prophecy concerning the temple's doom (11:15-33) during which he quotes Isaiah 56:7. Ironically the tearing of the curtain also fulfills the twisted prophecy reported by false witnesses at his mock trial (14:58) and used by mockers at his crucifixion (15:29).³⁸

For our purposes one pericope in Mark's Gospel remains for consideration before drawing this discussion to a conclusion. Mark 10:35-45 is crucial for understanding the significance of Mark's whole-Gospel inclusio. Each of the three times Jesus announces his impending crucifixion with increased detail, his disciples exhibit their lack of understanding (8:31-34; 9:33-37; 10:35-45). Following his plainly spoken announcement of his sufferings and death in Jerusalem, James and John make a request—"Bestow to us that we may sit one on your right side and one on your left in your glory" (10:37).³⁹ This request serves as an occasion for Jesus to provide further instruction about

his death and its ramifications for his disciples.

Evidently James and John think that Jesus, whom they know to be Messiah (8:27-30), is going to restore to Jerusalem the glory of the fallen throne of David by unseating the Romans and driving them out. Jesus' response is sharp and rebuking in riddle form: "You do not understand what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (10:38). Their affirmative response draws yet another riddle: "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right or my left is not mine to bestow but for those to whom it is prepared" (10:39-40). The cup of wine is a common imagery of divine allotment, particularly as here for God's wrathful judgment (cf. Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-28). That Jesus speaks of the anguish of his death under divine judgment is evident in his use of the imagery twice again in Mark. This imagery appears when he institutes his memorial meal—"And he took a cup. . . . 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,'" (14:23, 24) and then later when he prays, "Take this cup from me!" (14:36).

Though the imagery of baptism for being "overwhelmed with something" is not as prominent within the Greek Old Testament, it is present (LXX Isa 21:4). Shades of this sense are present in John's announcement: "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). In Mark 10:38-39 Jesus speaks of being overwhelmed with sorrow and with suffering as he speaks of the manner of his death. Jesus invests the imagery of the cup and of baptism with

a sense somewhat different from his use of them with reference to himself. For him, the cup and baptism entail his God-allotted role as one who is not served but serves by giving his own life as a ransom for many (10:45), a clear allusion to Isaiah 53:10. For his disciples, the imagery pair of the cup and of baptism refers to persecution that is appointed to them as Christ's followers.

Jesus' riddle-like response to James and John concerning baptism verbally echoes the narrative of his baptism in the Jordan River and foreshadows his crucifixion with synonym phrases. Mark's mention of the two robbers crucified with Jesus, "one on his right and one on his left" (Mark 15:27), recalls James and John's request: "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory" (Mark 10:37). The irony of the request and of Jesus' response should now become clear. The "glory" of enthronement the disciples expected ironically turns out to be Jesus' crucifixion. The shameless mockery heaped upon Jesus, by the Roman soldiers in their mock coronation, by the criminal charge inscribed against him ("Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"), by mocking passersby, and by the chief priests, turns out to be Jesus' glory, his enthronement. They intend insult, but their insults speak truths they neither intend nor understand. They unwittingly fulfill God's purpose of enthroning the Son of God, for the Father's approval—"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased!"—will be Jesus', only if he drinks fully "the cup" appointed for him (cf. 10:38 and 14:35f).

Conclusion

Mark's Gospel is punctuated throughout with irony that is both verbal and

situational. Irony is present within the individual pericopes of the inclusio, in the interplay of the two pericopes of the inclusio, and in the way the inclusio interfaces with the whole of Mark's narrative. This irony intensifies with Jesus' crucifixion.

As religious, civic, and military officials in Jerusalem mock Jesus as "King of the Jews" they proclaim the truth and ironically enthrone him as king upon the cross. Blinded by religious zeal, apart from the Gentile executioner, they fail to recognize the apocalyptic signs from heaven that signal God's visitation in judgment and salvation. Human mocking acclamation and divine judgment converge upon the Son of God. Paradoxically, Jesus' baptism with darkness is his glory, his enthronement.

Jesus, who receives the exalted investiture of "Son" from his Heavenly Father as he is anointed for his mission at his baptism and again at his transfiguration, endures another baptism that brings his earthly mission to its God-appointed goal. Crucified upon the cross he is overwhelmed with anguish and suffering as he gives his life as a ransom for many. The heavenly voice is silent. The cloud of God's presence and glory that overshadowed those on the mountain signified heavenly approbation. Now the cloud descends as the darkness of God to enshroud Jesus, signifying heavenly reprobation and identifying him with the whole earth under divine wrath and judgment. Jesus does not cry, "Abba, Father," as in the Garden (14:36), for the end has come. The darkness of apocalyptic judgment has fallen upon him with divine estrangement and wrath. Instead, he laments with a loud voice, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Passage of time does not dispel this apocalyptic darkness. This

darkness departs only with Jesus' passage from this life, ripping the temple veil, an apocalyptic sign of the temple's destruction and the opening of "the way of the Lord" for Gentiles.

ENDNOTES

¹E. Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel according to Mark*, trans. Pamela Gaughan (London: SPCK/ Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 72.

²David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). Cf. David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

³Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 47-62.

⁴Scholars name this variously as intercalation, framing, sandwiching, even dovetailing. See Mark 3:20-21, 22-30, 31-35; 4:1-9, 10-12, 13-20; 5:21-24, 25-34, 35-43; 6:7-13, 14-29, 30-44; 11:12-14, 15-19, 20-25; 14:1-2, 3-9, 10-11, 17-21, 22-26, 27-31, 53-54, 55-65, 66-72; 15:40-41, 42-46; 15:47-16:8. Cf. J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *Novum Testamentum* 31 (1989): 193-216; and Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition, and Function* (Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series 18; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

⁵Rhoads, Dewey, & Michie, 52-53. The episodes take the following arrangement:

A Healing of the paralytic (2:1-12)

B Eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17)

C Eating on a day of fasting (2:18-22)

B¹ Eating by plucking grain on

the Sabbath (2:23-28)

A¹ Healing of the man with the withered hand (3:1-6).

⁶For example, see M. Philip Scott, "Chiastic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15 (1985): 17-26. Cf. Bascom Wallis, *Mark's Memory of the Future: A Study in the Art of Theology* (Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1995), 10, 219, for a chiastic arrangement of the whole Gospel and 36 for identification of the chiastic arrangement of two of Jesus' proverbs. For example, see Mark 2:27:

A The Sabbath

B was made for humankind,

B¹ and not humankind

A¹ for the Sabbath.

⁷For a restrained example, see Bas van Iersel, *Reading Mark*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark/Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 20-21. Van Iersel summarizes the structure of Mark as follows:

Title (1:1)

(A 1) *In the desert* (1:2-13)

(y 1) first hinge (1:14-15)

(B 1) *In Galilee* (1:16-8:21)

(z 1) blindness — sight
(8:22-26)

(C 1) *On the way* (8:27-10:45)

(z 2) blindness — sight
(10:46-52)

(B 2) *In Jerusalem* (11:1-15:39)

(y 2) second hinge (15:40-41)

(A 2) *At the tomb* (15:42-16:8)

⁸Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 34.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. The two portions read *schizomenous tous ouranous* (1:10); *to kata-petasma tou naou eschisthē* (15:38).

¹¹Ibid.

¹²See Stephen Motyer, "The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 155-157; and David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 123-125.

¹³William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 576. Though dated, Lane's work endures as a classic.

¹⁴Van Iersel states, "The words 'desert' and 'tomb' refer to places which in the experience of the reader are in many ways interrelated: they do not form part of the inhabited world, people do not settle in them, and they are therefore preeminently suitable as dwelling-places for demons. . . . But not only are the places referred to by the words 'desert' and 'tomb' related to each other; both parts of the story taking place there show more remarkable similarities. In both a messenger appears, John and a young man, whose dress is mentioned in each case (which is exceptional in Mark), and both speak of local movements of Jesus, his coming after the Baptist and his going on before the disciples, respectively. In both parts also the 'way' of Jesus is an important theme, referred to in the former through the quotations in 1:2-3 and in the latter through Jesus going on before his disciples to Galilee (16:1).

Finally both stories tell how new life springs up in these places of death, in the first through the baptism, in the second through the resurrection from the dead" (21).

¹⁵See, e.g., Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989); and Wallis, 20ff. I have suggested elsewhere that Mark 1:1 should not be treated as a title, disconnected from the flow of the text because of *kathōs*. See A. B. Caneday, "Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration: 'He Was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him,'" *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 21. See also A. B. Caneday, "He Wrote in Parables and Riddles: Mark's Gospel as a Literary Reproduction of Jesus' Teaching Method," *Didaskalia* 10 (1999): 40-41.

¹⁶Wallis, 21-22.

¹⁷Wallis argues, "Both of the garments are eschatological symbols. John's camel hair recalls Elijah, and at the tomb, the angel's white apparel echoes the epiphanies in Hebrew Scriptures and in intertestamental literature. In the transfiguration scene, Jesus' garments become 'dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them' (9:3)" (22). Wallis, as others, does not regard Mark's mention of Jesus' grave clothes (15:46) as having any significance.

¹⁸Juel, 116.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Cf. especially Motyer, 155f. Luke 23:46 uses *ekpneō* with the understanding that it signifies Jesus' voluntary yielding of his spirit with Jesus' quotation of Psalm

31:5—"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

²¹See Rhoads, Dewey, & Michie, 60-61. Verbal irony occurs when an actor in a narrative purposely uses words that express one thing but mean the opposite. For example, the soldiers speak the truth unintentionally as they mock Jesus, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mark 15:18). Likewise, the inscribed charge against Jesus sarcastically reads, "King of the Jews," but is in fact the truth. Situational or dramatic irony occurs when there is conflict between what an actor in the drama expects to happen and what actually takes place. For example, the chief priests and scribes ridicule Jesus, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself." Little did they know the truth they spoke, for were he to save himself, he could not save others.

²²The centurion's confession is ironic "along with other ironic statements at the foot of the cross" (Earl S. Johnson, Jr., "Is Mark 15:39 the Key to Mark's Christology?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 [1987]: 16). Concerning the centurion's ironic confession, some dispute its authentic nature. For example, Juel regards the confession a taunt "in accord with the rest of the taunts in the account of Jesus' trial and death" (74, note 7). Contrast James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 483; and P. M. Head, "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1. 'The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,'" *New Testa-*

ment Studies 37 (1991): 621-629.

²³Based largely upon the text-critical work of P. M. Head who contends that the original text probably did not have *huios theou* (see *ibid.*), Earl S. Johnson, Jr. argues that the Roman centurion's confession is altogether too ambiguous to lend any support to the claim that Mark's Christology reaches its climax in 15:39 ("Mark 15:39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion," *Biblica* 81 [2000]: 406-413). Contrast P. Davies, "Mark's Christological Paradox," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (1989): 3-18. See also Edwards, *Mark*, 480-483. For a text-critical defense of the reading *huios theou* in 1:1, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Does Mark 1:1 Call Jesus 'God's Son'?—A Brief Text-Critical Note," n.p. [30 September 1999] Online: <http://www.bible.org/docs/soap-box/mark1-1.htm>.

²⁴Compare Edwards, *Mark*, 34-35, who cites *T. Levi* 18:6-8, showing that Jewish tradition expanded upon Isaiah's prophecies, reflecting an expectation fulfilled in Mark's episode of Jesus' baptism. Cf. *T. Jud.* 24:1-3. On Isaiah 63 (LXX) as the background for Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, see also Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 102ff. Watts effectively shows that Mark's use of *schizō* instead of the LXX's *anoigō* seems more accurate to render Isaiah's *qr'*.

²⁵Mention of "forty days" signifies that Jesus "replicates Israel's experiences in the wilderness, but he does so as God's 'well-pleasing' Son.

As Israel, the prototype of Jesus' wilderness temptation, endured God's testing to uncover what was 'in your heart' (Deut 8:2), so Jesus was tempted forty days to prove his character, faithful to his Father." See Caneday, "Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration," 31.

²⁶On the significance of the wild animals and the presence of angels see *ibid.*, 19-36. Cf. Jeffrey B. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation according to Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 53 (1994): 3-34; and Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, eds. J. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 3-21. See esp. Edwards who takes the wild beasts as an allusive reference to Christ's being thrown to the wild Roman beasts (*Mark*, 41).

²⁷Mark's description of "all the Judean countryside dwellers and all the Jerusalemites" being baptized by John seems to have a dual function in the narrative. First, from among all who came to be baptized by John, one stands out. He does not confess sins; his Father acclaims him as his Son in whom he is pleased. Second, Messiah does not come from Jerusalem or Judea but from Galilee, a likely allusion to Isaiah 9:1-2 (cf. Matt 4:12-16).

²⁸Likely, the bystanders "willfully misinterpreted" Jesus' cry (Lane, 573). Van Iersel hypothesizes that "The bystanders who apparently

have no Aramaic mistake 'Eloi' for Elijah. . ." (189). Strangely, T. Boman suggests that Jesus cried, "you are my God" (*eli 'atah*, Ps 22:11), but the taunting bystanders heard "Elijah come!" (*eliya tah*) ("Das letzte Wort Jesu," *Studia theologica* 17 [1963]: 103-119).

²⁹Lay Mark's accounts in 7:31-37 and 8:22-26 side by side. Be awed by the correlating features of Jesus' two signs. By his literary arrangement Mark shows that Jesus designed these two signs for the Twelve, to expose their impairment of hearing, of speaking, and of seeing, something that becomes manifest immediately after Peter's accurate but inadequate confession (8:27-30).

³⁰Mark features the crucifixion narrative over the resurrection episode by its length (15:21-41 have 371 words; 16:1-8 have 169 words). The inclusion portion alone (15:33-41) contains 149 words, only 20 fewer than the resurrection narrative.

³¹On the literary nature of the ending of Mark's Gospel see J. D. H. Amador, "Dramatic Inconclusion: Irony and the Narrative Rhetoric of the Ending of Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 61-86. For a discussion of textual evidence for the ending of Mark's Gospel see Edwards, *Mark*, 497-504.

³²By "patronizing" I refer to Peter's reversal of roles. Imitating Jesus (cf. Mark 7:33; 8:23), Peter took Jesus aside (8:32) to instruct him.

³³Of interest is the study by M. Philip Scott who identifies the transfiguration narrative as Mark's center of

his large chiasm that constitutes his Gospel ("Chiastic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15 [1985]: 17-26).

³⁴Ben Witherington III suggests a similar understanding of the relationship of the three passages (*The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 398). He refers to C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 391.

³⁵Cf. Edwards, *Mark*, 267.

³⁶Mark's reverse historical order—"Elijah appeared with Moses" (*elias sun mōusei*, 9:4), though placed in proper sequence by Peter (9:5)—is worthy of note. It likely suggests that Moses, whose presence might be expected, is the primary visitor and that Elijah accompanies him. Some take Mark's order to signify "that Moses is playing a subsidiary role" (e.g., Morna Hooker, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* [Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: A. & C. Black/Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991], 216). Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle, Paternoster, 2002), 351. Mark's mention of Elijah first likely fits the order of his narrative with Elijah figuring prominently in the first half of his Gospel in connection with John (1:4-8; 6:14-29; 8:28) and Moses having greater prominence in the second half in connection with the temple and institutions of the Law as Jesus

enters Jerusalem. Cf. J. P. Heil, "A Note on 'Elijah with Moses' in Mark 9:4," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 115.

³⁷As Heb 9:3 indicates, there were two curtains hanging in the temple in Jerusalem. The second curtain is more familiar. It divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exod 26:31-37; cf. Josephus' description in *War* 5.219). The first curtain, less familiar, segregated the Court of Israel (also called the Holy Place) from the outer courts. Josephus describes this curtain as an embroidered Babylonian tapestry that depicted the earth, the sea, and the heavens as it "typified the universe" (*War* 5.210-14). Though Mark's word (*to katapetasma*) is the same as used in Hebrews (6:19; 9:3; 10:20) and in the LXX (Exod 26:31-37) for the second curtain. A different word (*to kalluma*) is used of the first veil (Exod 27:16; Lev 16:2, 12). Nevertheless, it is likely that Mark refers to the first and not the second curtain, for he links the tearing with the centurion's confession. Only the outer curtain could be seen by the Gentile centurion. See Edwards, *Mark*, 477-479. Cf. also Ulansey, 123-125.

³⁸Mark 11:15-33 consists of three portions—11:15-19; 20-26; 27-33—forming a framed episode. Jesus' purging of the temple (vv. 15-19) and disputing with the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (vv. 27-33) frame Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (vv. 20-26).

³⁹Jesus' response to James and John's initial request—"What do you want me to do for you?" (10:36)—foreshadows the same question asked

of blind Bartimaeus who responds
as the two disciples should have,
“Rabbi, that I might see again!”
(10:51).