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'EYES TO SEE AND EARS TO HEAR':  
DISCERNMENT OF REVELATION IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

By Frances Shaw, B.D.  
Degree of Master of Arts,  
University of Durham, 1993.

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ABSTRACT

The biblical tradition affirms that God reveals himself, but also that such revelation is hidden and diverse, surprising and paradoxical. The aim of this study is to examine how Mark understands revelation to be given and discerned. A redaction-critical approach is taken for this study of one aspect of Mark's theology, although insights from literary criticism are also used.

Mark understands Jesus' death to be the most important event and place where God is revealed. In order to understand this correctly, as well as Jesus' teaching and miracles, a certain spiritual discernment is necessary, and the biblical tradition uses hearing and seeing as metaphors for this. How and under what circumstances such discernment becomes possible and what kinds of things or attitudes help or hinder the process are explored.

The first two chapters show how revelation is given and discerned in the OT and in Jewish apocalyptic literature. The main part of the study, chapter 3, explores how Mark takes up and develops these themes and how he uses Jesus' teaching and miracles in a symbolic way to lead both the disciples and his readers on a journey of revelation, suffering and humility. Discernment of revelation also has social consequences, and for Mark the people of God are now seen as those who have discerned God's revelation in Jesus.

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**'EYES TO SEE AND EARS TO HEAR':**

**DISCERNMENT OF REVELATION IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

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by  
**Frances Shaw, B.D.**

**A Thesis Submitted  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

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**Department of Theology  
University of Durham  
1993**

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## PREFACE

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Returning to academic study after a break of some years has proved to be both a challenging and rewarding experience. I should particularly like to thank Dr. Stephen Barton for his patient help and supervision over the last two years; Prof. James Dunn; and Dr. Walter Moberly for suggestions made on this topic in lectures.

A family move to Durham facilitated this opportunity for study, and so special thanks are also due to Peter and our children, Graham, Ruth and Colin.

## INTRODUCTION

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In affirming both the sovereignty of God as well as the free will of people, the biblical tradition is also concerned with the concepts of revelation and discernment. God reveals himself, not in what might be described as unilateral and uncompromising ways which leave people no freedom of choice, but in more hidden, diverse and surprising ways that are not necessarily immediately obvious. The biblical tradition can be understood as a record of the relationship between revelation and discernment: how, when and in what ways revelation is given, and how, under what circumstances and in what ways it can be discerned.

The aim of this study is to examine how one author, Mark, understands revelation to be given, as well as how that revelation is to be discerned. Mark, by taking an important step in writing a gospel, is making a link between revelation and discernment. For Mark it is essential that Jesus' death (and by implication his resurrection) is linked to his life, and especially to his teaching and miracles. For Mark, as for Paul, Jesus' death is the most important place where God is revealed, and the discernment that this is so is the basis of faith. But God's power was also at work through Jesus in his lifetime, and in order to understand this a certain discernment is also necessary. The fact that Mark has written a narrative affirms that he understood, not only that Jesus had revealed God at work in him in his lifetime, but also that Mark's own record of these events has a significance beyond just a recording of events. When his record is read and interpreted correctly, it too functions as revelation (cf. 14:9).

### Justification for the study

Discussion concerning revelation has frequently been concerned with two main areas. On the one hand, there has been a certain emphasis on the Bible as the Word of God and the dynamics of that Word as revelation. On the other hand, debates have been concerned with the philosophical difficulties of showing that God is significantly revealed in any particular series of historical events.<sup>1</sup> While material covering the topic of revelation may be described as plentiful, material covering the area of discernment appears to be scarce. The current revival of biblical theology, as well as a concern for spirituality - understood as the dynamics of life under God - suggest a study of the relationship between revelation and discernment to be a timely one.

One aspect of the relationship between God and people is that of divine initiative and human response. God takes the initiative and reveals himself in many different ways, but it is also God who enables people to recognise or perceive revelation. This question of the perception of revelation concerns how and under what circumstances discernment becomes possible; what helps or hinders the process; what things or attitudes enable such discernment to take place; and, conversely, what things or attitudes act as barriers to discernment.

Moberly<sup>2</sup> notes, "the relatively neglected theme of spiritual discernment which includes not only the well-known topic of true and false prophecy in both Old and New Testaments but also the recurrent biblical theme of people's constant inability to see what God is doing even when it is before their very eyes". Here he picks up two of the main ways in which spiritual discernment is expressed. Prophecy is contained in words which can be heard, and events consist of

actions which can be seen. How words are heard and how events are seen affects the significance attached to them.

The biblical tradition uses both hearing and seeing as metaphors or analogies for spiritual perception and discernment. This is also the case in English when we may say, "I see!", when what we really mean is, "I understand"; or we may say, "I hear what you are saying", when what we really mean is, "I understand your point of view".

As the Old Testament material contains paradigmatic stories of discernment and non-discernment of God, so Mark's gospel too contains stories which show discernment and non-discernment of God at work through Jesus. Mark frequently expresses this in terms of hearing and seeing - how people heard Jesus' words and saw his miracles, and what they then discerned from both. He particularly explores this theme in his presentation of his records of Jesus' healing miracles which enable blind people to see and deaf people to hear. The gospel also takes up the theme of discernment in terms of how people cannot perceive the evidence even when it is right in front of them - a theme especially prominent in his passion narrative.

Moberly describes this theme as "relatively neglected" and indeed I have found little material specifically concerned with this particular topic, of hearing and seeing in relation to spiritual discernment. Howard's short article on "Blindness and Deafness" in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (1992), notes that "To see and hear God's revelation fully requires not only physical sensation but spiritual sensitivity"; and he briefly covers some of the themes picked out here.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most significant texts occurs in the context of Isaiah's call, where God commissions Isaiah to let the

people hear and hear but not understand, and see and see but not perceive (Is. 6:9-10). In his detailed study of this text, *To See and Not to Perceive* (1989), Evans has shown how it has been used and understood, both in the MT and the LXX as well as at Qumran, in the gospels, Acts, the rabbis and early fathers. This valuable study concentrates on the varied use of this particular text, but does not set it in the wider context of spiritual discernment and revelation.

Marcus, in his recent book, *The Way of the Lord* (1992), examines Mark's use and citations of the Old Testament, but in this study he is specifically interested in Mark's christology rather than his understanding of spiritual discernment. Some aspects of discernment are covered in his earlier study of Mark 4 in *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (1986). Beavis has also looked at some aspects of this area in *Mark's Audience* (1989) from a reader-response point of view in the social setting of the Graeco-Roman culture.

Moberly, in his article, "Proclaiming Christ Crucified" (1988), picks up some of these themes in his discussion of Mark's passion narrative, but here is more concerned with how the gospel material is used and interpreted by some modern commentators. Johnson, in his two articles "The Blind Man from Bethsaida" (1979) and "Blind Bartimaeus" (1978), discusses some of these themes with particular more detailed reference to these two miracles.

Thus the work to date on the relationship between revelation and discernment has been limited. Little attention has been given to the broader aspects of discernment, and even less to the specific areas of hearing and seeing as ways of discernment.

### Method to be used

Recent gospel studies have shown a wide variety of methodological approaches. Redaction criticism, used as a traditio-historical tool, looks at the text by analysing the relationship between the final text form and its sources. It is thus able to show that Mark's gospel is not an entirely free creation by the author, but dependent on tradition. Redaction criticism, used as a literary tool, can also analyse the text to determine how far the author himself has shaped words, sentences and units taken over from sources.<sup>4</sup> It can thus demonstrate also that Mark is not completely dependent on his sources either.

This study, while being aware of Mark's use of material from his tradition, will use a redaction critical approach to focus on the shape of his finished work. Individual units and sections will be analysed, but attention will also be given to their place in the narrative as a whole, to examine Mark's understanding of revelation and discernment. Insights from literary, compositional and narrative criticisms will also be used. These types of analyses offer valuable insights into the overall structure and purpose of the gospel. However, they do tend to draw the text away from its historical setting and can be in danger of reducing it simply to meaningful fiction.

In Mark's work a tension between history and narrative is maintained. The action moves backwards and forwards between the historical situation of the time of Jesus' life and the on-going meaning for the life of faith Mark wants to convey to his readers.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly the case in Mark's central section where, for instance, Jesus' question and Peter's reply (8:27-33), are immediately followed by general teaching on the meaning of discipleship ("if any man", "whoever"; 8:34-38).

In writing his gospel Mark was not writing in a vacuum. He makes certain assumptions and builds on known traditions. Mark assumes the existence of one God and that he can be known.<sup>6</sup> The assertion that God acts in history and so formed and shaped the people of Israel, is fundamental to the biblical tradition.

This understanding that God is involved with time and history, stands in what Barr<sup>7</sup> describes as "cumulative narration". Moberly<sup>8</sup> notes that the great acts of salvation in the Bible, the Exodus and the Sinai covenant in the Old Testament, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament are presented in a narrative form. This is a fact "which has always been noted but usually rather taken for granted". An appreciation of narrative is important for a study of Mark's gospel since this is the form which he has chosen to use and which was later accepted into the canon in a way which Q, possibly M and L, as well as the Gospel of Thomas, were not.

God's involvement with history, including particular periods and points within that history, combined with a narrative approach to the traditions, suggests some sort of progressive approach to revelation. This does not mean that earlier beliefs are to be considered as somehow more "primitive" and later ones more "advanced" or "sophisticated". God's involvement with history, combined with an affirmation that God is holy, mysterious and cannot be known completely, means both that any revelation of God is bound to be incomplete and also that it will be historically conditioned. What God revealed of himself then and the way in which this was effected, will not necessarily be the same as it is now, or will be in the future. Progressive revelation rather suggests that there is some logical development, with each piece not being entirely

independent, but building on and being shaped in some way by what has gone before.

The inclusion in the tradition of both the creation stories and eschatological hopes, make a theological point that the God who was present and active at the beginning is the same God who will bring "history" to an end, at the "Day of the Lord". Mark makes an assertion in his gospel that in Jesus this end-time of God has arrived, although is still not yet complete.

A further insight gained from a narrative approach is that a narrative may itself be able to convey a truth that is very difficult to express in other meaningful ways. Wright<sup>9</sup> points out that a story is not used simply to "illustrate" some point or principle or as a substitute for the "real thing", but is a key element in the total construction of a world view. In this way a narrative is similar to many story parables which contain a truth hard to convey by propositions, such as David's self-condemnation by his recognition of injustice in Nathan's parable of the pet lamb (1 Sam. 12:1-15); or Luke's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to show what justification by faith means (18:9-14). If, as will be suggested later, Mark understands the Sower Parable as a parable not only about hearing the parables but also about understanding his gospel, then this further suggests that Mark saw his gospel narrative conveying a truth about Jesus that was difficult to communicate in any other way.

#### Aims of the Study

The present study has the following aims. First, I will examine the theme of revelation and discernment in the Old Testament, including the content of revelation and how this

is understood to be given, as well as how various stories explore the theme of spiritual discernment of revelation. Here, hearing and seeing are linked with knowing and understanding both in narrative traditions as well as in prophetic oracles. I shall be looking at how this theme is explored in certain Old Testament stories, as well as how it is used prophetic material, especially in the book of Isaiah.

Second, I will explore the theme of revelation and discernment in Jewish apocalyptic literature, including the later prophetic oracles, the book of Daniel and material from the writings of the Qumran community. In both the OT and apocalyptic literature, I shall be concerned to show the relevance of the particular themes of hearing and seeing to their use and development in Mark's gospel.

Third, I shall demonstrate and explain how Mark understands God's revelation to be given in Jesus. How he understands that revelation is to be spiritually discerned and what helps or hinders that process will be explored. I will also show how Mark develops and interprets the biblical themes of hearing and seeing as ways of discernment, and how this may add a further dimension to Mark's well-recognised secrecy theme.

Fourth, in relation to the social setting of Mark's gospel, I shall examine how discernment of revelation defines a particular group of people. Israel can be defined as the group of people to whom God has specifically revealed himself, and this may be expressed in terms of election, covenant and obedience to God's will as expressed in the torah.

While acceptance of some sort of canon as revelation served to define a certain group of people, inspired interpretation

which could be claimed as revelation from God was also used in the self-definition of other groups, parties or sects. Thus the understanding of revelation as group-defining is not foreign to the biblical material, and for instance, in the post-exilic period we find the book of Daniel claiming special revelation/interpretation and understanding from God and this is used to define Daniel and his group of *maskilim*. The sectarians at Qumran also claimed a special revelation and interpretation had been given to them through the Teacher of Righteousness.

For Mark and for the early church, an understanding of revelation and discernment had social consequences for the definition of their particular group. The links between Mark's gospel and the book of Daniel have frequently been noted,<sup>10</sup> especially in terms of the the use of Son of Man imagery, suffering and vindication, and kingdom themes. I shall examine Mark's understanding of discernment and revelation as group-defining and in what ways it is similar to and different from the understanding of Daniel and Qumran.

In examining this topic from these perspectives a neglected aspect of Mark's gospel will be explored.

## Chapter One: Old Testament

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Revelation and its discernment are fundamental parts of the relationship between God and people, and the OT can be viewed as the record of such a relationship. A study of the actual word "revelation" may not be helpful because of such infrequent instances of its use.<sup>1</sup> Yet if God is to be known at all, he must reveal himself and that revelation must be recognised or discerned as such by people. It is thus possible to examine the material to see what theological deductions may be made concerning how, when and in what ways God does reveal himself, as well as how and under what circumstances, expressed both positively and negatively, people's discernment of that revelation is influenced.

The underlying fact that the OT describes God's acts in history only makes sense within a larger framework of conceptions about the nature of God.<sup>2</sup> The OT thus describes a series of events which have been understood and discerned to be acts of God in the history of a particular people, his people. Progression in the narrative is given, not only by what God is seen to do, but by what he is heard to say, and it is the combination of this discernment of God's acts and words that gives the whole narrative its dynamic, as well as providing an epistemological basis for discernment in terms of a spiritual seeing and hearing.

The OT narrative does not claim to be history merely in the sense of a historical record. It points back to a series of events from which the tradition originated. At the same time it also points forward by providing the framework within which that tradition becomes meaningful for those in the present who read the narrative. Thus it is possible for the narrative itself to communicate to its readers and explore the relationship between God and his people. This means that how God revealed himself in the past and how that revelation was discerned then, can also be relevant for understanding how the record of that past revelation can itself be discerned to be revelation in the present. I will discuss this in section II concerning how revelation is given.

The content of revelation is not the "essence" of God's being, but his will, primarily expressed in terms of covenant. The covenant, the future renewal of that covenant and the link between obedience and hearing will be discussed in section III. Since God cannot be seen, one of the main ways of discerning God in the past was through hearing his word; thus one of the main ways of discerning God in the present must also be by hearing his word.

The theme that it is not always easy to discern God's word, either in the past or in the present, leads to a stress on the necessity of a continual and on-going discernment. This is also related to the theme God may reveal himself in different, surprising and paradoxical ways. This revelation is not of an unknown, different or strange God, but the one and the same God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same God who reveals himself to Moses, and later the same God who reveals himself to and in Jesus. In section IV I shall discuss how the OT narrative shows ways in which discernment may be effected, as well as the barriers which may act as hindrances. In each of these sections I shall be

concerned to point out themes and concepts developed by Mark in his gospel.

## II. HOW IS REVELATION GIVEN?

The OT acknowledges that God is holy and mysterious and therefore it is not possible for people either to see or hear the living God directly and still live (Ex. 20:19, 33:20; Deut. 5:24, 4:33, 18:16; Lev. 16:2; Num. 4:20). God does not need any human mediation, yet he chooses to act and speak to people, through people. Thus there is a fundamental dynamic that God speaks and works through people whom he has called for that purpose, and since he is in control of history, he also uses the powers of kings and nations for his purposes.

The rationale for this type of action is given in Exodus 3:7-12. "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt ... I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them"; and God works through his agent, Moses: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people". The people whom God has particularly called to be mediators of his revelation are the prophets.

### 1. Prophets

The narrative presents Moses as the archetypal prophet and agent of God's will, and the description in Deuteronomy 5:22-33 of the events at Horeb are determinative. The people are overwhelmed by God's "glory and greatness", and fear they will die if God speaks with them again (v.25). The result is that they ask Moses to be their mediator, and say to him, "Go near, and hear all that the Lord our God will say; and speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you; and we will hear and do it" (v.27). This arrangement is approved by God: "They have rightly said all

that they have spoken" (v.28). This is then what happens; the people return to their tents and God speaks to Moses.

This event at Horeb is referred to later in Deuteronomy (18:15-19) as the way in which God communicates with his people. This confirmation comes at a later stage in the narrative when another issue has been raised: what will happen after Moses' death when the people "come into the land" (18:9), since it is already known that Moses will not enter the land. The events at Horeb are confirmed as "right", and God says, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (v.18). The prophets will speak God's words, with the result that responding to the words of the prophets is the same as responding to God (v.19).

These records affirm the dynamic of the way God reveals himself. First, revelation is through mediators who are called or raised up by God for that purpose. Second, revelation is through words, words from God, through his mediators to the people. This pattern is confirmed in the record of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Ex. 20:1-21). The people "stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die'" (v.19).

If God speaks and works through mediators, the question may then be raised concerning how his mediators know what to say, and how they themselves discern what is the word of God. The answer given is that these mediators have had a vision of God and/or stood in the council of God to receive their message, and this dynamic has been explored in the call narratives of the prophets. The visions of God recorded in the call narratives have been subject to extensive study, since they are portrayed as theophanies,

self-manifestations of God.<sup>3</sup> The texts describe acts of divine self-revelation and have been analysed with the intention of discovering details of a revelation of God thereby.<sup>4</sup>

However, various aspects of these narratives suggest that a concentration exclusively on these texts as points of an ultimate revelation of God himself may not be justified. A vision by its nature is something which is unable to be verified. The only way a vision can be verified is by the result or consequence of that vision. This may suggest that the important factor is not so much what is said to be seen, as the significance and the results of what is seen.

Any encounter with God is virtually indescribable and strains the limits of human language. God is a personal, living God, but this is not dependent on his having a human form. Yet if God is personal then some kind of limited anthropomorphism in such visions is to be expected.<sup>5</sup> Theophanies are frequently described in traditional poetic terms and forms. Isaiah sees the Lord on a throne with a train that filled the temple, along with winged seraphim, smoke and a shaking of foundations (6:1-4). This is developed and elaborated by Ezekiel, who also sees the Lord on a throne or chariot with winged creatures, fire and lightening (1-3).

The call narratives can be analysed in terms of traditional style or *Gattung*,<sup>6</sup> but such analyses do not always address the the broader questions of what function such narratives have in the tradition. A concentration on questions such as what they saw, how this was recorded and the development of particular traditions in describing such an encounter, may be asking types of questions which the material is not designed to answer. Questions may also be posed to

investigate the way that theophanies function in the narrative.

Their function is to show that the prophets have unique access to God. A prophet speaks in God's name, and this is because God, when asked, told Moses his name and that he was to use it when speaking to Israel: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am'. And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you''" (Ex. 3:14, 5:1, 33:19, 34:5-7,14; also Jer. 14:14-15; Amos 1:3,6,9).

The vision received by the prophets serves to identify the source of the message to be God, but moves on quickly from that vision scene to concentrate on the prophet as the bearer of God's word. So the proclamation of the word plays a predominant part in the call narratives. God touches Jeremiah's mouth and says, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth", and, "Whatever I command you you shall speak"; Ezekiel is instructed to eat the scroll, before God sent him "to speak my words" to the house of Israel (Jer. 1:6ff.; Ezek. 3:1-3; also Is. 6:1ff.; Amos 7:14f., 9:1). These call narratives identify God, not only as the one who has sent the prophets, but also as the one who is the source of their words.<sup>7</sup>

Thus although the vision itself is important, even critical, for the validity of the prophets' message, the content of the vision may not be as important as the fact that the prophets had a vision at all. The prophetic call is to speak the word of God, but this does not mean to say that God's word spoken by the prophets or God's acts in history were perceived to be relevant only for that particular time, even though that word is related to the religious motifs of the day.<sup>8</sup> The narrative affirms that what the same God said and did in the past is relevant for the present, and in

terms of revelation, this is explored in the complex relationship between history and tradition.

## 2. Tradition

In his discussion of the relation between revelation and tradition, Knight concludes that the idea cannot be sustained of there being some sort of "primal revelatory datum" to which tradition simply witnesses or preserves in memory. What is perceived to be a given act of revelation is not a single event limited to the original historical situation in which it occurred, but rather is a "durative confrontation".<sup>9</sup>

Thus, for instance, God did not act in the exodus only for the benefit of that generation, but because he was perceived to have acted in that way, this resulted both in benefits for and claims on future generations. Thus oral and then written tradition is not just a text to be read, but re-read and remembered (Ex. 3:15). What happened in the past is relevant for the present, and the record itself reveals how God communicates with people, and how he wants them to behave in response, the basis of the covenant relationship.

The basis for the people's existence in relation with God is the covenant and the renewal of that covenant with future generations. "Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deut. 5:3; also Deut. 31:10, 24ff.; cf. Lev. 10:8-10; Josh. 1:8). The covenant is also to be remembered at the celebration of feasts and by participation in the cult (Ps. 42,77).

This "remembering" is not just a calling of facts to mind, since anyone could hear the narrative being read without it

having any effect on their lives. In order for this to happen the significance of the words has to be discerned, that is heard and remembered correctly. The Deuteronomic history could be said to develop a theology of remembering.<sup>10</sup> Childs<sup>11</sup> notes that Israel "encounters the same covenant God through a living tradition. Memory provides the link between past and present".

Israel's memory is to make relevant for the present God's original purpose for his people. They are to remember what God has done "that you may know the saving acts of the Lord" (Mic. 6:3-5). This kind of remembering expresses continuity between the past and the future because of the purpose of the one God. Yet since it is to be constantly renewed and remembered afresh it may also express an understanding that God can act in ever new ways. Isaiah urges the people to remember that they have been created by God and to remember their past sins, but also not to remember the "former things, nor consider the things of old", because God is going to do something new (Is. 44:21; 46:9; 43:18).

It is this kind of remembering in terms of discernment that Jesus uses when he criticises the disciples after the feeding of the four thousand. The disciples show that they have recalled the facts of the feedings by answering the questions correctly, but they had not "remembered", that is, perceived the significance of them. Here this kind of remembering is also linked with unseeing eyes, unhearing ears and hardened hearts (Mark 8:17f.)

This remembering in terms of discernment is one of the reasons why hearing rather than seeing becomes so important, and there is a constant urging of the people to hear.<sup>12</sup> This is not only a physical hearing in terms of a repeating of the narrative, but a hearing of that narrative

in such a way that its significance for the present is understood and discerned.

Since the relationship between God and his people is in the context of covenant, there is also a link between hearing and obeying. The Deuteronomic history constantly urges the people to hear and obey the words of the Lord: "The word is very near you; it is in your heart so that you can do it ... But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear ..." (Deut. 30:14,17; cf. 28:1; also Ps. 103:18). The people's response to Moses is: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8; Deut 28:1; 30:11-14).<sup>13</sup>

The repeated calls to hear also reflect that hearing and obeying is not something undertaken just at one point in time, but there needs to be a constant hearing again and a renewal of obedience as a continuous process. In this way the record of the tradition becomes revelation itself when it is discerned or heard correctly. One of the insights of narrative theology is how story itself can convey a truth in a way that other forms of literature cannot.<sup>14</sup> Thus the overall story shows God's concern for his people and how their very existence depends on the fact that he has chosen them and revealed himself to them.

### Summary

The OT affirms a fundamental dynamic that God communicates to his people through other people, mediators of his will and word. Visions of God and a hearing of his word are granted to his chosen mediators. The visions are of necessity described in metaphorical language and the form this language takes is developed in the traditions. The visions and call narratives, while including some description of God, function to reflect an overwhelming

experience of the divine presence, as a commission to be the messenger of God's word to his people.

Since what God said and did in the past is perceived to be relevant for the present, the record of that word is also understood as revelation, if discerned correctly. This discernment is effected by correct hearing and obedience.

If the content of the vision was not perceived to be so important, but the vision itself is understood as a prelude to and authentication of divine communication, we now turn to the question of what it was that was revealed to prophets in God's word, the content of the revelation.

### III. THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

As we have seen there is no debate in the OT concerning the question of God's existence and no place where God is not known or a beginning where he was initially known. Yet God also can never be experienced fully or directly. He is holy and mysterious and cannot be manipulated by people. What is revealed by God cannot be a definitive total disclosure of his essence or being. The content of revelation is not the same as the content of visions. Visions confirm what God told the prophets to say to the people and the fact that God is encountered in a relationship is reflected negatively in the prohibition of images of God and positively in the covenant relationship.<sup>15</sup>

#### 1. Covenant

The content of revelation can be described as a relationship between God and his people, and this is primarily expressed in terms of covenant. If the purpose of revelation is God's will for his people, then the people themselves, the "recipients" play an important part in that relationship. The God of Israel does not leave his people alone, and it is not so much a question of trying to persuade a distant, all-powerful God to take notice of his people, but more God's attempt, through coaxing and warning, to make a distant, rebellious, unresponsive people respond to him. The way people best respond is by obedience to the covenant.

The concept of covenant maintains the transcendence of God as well as the freedom of people. God, because he is God, maintains and is faithful to his side of the covenant, and claims absolute exclusiveness and commitment to the covenant

from his people. People can choose to reject or limit their allegiance to God's will, and membership in the covenant is demonstrated, not earned, by the possession of the torah. This is expressed in formal agreements of the people to keep the covenant (Ex. 24:3; Deut 29:14).

While remaining within the covenant and agreeing to the covenant regulations, people were not always committed to them. The sacrificial system existed to enable those who knew themselves to be sinful to retain their membership in the covenant. But there still remains a fundamental anomaly that people are unable to keep their side of the covenant relationship.

This understanding may be reflected in the record in Genesis 3 concerning the rupture in divine/human harmony, and the harmonious divine order. The record here is a narrative description which is the product of considerable theological reflection on the issue.<sup>16</sup> The serpent's question may concern people's (sinful) desire for an autonomous knowledge of good and evil. In reality this knowledge is to be found in the will of God expressed in observance of the torah. The further narrative in Genesis 4-11 emphasises peoples' continuing acts of disobedience and illusory human autonomy.

The Deuteronomic history is a major work of covenant theology, emphasising the promises made to Abraham, blessings as consequences of covenant fidelity and the land as God's gift. It is here again that the connection is made between hearing and obeying. Moses speaks to the people concerning their entry into the land: "You shall make response before the Lord your God", followed by the parallel statements, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God", and, "I have done according to all that thou hast commanded me" (Deut. 26:5,14).

Israel is to *hear* the commandments and statutes and be careful to do them, as she is to *hear* that "the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:3,4). It is this continuous hearing, obeying and discerning the voice of God as expressed in the covenant torah that is reflected throughout the OT.

## 2. New Covenant

Moses was perceived to be a prophet because of his commission in language and imagery similar to that of the classical prophets (Ex. 3,4), and especially as stated in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Here it is reported that prophets like Moses will be continually established by God because of the people's fear of an unmediated relationship with God. Thus the continuing voice of the prophets, like Moses who taught God's covenantal will and obedience, make the classical prophets spokesmen for the covenant and they speak to reconcile people to obedience to its demands.

The prophets deliver numerous revelations from God as the word of the Lord about human behaviour in relation to this covenant. God continues to communicate his involvement, and allegiance to the covenant is seen in on-going obedient service to God. Yet because people's freedom is maintained it is quite possible, and in light of Genesis 3 almost inevitable, that people should continue in a sinful disregard for the covenant regulations, and turn away from God. Moses knows that Israel will turn away from God when they enter the land (Deut. 28:2,15; 31:16,20,27).

The prophets understood the people's sinful turning away from the covenant, and saw God's judgement in terms of his actions in the historical and political sphere, raising up nations to defeat Israel. The reason given for Israel's exile was a lack of obedience to the covenant regulations.

They had not heard and obeyed God's voice: "When I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer (Jer. 7:13; Neh. 9:33; Ezek. 3:7; 9:10; Dan. 9:4-7; Hos. 9:17; Zech. 7:8-14).

Yet the belief in one creator God who is in covenant with his chosen people meant that such political crises could not be seen as an end of God's people without also admitting that God was not all powerful. Hence, the combination of monotheism and election led to an affirmation of further actions by God in the future to end such desolation and bring vindication to his people. Throughout the OT narrative this is expressed in terms of reward and punishment, promise and fulfilment, as well as in a variety of concepts which found expression in the post-exilic period.

In the future God will make a new covenant. This will not be like the old ones, but God himself will enable his people to keep his covenant (Jer. 31:33f.; Ezek. 11:19f., 36:22-32). If the exile was caused by Israel's disobedience to the covenant regulations, that disobedience was due to sin, including idolatry and apostasy. Thus since people are incapable of doing anything about themselves, the problem has to be solved by God dealing with the sin and restoring his people. The forgiveness of sins was seen more in terms of putting away the sins of the whole nation, rather than dealing with individual sins, which was the purpose of the temple sacrificial system (Is. 40:2; see also Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25).

If the exile was seen as some kind of death, then return from exile is seen as some form of new life or resurrection. Resurrection, while containing emphasis on the new embodiment of the individuals involved (Ezek. 37), also retains its perhaps more original sense in terms of the restoration of Israel by her covenant God. Resurrection is

part of the renewal of the created order and the language used describes a new creation (Is. 26:19; Hos. 5:15-6:3; Dan. 12:2f.; 2 Mac. 7:22).

God's establishment of a new covenant is also the beginning of God's universal rule, the kingdom of God, and the time of God's salvation. This link between God's rule and his salvation is found in Isaiah (see esp. 33:22, 52:7). This salvation is seen as a gift of God to the whole people, and the rescue by God of the people from pagan oppression. Individuals would find their own salvation through membership within Israel, that is, within the covenant. It is this theme of "good tidings" (εὐαγγέλιον) that both opens and describes Mark's gospel (1:1; Is. 52:7).

Many of these concepts are described in poetic terms concerning the future and take up the themes of release from some form of present bondage to life in a restored creation. The disobedience, stubbornness and obduracy declared by Isaiah to Israel will be reversed:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a hart  
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.

(35:5-6)<sup>17</sup>

If Israel was blind and deaf under judgement, now that judgement is passed, blindness and deafness must also be at an end (Is. 29:18, 32:3). It will also be possible for people to be obedient to God's word both because his laws are written on their hearts and he has healed their hearing to enable their hearts to hear and obey perfectly (Is. 30:21).

This new covenant that can be kept is also described in terms of light. Light comes to those who are no longer

blind, and comes similarly to those who have been released from a dark prison. God brings light, in terms of understanding and salvation, to those who have previously been in darkness, seen in terms of stubbornness and judgement.

I have given you as a covenant to the people  
a light to the nations,  
to open the eyes that are blind  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

(42:6,7; also 42:16; 29:18)<sup>18</sup>

Salvation for the whole people can thus be expressed in terms of a bringing from darkness to light, a bringing from blindness to sight, and salvation can also be expressed in terms of healing (Ex. 15:26; Ps. 30:3; 103:3). This theme is picked up by Mark in his summary after Jesus' healing of the deaf and dumb man, as well as in the significant story of Bartimaeus, where Jesus heals his blindness into sight and says "your faith has saved you" (7:31-37; 10:52).

God's future reign and renewal of creation is expressed in terms of a perfect landscape like Eden where there will be no more illness such as deafness and blindness (Is. 42:16). These images reflect an understanding of the renewal of God's covenant in such a way that people can obey it perfectly in a restored creation. They will physically be able to see and hear perfectly, as well as hear and obey God's will, since they have been released from the bondages of physical deafness and blindness as well as spiritual imprisonment. They are of particular significance in Mark's gospel. He understands Jesus as the one who brings physical healing of blindness and deafness and sees this as evidence that the kingdom of God has come in his person. He also understands Jesus' healings to be healings of spiritual blindness and deafness to enable people to discern that

God's reign, the kingdom of God, has already come in his person.

### Summary

The content of revelation is to be found in a discernment of God's will, and this is expressed in terms of a covenant relationship. Thus hearing God's word is closely linked with obedience and doing God's will. God remains faithful to his covenant but, because of sin, Israel is unable to be obedient and is taken into exile.

In the continuing political crises of the post-exilic period, the belief that God was going to fulfil his covenant promises became particularly meaningful. Various concepts were used to describe how and when God would act. These included the coming of God's reign, his kingdom, as well as the making of a new covenant which his renewed people would be able to keep.

Concern was then expressed as to who or which groups within the covenant would be recipients of his blessings. How loyalty to that covenant was to be discerned and expressed in times of crises is a particular concern of apocalyptic literature. Here the discernment of revelation and especially the revelation of mysteries to a particular individual and thence to a particular group becomes important. But first we need to consider how God's revelation can be discerned.

#### IV. HOW IS REVELATION DISCERNED?

God establishes and maintains contact with his people and communicates with them through his mediators. Once this particular channel is established and also allowing for the fact that mediators are sinful human beings who may also come under social pressure from institutional guardians of God's message, the office and function of the mediators may be abused. This issue is particularly focussed in the question of discernment between true and false prophecy.<sup>19</sup>

##### 1. True and False Prophecy

The passages relating to this topic do not seem to give consistent criteria for discernment of true prophecy and it seems that the tests to be applied could and did vary. Prophets are not to prophesy in the name of other gods nor are they to speak in favour of other cultic practices (Deut. 13:2, 18:20; Jer. 23:13-14). Although Deuteronomy 18:22 cites fulfilment as a positive criteria, the passage in chapter 13:2 says that even if the sign or wonder comes to pass, the prophet may still be false because "the Lord your God is testing you" (see also Deut. 12:2-14; 1 Kings 13, 22:21-23; Ezek. 14:9).

For Jeremiah the confirmation of the truth of his message lay in the subjective impact it made on the prophet himself (20:1-9).<sup>20</sup> He says he can only prophesy what the Lord has told him and not any dreamwork (23:26-32). This theme is taken up elsewhere, for example Balaam can only bless those whom God blesses (Num. 23:11f., 26, 24:13; 1 Kings 22:14).

This stress on the prophet's own call and overwhelming experience of the vision of God is, however, something that cannot be verified directly . Its truth must be assessed in other discernible ways. Prophets are to behave correctly and practice what they preach. This does not necessarily mean that they will live blameless lives, but that they will be acutely aware of their own sinfulness and unworthiness (Is. 6:5; Jer. 1:6; Ezek. 1:28). Jeremiah criticises false prophets for their immoral lives: "for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone forth into all the land" (23:15; also v.11,14).

Part of the prophets' message is the issue of a moral challenge, to urge a wayward people back to obey God's covenant will. The people want prophets to "speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions" (Is. 30:10). Jeremiah says of false prophets that had they stood in God's council they would have proclaimed God's words to the people and "turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings" (23:22; also 23:14,17; Micah 3:5-8; 1 Kings 22:8). True prophecy is thus perceived to have a definite moral content and effect. Jeremiah contrasts the life of Jehoiakim who lived in luxury, was oppressive and violent and had "eyes and heart only for dishonest gain", with that of Josiah who practised justice and righteousness and "judged the cause of the poor and needy" (22:14-17).<sup>21</sup>

Urging people to turn back to God may not only be found in the message of moral challenge to a sinful people, but may also be found in the equally challenging message of hope to a people in despair, to remind them of God's continuing concern (Is. 40:27-31, 49:14f.).

## 2. Location

Although the narrative affirms that God's presence is not restricted, there are two places where particular visions of God are granted - Sinai and Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Symbolism is found in the concept of a holy mountain, a place or sanctuary where God is especially present with his people and where people go to worship. Thus Moses speaks of God's own mountain as a sanctuary established by him (Ex.15:17). Chronicles identifies Mount Moriah as the site of the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 3:1), and Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem and the mountain of the Lord in parallel (2:3; also Ps. 24:3).

The symbolism of the mountain is also found elsewhere. Balak takes Balaam to the top of three mountains from where he expects him to curse Israel (Num. 22:41, 23:13,27). It may be significant for Mark, then, that the place where the disciples have a vision of Jesus transfigured, is on a mountain, but this mountain is in Galilee. The place where Jesus gives authoritative revelatory teaching is the Mount of Olives, significantly opposite the temple. Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord is on the mountain (Ezek. 11:23) and according to Zechariah 14:4 this would be the place where God would appear in judgement. The Mount of Olives is the place to which Jesus returns after the Last Supper (14:26) to prophecy in messianic terms of the striking of the shepherd and scattering of the sheep (14:27; cf. Zech. 13:7).

The other significance of the mountain and Jerusalem is also to be found in the temple.<sup>23</sup> The tent as well as the temple are perceived to be places where people can meet with God. The tent is described as the place where God "will meet with you, to speak there to you" (Ex. 29:42-46). The temple in Jerusalem is described as being the place of God's glory and

where "the upright shall behold his face" (1 Kings 8:11; Ps. 11:4,7). This reference to the "face" of God may reflect an understanding of the temple as the place where visions of God are granted, or possibly indicate the presence of some sort of icon or mean a very close meeting.<sup>24</sup>

The temple was also the financial and political centre of the land, and the high priest in charge of the temple became a very important political figure. As part of the future restoration the temple would be rebuilt and the presence of God would return there. Isaiah promises that the watchmen will see "the return of the Lord to Zion", and we have already noted how the whole oracle is concerned with the coming reign of Israel's God and his bringing of salvation (Is. 52:7-10; cf. Ezek. 43:1-7; 48:35).

This may explain why Jesus' words and actions against the temple were so provocative.<sup>25</sup> For Mark it is Jesus' words concerning the destruction and re-building of the temple that witness against him. Mark also portrays the temple negatively as no longer to be the meeting place between God and people, shown by his description of the tearing of the temple veil, his prediction of its destruction, and portrayal of Galilee as the place where God can now be seen and heard to be working through Jesus.

### 3. Obstacles to Discernment

Obstacles or barriers to discernment of revelation are explored in a variety of ways, making both positive and negative points. If the main foundation of the relationship between God and his people is the covenant, then not obeying God's covenantal torah is a barrier to hearing God's words expressed therein. We have seen how closely hearing and

obeying are linked; true hearing leads to obedience and obedience leads to true hearing.

Other stories also suggest that disobedience leads to a lack of discernment. Balaam should have relied on God's word on the first visit of Balak's messengers, "You shall not go with them". On their second visit he asks them in so that he can find out "what more the Lord will say to me", and this results in his being unable to see the angel in the road (Num. 22:12,19). In a similar way the "man of God" disobeyed God's command not to receive hospitality and was then unable to discern the words of false prophecy (1 Kings 13:18).

One of the main barriers to discernment is described as "hardness of heart". In the biblical tradition the function of the heart corresponds more closely to a modern understanding of the function of the brain, as the centre of the consciously living person.<sup>26</sup> A "softening of the heart" refers to a moving of the heart/will in terms of penitence and repentance (2 Chron. 34:27; Joel 2:12; Ps. 51:10,17). A "hardening of the heart" refers to becoming insensitive and inflexible, stubborn and rebellious (Deut. 2:30).

Hardness of heart is particularly explored in the narrative concerning Pharaoh in Exodus 4. Noth<sup>27</sup> notes that Pharaoh's unwillingness is expressed in different ways: the heart of Pharaoh was stubborn (7:14; 9:7); Pharaoh made his heart stubborn (8:15,32; 9:34); God hardened Pharaoh's heart (10:1). Commentators vary in how much weight they give to the progression here from human stubbornness to that caused by God.<sup>28</sup>

Childs,<sup>29</sup> however, has analysed the material differently, and finds the hardening terminology closely connected to the giving of signs. He notes that the only other reference to

Pharaoh is at 1 Samuel 6:6, where the Philistines are confused as to what to do with the ark. The priests ask, "Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?", implying that they too are in danger of refusing to learn from the divine signs. The implication from both stories is that those with hard hearts are unable to discern God at work in signs.

The narrative affirms that discernment is God-given, and to have one's "eyes opened" is used in a positive sense for a new quality of perception. Hagar's eyes are opened to see a well of water not seen before; God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to see horses and chariots of fire, and God also causes their enemy to be blind so that Elisha can lead them away (Gen. 21:19; 2 Kings 6,17-20; also Num. 22:31). The only more negative use of this phrase occurs in Genesis 3:7 in connection with Adam and Eve; after eating the fruit, "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked".

God can also "open ears", and the narrative frequently states that knowledge of God comes from receptive hearing. Solomon "pleased the Lord" because he asked for a "hearing heart" to "discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9-12). The Deuteronomic history interprets the manna tradition in the sense that as God gave life-giving manna in the wilderness, so he now gives his life-giving word, something which the people are to hear and obey (Deut. 8:3).<sup>30</sup> Balaam gives his final words to Balak as "the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered" (Num. 24:15f.).

There are again both positive and negative sides to this discernment. If all discernment comes from God, then a lack

of discernment must come from God as well. But this is not something completely arbitrary; God hardens hearts and withholds discernment from those who have already decided what they are going to do, those who are not open to receive God's discernment.

Thus, Pharaoh was already stubborn and not really open to change his mind, so God made his heart even more stubborn (Ex. 10:1). Jehoshaphat had already made up his mind what he was going to do before he consulted the prophets (1 Kings 22:1-4). In the discussion about what to do with the ark, the priests encourage the Philistines not to harden their hearts and be stubborn but to be open to different possibilities.

This hardness of heart and lack of seeing and hearing can also be used of Israel. Ezekiel is sent to "the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels ... impudent and stubborn" (2:3f.). Isaiah is also aware that he "dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (6:5). He is also instructed to "Go, and say to *this* people", and Ezekiel is sent to *the* people, rather than *my* people, indicating that they have already turned away from God. Evans, in his study of Isaiah 6:9-10, points out that in the MT the verbs are in the imperative, and therefore mean that "it is God's intention to render his people obdurate through the proclamation of his prophet".<sup>31</sup> The people are already stubborn and disobedient and God confirms them to be such by using the words of the prophet to make their hearts fat, their ears heavy and their eyes shut.<sup>32</sup> Later Isaiah describes God as pouring out a spirit of deep sleep and closing eyes so that the people will not be able to understand (29:9-10). Jeremiah urges the people to turn from evil and listen to God's voice, but they reply, "That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart" (18:1-12).

Although, on the one hand, God always acts within the tradition of his past acts, stories also point to the fact that God cannot be manipulated and may also act in surprising and unexpected ways. Cross<sup>33</sup> notes the parallels between the records of God appearing to Moses and to Elijah, said to be, not only at the same place, but at the same cave (Ex. 33:17-23, 34:6-8; 1 Kings 19:9-14). He points out the abrupt refusal of God to appear as in the traditional theophany at Sinai. It is emphatically stated that God is not in the wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but in a "thin whisper of sound", that is, almost imperceptibly, in silence.<sup>34</sup> This was not what Elijah expected. Samuel needed discernment to hear God's voice, not in the way that he had always heard it before through Eli (1 Sam. 3). Balak went for the top man that money could buy, to say what he wanted him to say, and it took a stubborn and lowly ass to discern the truth (Num. 22-24).

Those who have already decided against God and to whom God has not given discernment, frequently show this in terms of anger, abuse and rejection of God's word and his messengers (Elijah, 1 Kings 19; Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 15:10, 18:18; Micaiah, 1 Kings 22:24-28; Balaam, Num. 24:10). This is such a common feature of the life of a prophet that the fact of rejection is built in to their call, something to be expected (Jer. 1:8; Ezek.2:7; Amos 7:16).

### Summary

The story of the call of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 takes up some of the themes discussed here. The discernment of God, here in terms of recognising God's voice, is not always straightforward.<sup>35</sup> Samuel can hear the voice, but does not hear it correctly. He is both willing and open but still needs some help to discern correctly. The voice itself is

not necessarily apparent or self-authenticating. His response is not to ask, "Who are you?", but to run to Eli and say, "You called me".

God can reveal himself in surprising ways which are both within the tradition and yet different from that tradition. Eli may represent the end of an era but he is able to recognise God's voice when it comes to Samuel. Samuel needs to test his response by saying, "Speak, for thy servant hears". God tells him he is going to do a new thing in Israel "at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle".

We may also note that this is the only record in the OT of revelation to a child. While the interpretation of Mark's references to Jesus' dealings with children is rather complex, the record of revelation to Samuel shows that being a child is not a barrier to discernment of revelation. There may also be certain child-like qualities which encourage such discernment (see further p. 127f.).

In Mark's gospel, the theme of discernment is explored mostly in terms of how other people see and hear Jesus, rather than specifically in terms of how Jesus himself discerns the truth. Yet in the gospel there is teaching concerning the imitation of Christ, mostly in connection with suffering, humility and obedience to God's will. Other areas are also paradigmatic, such as prayer and receiving the Spirit.

While there seem to be no definitive criteria for discernment in relation to true and false prophecy, certain broad categories and tests apply. These various criteria can be explored in relation to Jesus. He works within the tradition of the scriptures and does not speak in the name of another god. He is able to know and speak about what

will happen in the future and these predictions are fulfilled, although his saying about the coming kingdom is more problematic (9:1; see further pp. 131ff.).

The subjective impact of his message is confirmed at his baptism. His own moral standards are not questioned, and although his actions may be strange and misunderstood, they are a challenge to the moral standards of others. This challenge is also seen in John the Baptists' call to repentance and criticism of Herod's marriage (1:4; 6:17f.). Abuse culminates in the death of John and of Jesus himself.

Jesus' opponents are not genuine seekers nor open to conviction that God can act in surprising and new ways.<sup>36</sup> Following Jesus' teaching in the synagogue, his own townspeople say they know he is a carpenter and where he has come from (Mark 6:3).<sup>37</sup> Jesus' opponents have already decided that he speaks blasphemy and that he is possessed by Beelzebul, and Jesus is "grieved at their hardness of heart" (2:7; 3:5,22; also 12:24). Although the disciples do not completely understand, they are willing to ask the question, "Who then is this?" (4:41).

## V. CONCLUSION

The belief in one creator God was held closely with the affirmation that Israel was, in a unique sense, the people of this God. This is expressed in terms of covenant and election. Israel is God's people, not because Israel is in some sense special, "but it is because the Lord loves you" (Deut. 7:8). In a broad sense then, revelation by God creates the community and people. If God had not revealed his will and established his covenant, there would be no people of Israel.

Membership of the covenant thus had implications for social grouping as well as being a matter of religion. God's faithfulness (righteousness) to the covenant meant that members could look forward to a future redemption and salvation. But in times of increasing political crisis, loyalty to this covenant was seen as being tested and different groups and sects understood what counted as loyalty in certain situations in various ways. While all groups agreed on overall obedience to the covenant law, in practice different areas received more or less emphasis: the Maccabees would rather die a martyr's death than break the torah; the Essenes obeyed strict community rules and stressed loyalty to their Teacher; the Sadducees were loyal to correct temple worship; the Pharisees intensified the torah to cover every aspect of life in the land; the Zealots were loyal to a particular political agenda as well as various inspired leaders. One of the ways in which these various groups justified their self-understanding was by new revelations of hitherto secret information only to members of their particular group.

God gives revelation of his will to the people via his chosen mediators. But discernment of this revelation is something that is on-going, and, although the traditions became a written record, the same kind of discernment is necessary to be able to hear and see God's activity in the present. The conditions of the diaspora and the continually changing political situation also led to a fragmentation into groups, each claiming a special revelation of God's will for them. How these new revelations were given and discerned, is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Two: Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Movements into exile in the sixth century created a new situation for Israel. Throughout the period of the monarchy there had been some sort of national identity with land, kings and cult. The exile brought an end to this kind of unity and in the early Persian period the gradual physical return of people from exile did not recreate it.

While the exile brought about physical and external changes, it also brought theological and religious changes to the nation. These were mostly questions of self-definition and of self-understanding.<sup>1</sup> The question of which groups could claim to be the legitimate successors of old Israel became a matter of great importance. There was conflict over both the adoption and interpretation of laws concerning ethnic, cultic and ethical qualifications of members of the new community.

What it meant to be a member of the Jewish people became arguments between universalism and particularism, between separatism and syncretism. The wide variety of both the physical and theological consequences of exile led to a fragmentation into groups, parties and sects. Some of these are not necessarily clearly defined, and may reflect tendencies in outlook rather than specific views.<sup>2</sup> Some of the extant material from the period may not be representative, or may reflect the views of the dominant group and contain polemical material.

One factor in this mixture of views and status was the part played by the acknowledgement and recognition of a group of writings as scriptural (but not yet canonical). The fact that some sort of collection of scriptures was becoming more fixed, had two main consequences. First, by recognising a collection of writings, the way was then open to offer interpretations of those writings. Second, some way had to be found to justify views not contained in the writings.

These two consequences developed in two further ways. First, the teacher, sage, scribe and wise man as a figure became much more important as the one who could give learned interpretations of scripture. Second, the role of the vision also became more important as a way of receiving direct knowledge of heavenly things not described in scripture. These two factors, while tending in different directions, were not exclusive to any particular group, and a wide variety of groups used both methods to justify their views.

The broad category of wisdom gave the scribe a large area of learning to interpret, and the work of Ben Sira may be considered a high-point in the Jewish wisdom tradition. His emphasis on strict obedience to the law is reflected in the development of various Hasidic groups which combined a strict obedience to the law with apocalyptic fervour. The writings of the book of Daniel reflect this combination, and also make use of the concepts of interpretation, mysteries and secrets, as well as revelation to a special group, the *maskilim*. The Hasidic movement may have given rise to the writings of Daniel, as well as the beginnings of the more rigorously defined group at Qumran.

The emergence of scripture as written revelation, adherence to the written law as God's word and will and the decline in prophecy as a direct communication of God's word which could

be heard, led to an understanding of revelation being given in inspired interpretation as well as in visions which could be seen, both of God and of the heavenly world. The content of that revelation was a revealed mystery, and was only given to certain people or groups, and thus had a religious basis as well as social implications. How that revelation was understood to be given is the subject of the next section.

## II. HOW IS REVELATION GIVEN?

The deportation of Israelites in 722 after the fall of Samaria and the exile to Babylon in 597 and 587 after the fall of Jerusalem led to physical dispersion of the people. This exile also had a profound effect on their understanding of God, the land and the temple. The period of the exile led to deep reflection on the tragedy, a re-shaping of beliefs and consolidation through both the preservation of its traditions as well as the nourishing of hopes of restoration.

### 1. The Emergence of Scripture

Ezra and Nehemiah undertook the task of consolidation around the law of Moses. Ezra's reading of the law to the people was highly symbolic and significant.<sup>3</sup> The reading and public affirmation was an important step towards the establishment and acceptance of the authoritative record of God's word as revelation, both in terms of God's acts in their history and the instructions for continuing conduct.

Legal provisions were authoritative because they had been provided by God to Moses at Sinai. He had seen God and heard his word, now written in the law. The writing down of the prophetic collections at about the same time also meant that Ezra's torah could be protected by ending the possibility that God might reveal and new and different torah.<sup>4</sup>

The voice of God no longer needed to be heard directly since his word in the law and in the prophets was now written. Yet this written word could be interpreted and its study

thus becomes very important. Fishbane notes that particularly in Psalm 119 a whole series of terms are transferred to scripture "which originally, or independently, served to express an immediate religious relationship with God".<sup>5</sup> "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18,66,135).

The struggle for self-definition is also reflected in the idea of looking back to the period before the exile as a distinct age or period in the past. This period was characterized by God's particular involvement with Israel, both in terms of the covenant and giving of the law, as well as the direct communication of his word. "Thus says the Lord" and the "word of the Lord" are perceived to predominate in this past era. References in Haggai, Zechariah, Third Isaiah and Malachi to "the former prophets" and "his servants the prophets", suggest that the prophetic era had come to an end and was now in the past (see also Joel's "as the Lord has said" in 2:32, probably quoting Obadiah 17).

A shift from a direct "thus says the Lord" to an inspired interpretation of prophecy can be seen in the visions of Zechariah (1:7-6:8). Although "The word of the Lord came to Zechariah", it comes in the form of a vision which then has to be explained by an angel. Here the prophetic claim to authority is taken over by the angelic interpretation of a vision.<sup>6</sup>

The recognition of a past age in which God spoke through his mediators and from which a recognised body of scriptural writings had emerged had several consequences. If the past was a time in which God's voice could be heard, the present was one in which it could no longer be heard in the same way. As the writings from the past became more venerated, some means were needed to justify both any interpretation of

what was contained in this scriptural collection, as well as any views not specifically contained therein. For interpretation, the role of the teacher and wise man becomes important, and for other views, the role of visions becomes important. These roles of interpreter and visionary are not exclusive and may often be complementary features of the same group.

## 2. Inspired Interpretation

Any differences of opinion between scribes and prophets were not given the opportunity to develop into entrenched positions after the exile. With the end of the period of the monarchy, the rise in the importance of the law and the decline in prophecy, the role of the scribe became more important. The two aspects of the scribes' function, that of a collector and purveyor of pragmatic wisdom and that of an interpreter of the law, often became merged into one. Since literacy became a desirable achievement, something which the wise promoted, combined with the emergent written scriptural traditions, some relationship between wisdom and the scriptural tradition was both inevitable and important.

If "wisdom" is the means by which God creates and acts and people are the means through which he acts, then wisdom is needed to become his agents, to act wisely in obedience to the creator. Thus Proverbs asserts that "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction"; as well as, "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 1:7, 6:6). Thus what God has revealed of himself in creation and can be seen and observed, and what God has revealed of himself by speaking his word in his will which can be heard, become merged into one. Ben Sira can identify wisdom with the torah (24:23-

24),<sup>7</sup> and later Jesus himself can be identified with wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

Certain differences in emphasis can be found concerning the role and function of scribes.<sup>9</sup> The work of Ben Sira reflects both the power, prestige and importance of the scribal class. The prologue speaks of him "having devoted himself more and more to reading the law and the prophets and the other books of the fathers". He also assumes a definite age of inspired prophets but this does not mean that prophetic features are also at an end. His work of interpretation requires an inspiration comparable to that of the prophets. As a result of study and prayer, he is "filled with the spirit of understanding" and will "again pour out teaching like prophecy" (39:6; 24:33).

A similar mixture of the prophetic and wisdom traits is found in Proverbs 8, which also suggests that by the time of Ben Sira, scribes had begun to assume an authority for their own teaching similar to that claimed by the past prophets.<sup>10</sup> As Hengel points out, "The scribe and the prophet are no longer distinguished in principle but merely in degree".<sup>11</sup> Inspired prophecy and literary inspiration become interchangeable concepts.

Ben Sira does not claim to have received a word from God, or a vision of God, but to exercise inspired interpretation in the prophetic tradition. His demands for private and social justice are not based on a word of the Lord as in the prophets, but on an appeal to the commandments. People will do right if they do what God has already commanded, since God's law is written and eternal. In 39:1-11 he sets out the characteristics of the ideal scribe. Through prayerful, inspired study of the torah, wisdom and prophecy, the scribe becomes a secondary, but necessary channel of God's wisdom. The scribes' occupation is with understanding; he

understands and interprets the hidden meanings of the texts, he meditates on secrets (39:7), he is filled with the spirit of understanding (39:6) and will reveal instruction in his teaching (v.8.). He could be described as a "professional understander".<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Visions

Dreams, visions and trances played some part in the experience of the prophets (Num. 11:10-30; 1 Sam. 10:5ff.). Most of the call narratives of the prophets are relatively short; the prophets only glimpse the heavenly world and God's court before receiving their commission to go and speak God's word to his people.

The visions recorded in Ezekiel reflect a certain development. The earlier vision (1:1-3:4) has more links with the classical prophetic vision, with less emphasis on the vision itself, that is, what is seen, and more on the commissioning of the prophet to speak the word of the Lord. The later vision of Ezekiel (40-48) has more links with the apocalyptic vision of disclosure of divine mysteries, of actually seeing some sort of future plan.

Since the voice of God could no longer be heard directly, then the vision became more prominent and was used to authenticate that the seer's message was revelation from God. First, the vision authenticated an inspired interpretation or explanation because this was given by an angel. In 1 Enoch 20-36 concerning Enoch's cosmic journeys, the angels are his guides, and there is a somewhat stereotyped vision form: arrival, vision, question, angelic interpretation, blessing. "I came to ... I saw ... I asked the angel ... he said ... Then I blessed the Lord".<sup>13</sup> The author of Jubilees says that the torah is something eternal

and is written on heavenly tablets, but his source of authority is secret revelation which the angels of the presence gave to Moses (1:27,29, 2:1, 18:9-15, 30:17-21). In Daniel, it is the angel Gabriel who interprets Daniel's pondering on Jeremiah's 70 years (9:20ff.; also 7:15-16, 8:16, 10:10f.).

Second, the vision enables the seer to see or be shown events and heavenly objects. Thus in a vision Daniel sees that when Antiochus persecutes Jews he is also fighting against heavenly angelic patrons, and when judgement is passed in heaven, earthly kings and kingdoms fall (7:27: dominion *in heaven* and dominion *under heaven*). Daniel 10-12 is similar to prophetic epiphanies and commissioning scenes, yet the message is not an oracle, but a long prediction of events to come. The seer is to write this down until the end of time, when the wise shall read and understand it (12:9-10).

Third, the vision is used to show that what is reported as having been heard and seen was from God. In 1 Enoch 12-16, Enoch receives revelation from an angel, to tell the watchers of their coming judgement. They ask Enoch to intercede and he then sees a vision of heaven, reinforcing the first revelation. Chapters 14-16 describe his ascent to heaven and his vision of the throne room. Enoch tells of his experience to show that his message comes from the very throne room, and because the watchers (rebellious angels) are from heaven, they know what it is like and that Enoch's message is true.

#### 4. Pseudonymity

That divine revelations were being disclosed in various writings was also confirmed by the use of pseudepigraphy.

This device attributed communications believed to have been received from God to a suitable eminent person from Israel's past who had received (or who was considered to have received) word direct from God.<sup>14</sup>

The authority seems to have rested in the character of the figure to whom these revelations were believed to have been given. They were granted a vision of God, were mediators of his word and endowed with the Spirit. Writers looked to the past in support and justification of their views in the present. In the present age only the *bath qol*, daughter or shadow of the voice, could be heard.<sup>15</sup>

This change in time and bringing up to date of revelation can also be seen in the use of sealed books to contain the writings. While the prophets are instructed to "go and say to the people", apocalyptic writings are frequently sealed and to be kept hidden. Daniel is instructed to "seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence" (8:26, 12:9). Enoch is told that his writing is to be for a distant generation (1 Enoch 1:2; also Test Levi. 8:19; 4 Ezra 12:36-38). The fact that the sealed words are now being read heightens the assertion that now in fact is the end time when the things spoken of are about to happen.

#### Summary

With the gradual emergence of an authoritative body of writings as scripture, any subsequently expressed views needed some justification to give them greater authority than just individual personal opinions. Several different justifications were offered. Scribal and wisdom traditions offered inspired interpretations of scripture, and this was seen to be in line with and similar to the inspiration of the earlier prophets.

Visions, too, offered a way of confirming revelation; revelations were either inspired interpretations given by angels or they could be events seen in heaven. The very fact of having a vision of God and the heavens was also used to show that what was being communicated was revelation from God. Knowledge of inner heaven and the vision of God confirmed the validity of the message. Similarities may be reflected in Mark's record of Jesus' transfiguration, where the disciples are given a vision of Jesus' glory and the voice heard from the cloud must be revelation from God: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him". This in turn is confirmation that Jesus' words themselves are to be understood as revelation from God (9:2-8).

That divine revelations were being disclosed in these writings could also be confirmed by use of pseudepigraphy. These various concepts reflect a diversity in the ways in which revelation from God was understood to have been given. The content of that revelation was also very varied, and this is the subject of the next section.

### III. THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

One of the main literary forms in apocalyptic literature is that of the reported vision and this frequently includes its interpretation. These visions are claimed to be divine revelations disclosing something not usually made known to people, hence the use of the words ἀποκαλύπτω and ἀποκάλυψις, meaning revelation or disclosure.

Thus the content of the visions becomes much more important than in the OT and the visions themselves become much longer. What is seen and what is heard as revelation is discerned as such in the context of a vision.

#### 1. Visions of God

Although there is a prohibition in Exodus 33:20 against seeing God's face and still living, visions in apocalyptic literature do give some details of the form of the all-holy God enthroned in glory. Frequently these visions are the climax of the heavenly ascent, and there are descriptions of the throne of God and its surrounds as they exist in the world above.

Ezekiel describes the human figure seated above the living creatures: "seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form" (1:26). Rowland has shown how this brief description of the form of a figure of God on the throne offered an opportunity to later generations to indulge in speculation of varying degrees of extravagance about the form of the God of Israel<sup>16</sup> (1 Enoch 14:8ff.; Dan. 7:9f.; Rev. 4:6ff.). The angels too are important as messengers and interpreters of God's word

(Michael, Dan. 12:1; 1QM17:5ff.; Rev. 12:7; Gabriel, Dan. 8:16f.; Luke 1:26, 2:9ff.).

There is evidence too that Ezekiel's vision may have been the basis for further visions in the Qumran community. Vermes<sup>17</sup> notes how 4Q405 20ii-22, a description of a member's own vision of the ministers of the 'Glorious Face', suggests a striving for mystical knowledge.

Life in the Qumran community meant a very close fellowship with heaven, and the language of rapture can be used to describe the experience of a member of the community:

"Thou has raised me up to everlasting height.

I walk on limitless level ground,

and I know there is hope for him

whom Thou hast shaped from dust

for the everlasting Council."

(1QH3:20f.)

In other apocalyptic literature, the seer is able to witness angels and the heavenly world, but then returns to earth in order to communicate what he has learned. At Qumran, the seer appears to remain in communion with heaven, and stands "with the host of the Holy Ones", that is, in the very presence of God.<sup>18</sup>

Entry into the community is regarded as a participation in the glory of the heavenly realm, and the life of the elect community was seen as an extension of the heavenly world (1QH11:10ff; 1QS11:6ff). It was as if God had extended the boundaries of heaven to include this haven of holiness (1QM10:9ff).

Isaiah's vision of God takes place in the temple and here the temple appears to be both the heavenly and earthly seat of God (Is. 6:1-8). The idea of a heavenly archetype for an

earthly temple occurs in connection with the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 25:9,40, 26:30, 27:8). In his vision Ezekiel sees the chariot throne carrying the glory of God away from the Jerusalem temple, because of the people's idolatry (8-11). The temple cannot be restored and only a new beginning instrumented by God can succeed. Ezekiel, accompanied by a man, then sees an elaborate vision of the future restored temple in Jerusalem and the return of God' glory (40-48; esp. 43:1-4, 48:35; cf. Is. 52:8).

This image of a new temple is taken up by Mark at the beginning of chapter 13 and in the witness against Jesus (14:58). Mark sees an explicit link between the destruction of the temple and Jesus' crucifixion. The veil of the temple is torn in two at the point of Jesus' death and this suggests that the temple is no longer to be the place at which God and people are to meet.

In Revelation, John's visions giving measurements of the temple suggest that the temple is a symbol of a greater reality. The place is not a particular location but anywhere Christians face opposition, and measurement of the temple is a sign of divine possession. So too is Mark's transference of the vision of God and receipt of God's revelation from the temple to Galilee.

## 2. Interpretations

In prophetic visions the word of God comes directly to the prophet. The word is the will of God and there is little suggestion that the prophets do not understand what is being said. As in Ben Sira and other inspired scribes, an interpretation cannot be obtained by the power of ordinary wisdom, it has to be given by God. The fact that an interpretation is needed implies that something is in need

of interpretation, that is, something that is not plain and available to all. What needs interpreting is, therefore a mystery (*raz*), a concept of Iranian origin and translated in Greek as μυστήριον.

In Daniel there is a much stronger emphasis on and distinction between revelation and interpretation. The word *peshar* occurs 30 times in the Aramaic part of Daniel, in connection with both mantic wisdom (2:30, 4:9) and with the interpreting angel (7:16).<sup>19</sup> In 4:9 the mystery is given to one party, here the king, and the interpretation to another, Daniel. Daniel's interpretation, revealed to him by God, unlocks the mystery. Hence Daniel may speak of the mystery being revealed to him by God, and God as the one who "reveals mysteries" (2:28). At another point, it is Daniel himself who cannot understand his own dream of the four beasts until he asks one of the angels standing in the presence of the Ancient of Days. "The interpretation of the things" is then given to him (7:16). The fact that the interpretation is given by an angel means that it is not just one possible interpretation but the true meaning.

The concept of a mystery and an interpretation found in Daniel is applied in Qumran to scriptural texts, and there is frequent use of words such as secret (*sod*), conceal (*satar*) and mystery (*raz*) (1QS8:18, 9:17,22). The mystery was communicated by God to the prophets, but the true meaning of these oracles was not available to them. The meaning was sealed until its interpretation was made known by God to his chosen one, here the Teacher of Righteousness (1QpHab 7:1ff.). Thus the original setting and meaning of the prophetic oracle are ignored in favour of a deeper and new meaning which God meant the passage to have.<sup>20</sup>

Alongside this interpretation of the prophets, went a similar interpretation of the torah. If the torah was to be

kept in daily living, especially in conditions of dispersal, a scheme of case law had to be developed, and some groups claimed that their particular interpretations of the torah were inspired. The Qumran Community took this further and claimed, not only inspired interpretations, but secret laws which came from the same source as the torah itself. Thus the text of the Temple Scroll (11QT) is presented almost entirely in the first person singular, as the direct address of God. The law is set out as spoken directly by God to Moses at Sinai, and in other places the text is changed to make it clear that God himself is speaking. Expansions of laws and injunctions are also set in the first person. Anybody could read the written law, but any subsequent revelations in the oral tradition remained the special teaching of those to whom it had been entrusted. The community was thus in possession of secret teachings, equivalent to and coming from the same source as the written law.

The renewal of the covenant by God formed part of the future expectations, and the Qumran Community believed that God had renewed his covenant, secretly, with them alone (CD6:2). The members of this covenant community "shall take care to act according to the exact interpretation of the law".<sup>21</sup> The book of Jubilees also saw Israel's special status in terms of covenant (14:19f., 15:1-34), and views its text, which is an elaboration of Genesis 1 - Exodus 12, as secret revelation which the angels of the presence gave to Moses at Mount Sinai (1:27,29, 2:1; also 18:9-11, 30:17-21).

### 3. The Last Days

Anything pertaining to heaven and earth, past or future could be included in the content of revelation. Enoch travelled to the ends of the earth in a visionary journey (1

Enoch 17-36). Either the seer is told by an angel or is shown the heavenly mysteries, or a combination of both. This is also linked with the idea that the secrets of the universe are in some sense stored up in heaven, and hence the seer is able to see the events of the future. Thus predictions about the future are not in general terms, but visual presentations of events of history; both past and future events could actually be seen (see Apoc.Abr. 22).

The oracles of Isaiah and Ezekiel looked to the future to a great new act that God would perform in history. Apocalyptic visions of history are used to confirm that God has a plan that will one day be shown to be just, and also try to work out in more detail exactly when this will take place. One device is to include presentations of Israel's history down to the generation of the seer and his readers. This time is seen to be a decisive point in history when the plan of God for the coming kingdom and vindication would be brought to fruition (1 Enoch 85ff.). Daniel's writings are said to be shut up and sealed until the end of time (8:26, 12:4,9). What God had revealed to the fathers and sealed as secret teaching, was now being made known to the group of elect or pious to strengthen their faith in the sufferings of the end time.

Enoch is described as "a righteous man whose eyes were opened by God"; he saw "the vision of the Holy One in the heavens, which the angels showed me, and from them I understood as I saw, but not for this generation, but a remote one which is for to come" (1 Enoch 1:2f.). Jubilees describes Enoch as seeing "what was and what will be"; how he "saw and understood everything, and wrote his testimony, and placed the testimony on earth for all the children of men and for their generations" (Jub. 4:19).

Similar to the OT prophets, many of the concepts used to describe this future are concerned with covenant renewal. Israel's God would become, in reality, what he already was, that is King. The kingdom of God refers to a new order in which Israel is vindicated and ruled over by her God; the torah fulfilled, the temple rebuilt, and the land cleansed. This theme is emphasised in Daniel (esp. 2,7) where the kingdoms of the earth will be destroyed by the setting up of the kingdom of the true God. God's final act of vindication was often seen in terms of a battle (Dan. 7-12; 1QM).

This interest in the future seems to be concerned, not so much with the character of the new age to come, as with the human history which led up to it.<sup>22</sup> The absence of descriptions of the detail of life in the future suggest that it is not how the righteous would live in the future which was important, but that the meaning of existence in the present in light of God's past and future acts needed to be demonstrated. This gives an understanding of the present sufferings as the birth-pangs, messianic woes and a period of great distress before the dawn of salvation (Hos. 13:13; Is. 42:13-16; 1QM1:9-12; Jub. 23:22f.).

This understanding enabled a community to avoid despair about the apparent absence of God from history, and to reaffirm their belief that God would act. For those who discerned correctly, the revelations received in visions enabled those who were currently suffering to stand firm in their convictions. Thus the writings do not always encourage people to repent or change their ways in order to change the course of history, since these historical events are fixed and something to be endured. Much of the literature calls the faithful to remain righteous before God, but to remain passive, non-participants in the final struggle.

## Summary

The main literary form of revelation in Jewish apocalyptic writing is the reported vision. The content of the revelation was very varied, from a vision of God enthroned in glory to the mysteries of nature and the universe; from interpretations of mysteries given by angels to the events of the end-time.

The vision itself as well as the angelic messengers confirmed that what was seen and heard was from God. For many different groups visions not only answered questions concerning God's apparent lack of activity but also concerning their own suffering. The belief continued to be affirmed that God would redeem his covenant people, although what precisely counted as loyalty to the covenant and therefore what marked out those within the covenant who would be vindicated, varied from one group to another.

Apocalyptic literature highlighted certain dualities, such as that between the present age and the age to come, between good and evil, as well as an epistemological duality.<sup>23</sup> Only those to whom God had revealed his will and only those who had discerned God's will, were able to perceive the importance of the times in which they were living as God's end-time and the suffering they were enduring as part of the beginning of that time. Only they were able to discern what counted as covenant loyalty and therefore be part of the coming redemption by God of his people.

Although Mark sees the kingdom of God in one sense as having arrived in the person of Jesus, and he sees his community as living in God's end-time, this end-time has been re-defined as the time between the coming of Jesus and his imminent return. The suffering of his community is seen as the beginning of this end-time.

The revelation given by Jesus is not given in the form of a vision and Jesus' own visionary experience at his baptism has more similarities with the earlier prophetic visions. Yet Mark can speak of the mystery of the kingdom being given by God and also describes an epistemological duality between those who discern God's revelation in Jesus and those who do not. How Mark understood this revelation to be discerned will be discussed later, but first we turn to how that revelation was understood to be discerned in apocalyptic literature.

#### IV. HOW IS REVELATION DISCERNED?

When Israel's God did finally act to redeem his people, those who would benefit would be those who remained loyal to the covenant and obedient to the covenant law. Exactly what that obedience meant, how it was expressed and what counted as loyalty to the covenant at any one moment varied from group to group and from one location to another.<sup>24</sup> Loyalty could be expressed to one particular revealed interpretation of scripture, received from God by a righteous person or leader, frequently written down, and only now being opened.

##### 1. Preparation

While the prophetic visions in the OT appear to have been more spontaneous, visions and revelation in apocalyptic literature often occur after a period of preparation, usually of prayer and fasting, and also often follow on from meditation on the words of scripture. Daniel sought God in "prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" before Gabriel came to him (9:3f., 20f., 10:2ff.). Ezra fasts for seven days before some of his visions (4 Ezra 5:20, 6:31, 35).<sup>25</sup>

As well as fasting, sometimes special food or drink is prescribed (Dan. 1:12; Asc. Is. 2:11; 4 Ezra 9:24f., 14:37ff.).<sup>26</sup> John the Baptist, too, is described as having a special diet, and Jesus fasted in the desert before receiving revelatory visions and being "ministered to" by angels (Mark 1:6, 13).<sup>27</sup> These kinds of preparation may reflect some kind of asceticism, and Jesus himself remained single.

Enoch was seen to be a righteous man in an unrighteous age, and, therefore, God removed him from the earth in order to transmit esoteric revelation. He not only saw but also understood everything (1 Enoch 1:2; Gen. 5:24). This theme of understanding is also important. The ideal scribe is seen, not only as an interpreter of the prophets, but is in some aspects superior to them, because he understands what they did not.<sup>28</sup>

An important quality of the scribe is his exemplary piety, described by Ben Sira as rising early to seek the Lord in prayer, as well as meditating on the law of the covenant (39:5,6,8). Wisdom and righteousness are complementary in much apocalyptic literature (Dan. 6:10f., 9:3ff., 12:3; hymns of the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran, especially 1QH11).<sup>29</sup>

Vermes<sup>30</sup> points out that this type of holiness can lead to self-righteousness, arrogance and pride. Yet the Qumran community seem to have concentrated more on the blessedness of themselves as chosen and never cease to emphasise their unworthiness, sin, frailty and dependence on God (1QH10:5).

## 2. God-given discernment

In common with OT prophecy, apocalyptic literature affirms that all revelation is given by God's grace. This may be seen in terms of God-given wisdom, understanding and inspiration, as well as in terms of being able to see or being shown the content of visions (cf. Job 42:5,6). Ben Sira's ideal scribe will be filled with the spirit of understanding "if the great Lord is willing" (39:6). Vermes<sup>31</sup> notes that at Qumran, not only is God's assistance necessary in order to remain faithful to his law, but also the very knowledge of that law is a gift from heaven. All

their special understanding and wisdom comes from God. "Blessed art Thou, my God, who openest the heart of Thy servant to knowledge" (1QS11:16)

One way in which revelation is said to be God-given is by the inspiration of God's Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; Ezek. 8:3). With the growing understanding of a religion based on the torah, the spirit which inspired the prophets in revelation was seen now to be at work in those who interpreted that torah. Orton<sup>32</sup> notes that the "spirit of understanding" is in practice inseparable from the "spirit of the Lord" that rests on those who are privileged to see divine mysteries and understand hidden things (Ben Sira 39:6; 1 Enoch 49:3; 4 Ezra 5:21; Ps. Sol. 17:42; see also Dan. 5:11f-14; in 4 Ezra 14:18ff. the Holy Spirit is described as a lamp of understanding).

These several attributes of a person who has received revelation are used to describe David in the Qumran literature.<sup>33</sup> David was a wise man, a scribe, perfect in all his ways, to whom God had given a spirit of understanding to speak in prophecy.

While this spirit of understanding could be viewed as a continued inspiration by God's Spirit, a more radical view understood the Spirit to have departed from Israel altogether (see Zech. 13:2ff., which reflects abuse and dislike of the prophetic office and looks to a future marked by its abolition). The return of the Spirit which had inspired the prophets was seen as a sign of the dawn of the new age. The stones of the altar were taken away and hidden "to await the appearance of a prophet who should give a ruling about them (1 Macc. 4:44ff.; Is. 11:2, 61:1).

An oracle of Joel looks forward to the coming day of the return of the Spirit, and Luke interprets the coming of the

Spirit at Pentecost, not only as a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, but also as a sign that the last days had arrived (Joel 2:28ff; Acts 2:17 where "in the last days" is added to the quotation). The book of Revelation does not need to be pseudonymously attributed to a figure from the past because the new era now arrived is one when the Spirit is again active (Rev. 1:10). At the beginning of his gospel Mark records Jesus' visionary experience at his baptism; he "saw the heavens opened" and the Spirit descending, before hearing God's voice (1:10f.).

### 3. Election

This revelation and discernment of secrets, limited to a chosen seer and thus to those who read his work, is linked with the emergence of groups who regarded themselves as the true Israel, while all others were not. In one sense to become a member of a particular sect is a matter of individual choice, but this choice reflects a previous divine choice or election. Israel was the people of God because God loved her (Deut. 7:7f.). If a particular sect believed that they were the true Israel, then they too must have been chosen, elected and loved by God. The Qumran Community believed that they were the elect and true Israel. "God has given them to His chosen ones as an everlasting possession, and has caused them to inherit the lot of the Holy Ones" (1QS 11:7). Wright<sup>34</sup> notes that "there is no reason to suppose that any Jewish group or sect would have thought any differently".

Thus, while in theory every member of Israel has been elected, there is often in practice a deep divide between the righteous observers of the covenant and the wicked of Israel. The Thanksgiving Hymns give a long list of the characteristics of opponents, that is, those outside their

community. They are described as wanting to exchange the law written on the heart for the smooth things of which they speak, walking in stubbornness of heart, seeking God in idols; they do not listen to God's voice or recognise the vision of knowledge (1QH 4). This is seen in contrast to the speaker to whom God has revealed himself as perfect light, who has given illumination and knowledge of mysteries. References to obduracy are not made in relation to the eschatological community but to non-members, former members or Israel in Egypt (CD 2:17-18, 3:5, 7:18-19,22-24) Members of the Community were also forbidden to pass on these interpretations and mysteries to those outside (1QS 5:15-16; 1QH 18:9-29), in contrast to Jesus' disciples who specifically went out to teach (Mark 6:7).

#### Summary

All revelation is God-given, whether this is perceived in terms of wisdom, understanding or inspiration. Meditation on scripture, prayer, fasting and ascetic piety may serve as preparation for receiving revelation.

The content of the literature reflects the concerns and hopes of its authors and their communities. The community is often expected to see itself in the literature and as such the revelations act as an encouragement to personal perseverance and fortitude in times of suffering and persecution. The revelations also function as a unifying bond for the community as a whole, and this is frequently expressed in terms of election.

Here we find similar phrases concerned with discerning revelation to do with the heart, ear and eye, which had been used previously to encourage an on-going discernment of revelation in terms of God's covenant will. These can now

be applied positively to those who are inside a particular self-defined group, and negatively to those outside and therefore excluded from receiving God's blessing and vindication.

Mark may also expect his community to see themselves in his gospel, and also uses phrases concerned with the heart, ear and eye in terms of discernment of revelation. Those who have discerned correctly are on the inside and those who have not discerned correctly are on the outside.

## V. CONCLUSION

The broad historical context of apocalyptic writings is one of political unrest and the conviction that God would act to reverse Israel's fortunes. One common theme of the writings is that people cannot achieve wisdom or knowledge or interpretation on their own; these must come from God. While in theory this kind of information is available to all, in practice the secrets and mysteries are revealed to only a few. Thus the people to whom they were revealed had an esoteric knowledge available only to themselves and their particular group. The beginnings of the Samaritan, Essene, Pharisee and Sadducee groups can be found in the interpretation of legal stipulations and later in disputes over the adoption of a particular calendar or the legitimacy or the high priest. This should not be taken to imply that apocalyptic literature arose primarily in marginalised groups, although it may be that these groups used such an understanding of revelation in a more specialised way.

Whether or not any particular group would be described as subversive, each claimed an insight or revelation into the divine plan which was normally hidden. There was a combination of a longing for a reversal of the current ill-fortunes with a devotion to the God who had revealed secrets in the past and would do so again in the present. There is thus an underlying indebtedness to the revelation of God's will, now contained in a body of scriptural literature and coming from a time of revelation when God *spoke* to Moses and the prophets.

The post-exilic period, with its body of written scriptures, was essentially one of revelatory *literature*, influenced by the Hellenistic age. Although apocalyptic seers and their

literature claimed continuity with the character of that original revelation through hearing, seeing and inspiration, they needed a different form of authority. Information gained within the context of visions was perceived, not as an opinion, but as having the authority of a direct revelation from God. The discernment of revelation which had earlier concerned the distinction between true and false prophecy, was frequently solved by the use of pseudonymity. If the apocalyptic seer was to discern revelation, he himself needed to be righteous and obedient to God's law, as well as in receipt of God's spirit of understanding.

Mystical insight in terms of visions, confirmed that what was communicated was revelation from God. Visions of God and his throne formed part of a much larger and longer description of heaven and the secrets of God's purpose for the universe. For the prophets, the vision of God was itself not the main content of revelation, but rather formed a prelude to the communication of God's word. Since that word became written in scripture, the focus of the vision changed. While the fact of a vision was still necessary to confirm that the revelation came from God, the actual content of the visions became much more important. Mysteries, interpretations and events of the past and future could actually be seen or explained to the seer.

The tradition of the OT prophets speaks of a great new act which God will perform to renew his covenant and vindicate Israel. While later writers often tried to work out in detail when this would be, both confirm that there is a divine plan and that God would act. Although cosmic imagery is frequently used to describe this new act of God, there is little evidence to suggest that the end of the space-time universe was expected.<sup>35</sup> There seems to have been more of a belief that the present world order would come to an end, a

world order in which pagans rather than the covenant people of God held power.

For Mark the coming of Jesus and the kingdom of God is also a mystery or a secret to be understood by the reader, and he highlights the fact that there is a secret to be penetrated and a mystery to be explored and grasped. He too expects his community to see themselves in his writing, and shows that they are living during the time of the end-time sufferings.

Members of his community are those who have discerned divine revelation in Jesus. In order to do this they need to hear and see correctly what Jesus said and did, now recorded as story in his gospel. Those who discern and respond in faith by becoming "followers", become insiders, while those who do not discern are outsiders. How Mark understands this revelation to be given, as well as how it is to be discerned will be discussed in the next section.

## Chapter Three: Mark's Gospel

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### I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a certain change of emphasis in more recent Marcan research away from a predominant concern with the Jesus of history towards more of a focus on the evangelist himself. Attention has been given to what motives and other factors may have influenced him in both his presentation and choice of material to result in a piece of work called a "gospel". While form-criticism tended to emphasise the fragmentary and diverse nature of the gospel material, redaction-critical studies recognised the contribution of the author in shaping the gospel traditions, both at the individual pericopae level and their linking, as well as in the overall arrangement of material.

Attention has also focussed on the overall purpose of the gospel. This has been variously assessed and has been described, for instance, as christological, kerygmatic or paraenetic.<sup>1</sup> Yet implicit in all these designations is the recognition that the gospel cannot be used exclusively to give historical facts about Jesus, and that some sort of theological motivation is contained in the process of writing. There has also been a wide variety of suggestions as to what the central theme of the gospel might be, such as: the secrecy motif in the true but hidden identity of Jesus; the role of the disciples and discipleship; suffering and rejection, linked especially with the passion; the use of parable, paradox and irony. While certain themes can indeed be found, singling out one in particular as

central may not do justice to the complex nature of the material where different themes are both inter-related and developed. Kee compares the gospel to a fugue which does not lend itself to too detailed an analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Due to a lack of comparative source material, very detailed analyses of the text inevitably remain somewhat speculative and have certain drawbacks. While continuing to use these tools, a more holistic approach, taking into account Mark's literary technique has certain advantages.<sup>3</sup> We may assume that because what Mark has written is a gospel, it is a Christian document and not an impartial account written by a neutral observer. The text is the medium through which Mark wishes to communicate to his readers. The fact that there are no specific references to the author, date and place of writing may indicate that these issues are not central to the way in which the gospel is to be read or understood.

Although Mark was writing after Easter, his gospel is set in the time before Easter, and he assumes that what he has written is particularly relevant for his present time. It is, however, very difficult to determine from within the text itself the nature of the community "behind" that text. The internal dynamics of the narrative rather than external factors may or may not have shaped the story, since documents are not purely a reflection of the situation in which they were produced. Similarities with Greco-Roman biographical writings of the time can be found and, while this may reflect a general background, the immediate setting must reflect the religious and social activities as well as the needs and questions of the early Christian community.

It is possible to form from the gospel itself and general historical knowledge some sort of picture of Mark's community, that is, the one to be found in the story world of the text itself. If Mark's familiarity with his audience

is assumed, so too must his desire and ability to communicate effectively. He communicates with his readers by letting them "see" and "hear" interaction between Jesus and other people, groups or individuals, who feature in his story. The identity of Jesus thus becomes a crucial issue, both in terms of who he was, and is, and how he is to be understood and recognised as such. Mark consistently focusses on Jesus' identity. His readers know from the start that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but it is not clear until the end of the gospel exactly what Mark understood by these terms, what kind of a Christ and Son of God that Jesus is.

This concern with Jesus' identity has long been linked with the "messianic secret" material.<sup>4</sup> Jesus revealed his identity to some and not to others, and of those who did recognise who he was, some he told to be silent about it and others he did not. Various explanations have been offered concerning Jesus' own messianic consciousness, or suggesting, for example, that Jesus sought anonymity in order to avoid a premature or mistaken understanding of who he was. Such theories have highlighted something in the gospel which is not easily explained, a tension between openness and secrecy. The gospel does describe a mystery and invites the reader to understand a secret below the surface. The kind of faith Mark has in mind is in a God who works in hidden, mysterious ways, like a seed growing secretly.

Mark frequently does not give his readers definitive answers to questions we may speculate they were asking. The mystery of the kingdom of God is given, but not specifically defined; the significance of the present time as well as the timing of the end is important, but details are not given. Yet the fact that he has chosen this particular more indirect style may point to a deeper meaning, both in the

material he has chosen and the way he has decided to record it. The meaning is there and the answers are there but a certain kind of discernment is necessary in order to perceive them. Those who see beyond Jesus' authoritative miracles and teaching will ask questions about the source of his power as well as discern something about the times in which they are living. Those who consider Mark's presentation of Jesus will discern that he is not only a king who brings the kingdom of God, but also a suffering Son of man.

Thus there are repeated calls to "see", to discern something more than that which is visible, and to "hear", to understand something more than that which is audible. There are no objective proofs of Jesus' identity nor of the presence of the kingdom. It is a challenge for Mark's readers to see and hear something more than is available to the senses. Mark's achievement was to bring together many varied traditions of Jesus, as a teacher and prophet, wonder-worker and exorcist, the promised Messiah and apocalyptic figure, all under the theme of the cross. The gospel itself is full of paradox and irony, that the good news is a mystery, that there is success in failure, as well as life in death. He is concerned to show how this revelation was given in Jesus' life and death, as well as who recognised it as such and by what means. Since his gospel has relevance for his present community, these questions of who, and by what means, are of continuing importance.

This discernment of revelation in Jesus has implications not only for the life of the individual but also for that individual as a member of a community. The communal and social implications have been examined by using approaches more familiar to social scientists to describe the dynamics of community formation and what has been described as

"boundary management".<sup>5</sup> The recognition of revelation in Jesus serves as an important social factor in determining the membership of that community. Earlier (p. 70f.) we have seen how the concept of revelation as a definition of community as well as determining the membership of that community were also dominant features of the book of Daniel and the community at Qumran. Discernment of revelation thus has individual and social implications.

Mark uses motifs of seeing and hearing, blindness and deafness, perception and understanding throughout his gospel in connection with revelation and the discernment of Jesus' identity. Yet the discernment of God, revealed in Jesus, needs more than physical seeing and hearing; seeing needs to be changed into perception and hearing into understanding for this discernment to take place. The discussion about parables in Mark's chapter 4 focusses more on correct hearing; the eschatological discourse in chapter 13 on correct seeing; and the passion narrative brings the two themes together in the ultimate irony of the cross. We begin by looking at how Mark understood revelation to be given.

## II. HOW IS REVELATION GIVEN?

The specific reason why Mark wrote his gospel remains unclear. His is the only New Testament writing to be called a gospel (εὐαγγέλιον). By the time Mark wrote, the word "gospel" had become more of a technical term meaning God's good news to people, and it was used in this sense by the early Christian communities (2 Cor. 8:18). So it would seem that Mark expressed what he was doing in terms familiar from Christian usage. But it is still not clear in exactly what sense he saw his gospel as good news.

His record takes up the scriptural theme of God's saving activity shown in historical events. He might well have chosen other forms, such as a record of Jesus' miracles (a sign or miracle source) or of his teaching (such as the Q source),<sup>6</sup> but he chose to write a narrative to record the events of Jesus' life. This narrative is a record of divine action in history as well as a record of how and by what means that divine action may be recognised and understood.

### 1. The Gospel

Mark uses the word "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον) seven times, and on five of these occurrences it is unconditional with no explanation or qualification (1:1,14,15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9). Of these the reference in connection with the anointing woman is significant: "Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (14:9). This suggests that the content of the gospel consists of this event and other individual events in Jesus' life being re-told. This then implies that what he has written is not simply a historical record, but

that he understands his narrative of the events of Jesus' life to express what the gospel is.

Mark also uses the word "gospel" at the start of his work, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). The gospel "of" Jesus Christ, can be taken in a subjective or objective sense; the gospel which Jesus himself proclaims, or the good news which the gospel proclaims about Jesus. Yet it is also possible that Mark's phrase is not specific and can be taken in both senses (see also 1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor 2:12; and Rom. 1:1; 15:16).

From this opening line his readers know who Jesus is: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus, in one sense, Jesus' identity is not something secretive, something still to be revealed. Yet Mark uses the rest of his gospel to show what exactly these terms come to mean in reference to Jesus. The phrase "Son of God" could be used in different ways in both Jewish and Gentile settings.<sup>7</sup> Mark therefore has to explain just in what sense he understands Jesus to be the Son of God. By the end of the gospel where the centurion says, "Truly this man was the Son of God", the readers' understanding of what that term means has changed dramatically (15:39, note the emphasis on ἀληθῶς). The gospel can therefore be said to progress in a literary sense in its revelation of Jesus' identity. The readers and characters undertake a journey of revelation, where Jesus teaches his disciples "on the way". He teaches them about what his kind of Messiahship involves, and, as a consequence, what following that kind of Messiah involves.

Although detailed analysis of Mark's structure has proved to be difficult, certain scenes in the gospel are important turning points in the narrative. The one near the centre of the gospel at Caesarea Philippi is particularly significant, not only as a central turning point in itself, but also

because of the arrangement of the material on either side. Up to this point, Jesus has taught the crowds and performed miracles; afterwards, his teaching is for the disciples and the few miracles are given symbolic significance. The whole scene is concerned with Jesus' identity; we note the contrast between Jesus' questions, "Who do men say that I am?", and, "But who do you say that I am?" (8:27,29). This is perhaps not so much a contrast between who the disciples thought Jesus was, but a contrast between believers and non-believers. The disciples have progressed past seeing Jesus as wonder-worker, teacher, John the Baptist, Elijah or a prophet (as others think), and know him to be the Messiah.

The story immediately before this scene describes a two-stage healing, and Mark may understand this symbolically. The disciples' eyes are partly opened, but they still do not see Jesus clearly. Here they understand Jesus to be the Messiah, but, as verses 32 and 33 show, this understanding too is only partial. This may be why Jesus instructs them to "tell no one about him" (v.30), since they do not fully understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is.

This theme of secrecy is certainly a theological motif for Mark, whether or not it goes back to Jesus himself. He uses secrecy and concealment, as well as the opposites, disclosure and revelation, to speak of the way in which people reacted to Jesus.

Concerning the secret of Jesus' identity, apart from 8:30 and 9:9 referring to the disciples, Jesus does not allow the unclean spirits to make him known (1:25; 3:11). His identity, however, is something proclaimed and not secret at his baptism, in his answer to the high priest's question and at his death (1:11; 14:62; 15:39). Yet in contrast, there are passages where the idea of secrecy is present, and most of these are miracle stories. Witnesses are told not to

tell about the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:34) and the leper is told to show himself to the priest without saying anything (1:44); a healed deaf man and a healed blind man are also commanded to say nothing (7:36; 8:26).

Yet there are also other scenes where there is no command to secrecy. The demoniac is told to tell his friends how much the Lord has done for him; the woman with the haemorrhage is told to go in peace; and the woman from Syrophenicia is told to "go your way" (5:19, 34; 7:29). In each of these stories it is faith which is commended. Their description of Jesus to others will not simply be one of him as a wonder-worker, as those in the first group who were told to keep quiet. For those whose faith has led them to understand something of Jesus' identity and the source of his power may go out and tell others.

By writing a gospel Mark is telling others who Jesus is and showing how Jesus' life, and especially his miracles and teaching both reveal to some who Jesus is and, at the same time, conceal it from others. Mark also says that he is only recording some of the many miracles Jesus performed, and well as only some of his teaching<sup>8</sup> (1:34,39; 3:10; 6:54-56; 4:1-2,33; 10:1). So we need to look at Mark's selection of Jesus' miracles and his selection of Jesus' teaching, to see how he understood them to function as revelation.

## 2. Miracles

The first miracle Mark chooses to record shows how Mark understood the relationship between Jesus' teaching and his miracles (1:21-28). The setting in the synagogue at Capernaum is one where Jesus is teaching. The people are astonished (ἐξεπλήσθησαν) at his teaching because it had authority (ἐξουσία). Significantly Mark adds "not as the

scribes", those who turn out to be Jesus' enemies, and this suggests that the whole passage is concerned with authority. Jesus then heals a man possessed by an unclean spirit. The reaction is again one of amazement (ἐθαμβήθησαν), and the reply is, "What is this? a new teaching!" Thus Mark seems to be saying that Jesus' power and authority to command spirits is also present in the authority of his teaching, and also that the exorcisms themselves are a new kind of teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Mark also makes the same link in another miracle story, also set in Capernaum (here in the house). Again the question is about Jesus' authority. Has he the authority to forgive sins? The affirmative answer is emphatically confirmed by healing the paralytic and again the reaction is one of amazement. This linking of word and action is also found the last time Jesus is recorded as entering a synagogue, in his home town. Those in the synagogue were astonished by his wisdom and mighty deeds - two facets of the same authority (6:1-6). We may also note the ability of Jesus to draw vast crowds, not only because of his miracles but also for his teaching.

So Mark is saying that when Jesus performed mighty acts for people to see, they should be viewed as teaching; and when Jesus teaches for people to hear, this should be viewed as containing the same power that is present in his miracles. Jesus' teaching and his power over spirits are to be seen as facets of one event.

This power over spirits can also be seen in the record of the two miracles on the lake, the stilling of the storm (4:35-41) and the walking on the water (6:47-52). They are both told in a similar form to exorcism narratives, and in the first one Jesus addresses with wind and the waves with words similar to those with which he speaks to demons, "Peace! Be still!" (4:39). In the scriptural tradition the

sea often represented the powers of chaos and evil, only overcome by God (Gen. 1:9; Ps. 107:26-29; Job 9:8). Thus Jesus' control of these elements is similar to that of God's, and we note the parallel, "Take heart, it is I" (6:50) with the "I am" declaration of Exodus (3:14). Although the disciples do not understand, they have gone some way towards a beginning of understanding by asking "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (4:41).

If we look at the effects of the miracles Mark has recorded, we find that they are not always used for the purpose of leading from unbelief to faith. In fact, rather the opposite is true - Mark more frequently records that some sort of faith must be present to make a miracle possible. Not only this, but faith must also be present in order to perceive miracles correctly.<sup>10</sup>

The reactions to Jesus' miracles are those of astonishment and amazement and sometimes fear.<sup>11</sup> Others who do perceive that Jesus' power was more than human conclude that the power is satanic (3:22) or another great person has returned (Elijah, a prophet or John the Baptist, (6:14-16). The evil spirits recognise Jesus' power and their response is to try to avoid destruction (1:24; 5:7). The people from Jesus' home town are unable to see beyond Jesus the carpenter (6:3) and the disciples did not understand his authority to control the sea or to provide food (6:52; 8:17-21).

The way Mark has recorded the miracles does not reflect Jesus simply as a wonder-worker, but they present people with a challenge of deciding their response to Jesus. The response we may suggest Mark wanted his readers to make was that the miracles show God's power at work through Jesus, and are thus intimately connected with Jesus' identity. How his readers can move from the fact that Jesus could perform miracles and that they show God's power at work, to the

deeper implications of this, is developed throughout the gospel.

### 3. Teaching

If miracles people can see do not always lead to faith, Mark also seems to say that teaching people can hear, although endowed with the same power and authority, does not always lead to faith either.

#### a) Parables

The word παραβολή has many different meanings, and we may distinguish several uses by Mark. He uses the word "parable" in the sense of story to describe the Sower Parable, as well as the Vineyard Parable or to refer to a parable of the kingdom (4:13,30; 12:1). Whether these stories are to be interpreted allegorically and whether they have one or many points, has been much discussed. Here it is sufficient to note that they are stories with a point which can convince the hearer in a way that other literary forms may not.<sup>12</sup>

"Parable" can also refer to teaching in general. Mark records that the disciples ask Jesus about "the parable", when what has gone before is not a story but only one sentence of teaching (7:15-17). Similarly, Jesus' teaching about Satan's kingdom is not a story with a point, but is also described as "parables" (3:23).

Mark's parable chapter (4) contains both the Sower Parable (story) and an interpretation of it. This implies that a parable is something like a riddle and cannot be understood without an explanation. This also seems to be stated in verse 34, where parables are contrasted with explanation,

and verses 11 and 13 imply that parables are hard to understand.

The location of Mark's first reference to Jesus speaking in parables is significant (3:23). Jesus is here speaking to the scribes from Jerusalem and the teaching concerns their misunderstanding of his powers of exorcism. Up to that point in his gospel, Jesus has taken his message to the synagogues and disputed with the scribes and Pharisees, but they have rejected him and plan to kill him (3:6). So it is significant that one of the ways Jesus teaches from now on is in parables. Thus Mark's first reference to parables describes the kind of teaching he gives to his enemies, and in his last reference to parables Jesus also speaks to his enemies. Mark's sense of dramatic irony is seen here, because he records that his enemies do perceive that the parable was against them (12:12).

Parables are thus stories that need explanation, but in 4:11, in contrast to the given secret of the kingdom, "everything" (τὰ πάντα) is in parables. "Parables" here may not refer just to a particular form of teaching (stories or riddles), but to everything to do with Jesus, to the whole of his life. The whole of Jesus' life and death is a riddle that needs explaining.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, for Mark, parables can function in different ways. For some they function as riddles that are hard to understand and conceal the truth; for others they are still riddles but reveal the truth to those who will listen. Who it is who is able to understand them and the means by which this explanation is apprehended is discussed in section VI.

#### b) Teaching in relation to the law

Mark's presentation of Jesus' teaching in relation to the law has two major emphases.<sup>14</sup> First, Jesus does not call

for the law to be abandoned, and is portrayed as upholding the Mosaic law. Thus in the discussion on ritual purity and corban (7:1-13), the contrast is between Pharisees and scribes upholding the traditions of the elders/men and Jesus upholding the traditions of God/Moses (vss. 5,8,10). In the discussion about divorce, Jesus compares one commandment with another superior commandment, thus upholding the law (10:1-9). The debate about the sabbath hinges on an interpretation of Moses' command to "remember the sabbath" (2:23-28), and in the conversation with the friendly scribe, both Jesus and the scribe are shown as upholding the law (12:28-34).

Second, alongside this upholding of the law, is an emphasis on Jesus' authority as being greater than that of Moses. In each one of these examples given, Jesus upholds the Mosaic law, but in each, Jesus is also shown as himself having greater authority than that of Moses. On ritual purity, he appears to dismiss what he has just upheld with an authoritative word of his own (7:14-23). At the end of the discussion on divorce, Jesus adds his own pronouncement on the matter (10:10f.). Although Jesus saw that the scribe answered wisely concerning the commandments, and they appear to be in basic agreement, the authoritative words of Jesus at the end place his own assessment of the law above that of the scribe's ("And after that no one dared to ask him any question", 12:34). This dual emphasis on the authority of the Mosaic law and a superior authority in Jesus is brought out at the end of the discussion on the sabbath: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" could be described as a summary of the principle of the law; and "so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath" as Jesus' own authoritative pronouncement (2:27).

We may also note that in the following section (3:1-6), again concerning the sabbath, Jesus asks, "Is it lawful on

the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?", and Mark ironically states at the end that the Pharisees started to make plans to kill Jesus - the implication being that those who thought they were keeping the law are the very ones who are not.

The record of the transfiguration may also suggest that Jesus is superior to Moses (9:2-8). The reference to the six days, the cloud and the voice are all reminiscent of the giving of the tables of the law (Ex. 24:15f.). Moses and Elijah are shown talking with Jesus as equals, but then God's voice confirms that Jesus is his beloved son, and so presumably superior to Moses.

Thus Mark's portrayal of Jesus in relation to the law shows that Jesus cannot be criticised in his loyalty to the law. In fact it is rather he who keeps it while his opponents do not. Yet Jesus not only keeps the law but is himself superior to it: his is a new teaching with authority (1:27). The implications of an understanding of Jesus' superior authority for the life of Mark's community will be discussed in section IX.

### Summary

Mark's gospel is a record of the events of Jesus' life understood as divine action in history. One aspect of Jesus' identity is stated at the start, that he is the Christ, the Son of God, but exactly what this means and entails is not clear until the end of the gospel. Jesus' identity is a mystery and only those who are able to discern correctly will begin to understand the revelation given in and by Jesus.

Mark records that Jesus' miracles did not always lead to faith. His teaching in parables is obscure and does not always seem to lead to faith or understanding either. Jesus' teaching in relation to the law, while upholding the law, points to his own authority as being greater and superior to that of Moses. We now turn to those aspects of Jesus' identity to which Mark's record points, and what it was that the disciples and others were supposed to have discerned.

### III. THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

We have noted how the disciples and others have heard Jesus' teaching and seen his miracles, but it is not always immediately clear what they are supposed to discern from these. The disciples receive special teaching, but Mark does not always say what the content of that teaching is. The mystery of the kingdom is given, but Mark does not obviously say what that involves. The disciples are expected to learn something from the feeding miracles, but Mark does not say what they are expected to deduce.

Yet Mark does tell his readers that Jesus is in fact the Son of God as he frames his gospel with these references (1:1; 15:39). He may also be well aware that simply stating that Jesus is the Son of God is a fact that could be, and no doubt was, disputed, and that such a statement was not likely to touch people's lives unless they discerned its truth for themselves. We have also seen how he has developed more precisely what he means by Son of God from the beginning to the end of his gospel.

Mark does not make specific deductions about the deep significance of Jesus' life, but intends his words and actions to speak for themselves. What he does is to give many clues and a lot of attention to urge his readers towards correct discernment. We now turn to suggest what deductions that he wanted his readers to make in the way he presented his material about Jesus.

## 1. Source of Power

We have seen how Mark links the power portrayed in Jesus' miracles with the same power present in his teaching. Jesus shows he has power to forgive sins by healing a paralysed man (2:1-13). He has power to control the wind and sea (4:35-41; 6:45-52), as well as evil spirits (1:23-28). Mark shows people beginning to ask the right sort of questions. "With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"; "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"; "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (1:27,7; 4:41).

Mark does not give a specific answer to these questions at the point in his story where they occur. Like the questioners, he leaves his readers to make their own deductions, but indicates that these are the sorts of questions they should be asking. From these examples we may deduce the answers he is expecting his readers to give. Only God can forgive sins; only God has power over the sea; only God can control evil spirits - and *therefore* Jesus must have a special relationship with God in order to demonstrate and use these powers.<sup>15</sup>

We have already noted how the concept of sonship reflects a very close relationship with God. This is also shown in Mark's references to Jesus at prayer, each one of the three comes at a moment of stress or crisis and is connected in some way with use of power: after he had healed and exorcised many (1:35); after the feeding of the 5,000 (6:46); in Gethsemane where he addressed God as "Abba, Father" (the only reference in Mark, 14:36; ~~note also the prayer of Jesus also referred to at 9:29; 11:17; note the lack of address to God as Father on the cross, 15:34~~). Jesus thus not only has a very close relationship to God but also in some sense shares God's power.

## 2. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is concerned with God's power and his kingly rule.<sup>16</sup> We have seen how this and the renewal of the covenant formed part of the biblical hope and expectation for the future (pp. 30ff.). However, if Jesus had simply taken up this theme of imminence, or had just said, "God is King", this would hardly have been striking.<sup>17</sup> What he said was, "The time is *fulfilled*, and the kingdom is *at hand* (near)" (1:15).

A group of Mark's references to the kingdom of God comes in chapter 4, coupled with the instruction to listen (ἀκούετε). The teaching here says that the kingdom of God is a mystery, something both hidden and surprising, as well as something that is not easy to perceive. Part of this mystery is also the division of people into groups, those who hear and see and those who don't (see further section VI). These references suggest that the kingdom, God's rule, is mysterious and not easily understood; hence the constant emphasis on correct spiritual discernment.

The kingdom of God is not something static, but dynamic; the exercise of royal power and authority. If Jesus has a special relationship with God (sonship) and shows something of his power, Mark also portrays Jesus in some respects sharing God's role as King. At his baptism the heavenly voice echoes the words of Psalm 2:7, where Israel's king is acknowledged as God's Son: "You are my son, today I have begotten you". Jesus is proclaimed king by the crowds as he enters Jerusalem (11:9f.), and although Mark does not specifically allude to what is said about the king of Zion in Zechariah 9:9, the reference to the crowds spreading garments in the road suggest they were consciously welcoming him as their king (cf. 2 Kings 9:13). As pilgrims usually

entered the city on foot, Jesus' riding on a donkey is making some kind of messianic statement.

Later Jesus is anointed by a woman at Simon the leper's house. He is anointed on his head, which may be symbolic of kingship.<sup>18</sup> Mark frames this scene with two sections describing the plot to arrest Jesus, and this highlights how closely the themes of Jesus' death and his kingship are linked. It is in being anointed for burial that Jesus is in fact anointed as king. This ritual should more properly have been performed by the high priest in the temple, rather than a woman in a house. Later the high priest will ask Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", and will declare Jesus' answer to be blasphemy (14:61). The other main references to Jesus as king come in the Passion Narrative where the phrase "King of the Jews" occurs five times and King of Israel once (15:2,9,12,18,26,32). It is as a political king and messiah that Jesus is crucified.

The kingdom of God is about God's mysterious power, but its "coming" also tells those who are alert something about the times in which they are living. While the kingdom cannot simply be equated with Jesus, Jesus and the kingdom are inseparable. In some sense Jesus has brought God's end time into the present, and he implied that the final rule of God had already come in his own person.

### 3. God's End-time

Mark immediately gives a clue to his readers that he has set his gospel in God's time. John the Baptist comes as a fulfilment of God's word of prophecy, and it is only after John is arrested that Jesus starts preaching (1:14). The whole description of John the Baptist gives an eschatological setting to the gospel. John's diet and

clothes identify him with Elijah (1 Kings 1:8) and since Mark has already included one quotation from Malachi (3:1), his readers might also make the connection with the last verses of Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (4:5; also indicated by Jesus in 9:12f.).

Mark also says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8), and this forms another eschatological feature, the fulfilment of the prophecy in Joel (2:28), where the Spirit of God will be poured out on all flesh.<sup>19</sup> The descent of the Spirit was expected to take place at the time of eschatological salvation when God would deliver his people (Is. 64:1). So the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism is to be seen as an eschatological event.<sup>20</sup>

Mark's portrayal of the temptation of Jesus is not as in Matthew and Luke about Jesus' deliberations on what role he should follow (Mat. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13), but in terms of conflict between Jesus and Satan - the eschatological battle. Jesus is compelled by the Spirit into taking the conflict out to Satan.

Mark records that the evil spirits were able to recognise God's power at work in Jesus. They knew who he was but were also aware that Jesus was the agent of their destruction (1:24). Jesus was also able to bind the "strong man", Satan (3:22-7). The use of the plural "us" (1:24) may suggest a representative of the host of demons now confronted by the power of God in Jesus. He has come to destroy, not just one unclean spirit but a whole contingent of them. The unclean spirits are being destroyed by the Holy one of God, equipped with the power of the Spirit of God.<sup>21</sup> Exorcisms as such were not signs of the new age since the work of other exorcists is also recorded,<sup>22</sup> but the binding of the powers of evil and the defeat of Satan's power was expected as a

sign of God's end-time.<sup>23</sup> Matthew and Luke record Jesus making the specific connection between exorcisms and the coming of the kingdom (Mat. 12:28; Luke 11:20), and although this is not so explicit in Mark, this is probably the deduction he wishes his readers to make.

Mark does not always make a definite distinction between exorcisms and healing. It is said of Simon's mother-in-law that the fever "left her", and of the leper that the leprosy "left him" (1:31,42). He speaks of the fetter or bond (ὁ δεσμός) which binds the deaf and dumb man's tongue, as well as the scourge of disease (μάστιξ) (7:35; 3:10; 5:29,34). These suggest that diseases are personal and evil forces to be expelled. The person whom Satan has kept bound and shut up is being released (hence the command, "be opened" or "be released"; διανοίχθητι).

If evil is responsible for sickness and illness, then the deduction is that if Satan is defeated, healing can take place. This assessment of the evidence is more strongly developed in Matthew, where Jesus is recorded as answering John the Baptist's question, "Are you he who is to come?", with a quotation from Isaiah 61. At Qumran the figure of Isaiah 61:1 was identified with the eschatological prophet, although it is not clear how far that prophet was seen as a wonder worker.<sup>24</sup>

Mark may also have had in mind the passage from Isaiah 35:5f about healing in his report of the healing of the deaf mute and in his following summary (7:31-37). That Mark had this particular passage in mind is suggested by his use of the rare word for dumb (μογιλάλον), found only here in Mark's description of the deaf mute (v. 32), and only in the LXX version of Isaiah 35:6. As we have seen (p. 32), such passages in Isaiah speak of a future event when God would

restore the fortunes of Israel and reverse the judgement, spoken of in terms of blindness and deafness in chapter 6.

Healing, restoration, liberation and salvation all formed part of the hope cherished only for the age to come. Mark understands the healing miracles as part of God's saving activity. To the woman with the haemorrhage and blind Bartimaeus Jēsus says, "ἡ πίστις σου σέσωχέν σε", "Your faith has healed/saved you" (5:34; 10:52; also 5:23,28). This link between sight and salvation is found elsewhere (Ex. 14:13; 2 Chron. 20:17; Isa. 40:5; 59:11; 1QS 11:2-3; CD 20:24; 1QH 18:5). So Mark understands the time of the future salvation to have arrived.

The fact that Mark here specifically links this future event with the presence of Jesus, speaks of God's future time becoming the "now" of Jesus. Yet the restoration of sight and hearing and release from bondage referred to in Isaiah is one aspect of the reversal of fortunes also mentioned, such as waters in the desert and the land becoming fertile. It forms part of a general picture of blessedness and is not specifically linked with the coming of an end-time figure.

#### 4. The Suffering Son of Man

We have seen earlier in the discussion of Mark's secrecy theme, that this is often taken to be a "messianic" secret, but in fact Mark uses many different ways of describing Jesus' identity. He can thus use terms such as Messiah, Son of God, Holy One of God, King of the Jews, Son of David, Son of man as ways of describing Jesus. It was only later that some of these terms came to be used as specific titles, as the word Messiah changed from being an adjective meaning "anointed" to a title as the only Messiah.

The way Jesus preferred to speak of himself was by using the description Son of man, and it is striking that the expression is virtually exclusive to the gospels.<sup>25</sup> Its use probably goes back to Jesus himself, but exactly how and in what way he used the phrase is difficult to assess. He may have used it both as the Aramaic expression to mean "one", as well as linking it with imagery taken from Daniel.<sup>26</sup>

In the sayings in Mark where the Son of man phrase is used, eleven out of thirteen are concerned with the theme of suffering and vindication (8:31,38; 9:9,12,31; 10:33,45; 13:26; 14:21,41,62; also 2:10,28). Since the main message of Daniel 7 is also concerned with suffering and vindication, it seems likely that Jesus himself made some connection, although the Son of man and the kingdom of God, also a feature of Daniel 7, are not specifically connected in the synoptic tradition. The way Mark has portrayed Jesus' use of the phrase, suggests that he understood Jesus not claiming Son of man as a title, but rather accepting the role that went with it.

The passion predictions also say that the suffering is part of God's will: "the Son of man must suffer" (8:31); "the Son of man will be delivered up" (9:31; 10:33); as well as "and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things" (9:12) (compare also in Gethsemane, "not what I will, but what thou wilt"; 14:36). The teaching about the suffering and vindication of the Son of man is repeated three times,<sup>27</sup> and forms the framework for Mark's central section on Jesus' teaching on his way to Jerusalem, ending with the saying concerning the Son of man giving his life as a ransom for many (10:45).

This three-fold repetition suggests that Mark's understanding and portrayal of Jesus as the suffering Son of

man is very significant for him. The repetition, combined with other teaching for the disciples, shows that this is also a difficult concept to grasp, and its implications have to be explained. Yet the disciples still do not seem to understand fully. The whole concept of Jesus as both the Son of God and the suffering Son of man, as well as the idea that God's power is revealed in suffering and death, are especially difficult to grasp. Yet by interweaving this teaching Mark is saying that the two concepts are intimately connected. If the disciples perceive who Jesus is, that perception has implications for the way they will conduct their lives.

#### Summary

Mark wants his readers to begin to understand who Jesus is and to grasp something of the mystery concerning his identity. He portrays Jesus both as a powerful exorcist defeating Satan and as a healer with power to restore hearing and sight. Jesus' power comes from his close relationship with God, as God's Son, and already God's future kingdom, rule and salvation has, in some sense, come in his person.

Yet Mark understands the kind of king Jesus is in terms of a suffering Son of man and the exercise of God's power in his kingdom to be ironically revealed in suffering and death. If this is what Mark wanted his readers to understand, we now turn to the question of who has such a discernment and how they acquired it.

#### IV. REVELATION TO WHOM?

Revelation, although initiated by God, does require an active participation by people in terms of discernment.<sup>28</sup> Thus the heading of this section, 'Revelation to Whom?' could be phrased, 'Response to Revelation'. However, looking at Mark's gospel as a whole, it is possible to distinguish in very broad terms those to whom revelation is given and those who respond to that revelation. There are broad categories of people in the narrative - the crowd, the disciples, the Jews and Gentiles, the scribes and Pharisees. These groups are depicted by Mark in general terms.

Alongside these broad groups, Mark also makes other divisions based on different criteria - the recognition of and response to the revelation given by and in Jesus. Here such categories as faith, following Jesus and doing God's will are determinative. Those who hear, see and understand Jesus, recognise revelation in him. Those who hear, see and do not understand Jesus, do not recognise revelation, and thus do not really hear and see.

For Mark, these two groups do sometimes overlap or coincide, but are not the same. Thus, the scribes and the Pharisees and those from Jerusalem are generally hostile, while the disciples, Gentiles and those from Galilee are generally favourable. The crowd is sometimes for and sometimes against, and the disciples themselves sometimes understand and sometimes do not. These various groups and how they perceive Jesus are the subject of this and the following sections.



## 1. For All

Mark says that the revelation of Jesus is there for all to see and hear. This may be seen in his sometimes rather sweeping use of the term "all". The crowd bring all (πάντας) who were sick and Jesus preached in the whole (ὅλη) of Galilee (1:32,39; also 1:28) Phrases like "a great multitude" (πλήθος πολύ) from many places, and "a very large crowd" (ὄχλος πλείστος) (3:8; 4:1) suggest the universality of his message (see also 1:5).<sup>29</sup> Mark also includes two sayings about the gospel being preached in the whole world (13:10; 14:9) and these may reflect his understanding of the gospel as universal in scope.

Near the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem, Mark says that Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him,<sup>30</sup> and then goes on to include teaching in very general terms, using phrases like "if any man" and "whoever". By strategically introducing the crowd again at this point, Mark may be wanting to stress the universal applicability of Jesus' teaching, especially as that particular teaching concerns persecution because of the gospel (8:34-38).

The significance of the numbers in the feeding miracles is not entirely clear, but may suggest first Jewish and then Gentile settings (6:43f., 5 loaves, 2 fish, 12 baskets and 5,000 men; 8:5, 8f., 7 loaves, a few fish, 7 baskets and 4,000 people).<sup>31</sup> The numbers are repeated later (8:19) as if to underline their significance. The large quantities left over suggests both a contrast and a superiority to the giving of the manna in the wilderness, where it was specifically stated that there could be none left over (Ex. 16:19f.).<sup>32</sup>

Mark's understanding of revelation being available to all is also highlighted when we look at individuals he mentions and

their great variety. The first followers were fishermen, the next a tax-collector (1:16,19; 2:14). Given that Mark records Jesus as withdrawing from the synagogues and the scribes as his enemies, it is significant that he portrays in positive ways Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, a scribe<sup>33</sup> and Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council (5:22; 12:28; 15:43).

Similarly Mark also records in a positive way women who came to Jesus: the woman with the haemorrhage, a woman who anoints Jesus, the woman from Syrophenicia who is also a Gentile, the widow at the temple (5:34; 14:8; 7:25; 13:44). Women are also recorded as following and ministering to Jesus (15:40f.; note, ἡκολούθουν and διηκόνουν).<sup>34</sup> Mark also records Jesus' favourable dealings with children (9:37; 10:14).<sup>35</sup>

Mark thus seems to be saying that the revelation in Jesus is there for all to see and that many different types of people are able to see it and respond. He has shown by his choice of examples that anyone can follow Jesus, that there are in fact no social, physical or national barriers to doing so. Even physical blindness does not prevent someone from "seeing" the significance of Jesus (Bartimaeus is able to recognise Jesus as Son of David *before* Jesus heals him, 10:46-52).

The revelation in Jesus thus also has social consequences. While a scribe and a member of the council may indeed discern the truth about Jesus, many of the examples given show Jesus' contact with those on the fringes of society, those who have been marginalised and excluded because of where they come from, what they do, and what kind of person they are. This is why following Jesus may generate conflict as it transcends previously accepted boundaries (see further section IX).

## 2. The Crowd

While Mark understands revelation in Jesus to be for all, the largest group in his narrative, the crowd (ὁ ὄχλος) comes and goes and seems to be stage-managed. The crowd is described as "great" (3:7; 5:21,28; 6:34; 8:1; 9:14; 12:37) and on one occasion as "very great" (4:1). While it is important for Mark to show Jesus was able to attract such crowds, their presence is a mixed blessing. They prevent Jesus and his followers from eating (3:20; 6:31) and "pressed upon him to touch him" to such an extent that he has to sit in a boat to avoid being crushed (3:10; 4:1). The crowd are attracted to Jesus because they had heard "all that he did" and because "he had healed many" (3:8,10). The close link made by Mark between healing and teaching implies that they also came to hear what Jesus had to say (see 10:1). Mark repeatedly shows Jesus teaching the crowd and the times Jesus actually calls the crowd to himself is for the purpose of teaching (7:14ff.; 8:34ff.).<sup>36</sup>

When Jesus tries to escape the crowd's attention in the desert, they are waiting for him (6:33). Although Jesus "had compassion on them" (v.34), it is at this point in the gospel the the crowd begins to become, not hostile, but rather more of a nuisance because of their lack of understanding. After the miraculous feeding Jesus first "made his disciples get into the boat" and then "dismissed the crowd" (6:45). Mark does not record why Jesus did this and neither does he record the crowd's reaction to the feeding (in contrast elsewhere to reactions of amazement). At this point in his Gospel, John records that Jesus saw that "they were about to come and take him by force to make him king" (6:15). The fact that Mark portrays the miraculous feedings as messianic may confirm this interpretation. Jesus sent the crowds away because they understood the feedings in

a messianic way, but their understanding of messianic was incomplete.<sup>37</sup>

Mark's references to Jesus at prayer come at significant points in his narrative (1:35; 11:32ff.). Here immediately after he has dismissed the crowd, Jesus went away to pray (6:46). His healing and teaching can certainly draw crowds but this may not be the way he is to use his power. The crowd lack understanding and there may also be a hint here that the crowd will eventually turn against Jesus.

Although there are other references to the crowd after chapter 6, they do not figure so prominently. The narrative and teaching are more concerned with the disciples, and Jesus deliberately wishes to be hidden from the crowds (7:24; 9:30). Thus, although they "hear him gladly" in the temple (12:37), the crowd next appears with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus and is linked with his enemies (14:43). The chief priests persuade the crowd to shout for Barabbas and Pilate, "wishing to satisfy the crowd", releases him (15:15).

Thus in Mark's narrative, Jesus is capable of attracting vast crowds. However, this crowd, while seeing Jesus' miracles and hearing his teaching, lack understanding of their real significance. Their response is fickle, to such an extent that in the end they are only satisfied with Jesus' death. Mark's portrayal of the crowd may also reflect a social situation in which his group forms a minority.

### 3. The Leaders of the Jewish People

Although the word "Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) only occurs once in the gospel in an explanatory verse (7:3), Mark frequently

refers to the leaders of the Jewish people. His references seem to be broadly divided into two groups: the Pharisees and the Herodians who function mostly in Galilee; and the priests, scribes and elders who are based in Jerusalem. In the earlier chapters, the scribes, who have come from Jerusalem, are frequently linked with the Pharisees.

Almost right from the beginning of his gospel, Mark portrays these leaders in negative and hostile terms, and shows Jesus in immediate confrontation with Pharisees and scribes. Jesus both demonstrates and speaks openly about his authority. He not only claims to forgive sins, but by healing the paralytic, proves that he can do so (2:5-12).<sup>38</sup> Disputes with the Pharisees follow about table fellowship, fasting, and the sabbath, and in each case, the issue does not just concern interpretation of the law, but includes Jesus' authoritative teaching in relation to such issues (2:17,19f.,27).

Thus, although Jesus taught and healed in a synagogue and disputed over questions of the law and cult in a way that pointed to himself and his own authority, the scribes and Pharisees reject this revelation and from now on Jesus moves away from the synagogues and his opponents will receive only parables (3:23). Mark has thus very quickly set out the main opponents, and his readers know that they are planning to kill Jesus (3:6: see also 3:19 concerning betrayal, and 8:31, 10:33 where Jesus knows who are his enemies).

Although Mark records other engagements with Jewish leaders, from now on they are set in an unfavourable light. Jesus is recorded only one more time teaching in a synagogue "in his own country" (6:1f.) and prefers more often to teach in a house or by the lakeside. At this synagogue, the "many who heard him" were astonished, but did not, as a previous group who were amazed, glorify God (2:12), but begin to dispute

Jesus' origin. Thus, although the synagogue leaders have heard and seen Jesus (wisdom and mighty works, 6:2), they still only understand him on a human level as Mary's son.<sup>39</sup>

The question of authority is also specifically raised in a dispute with the chief priests, scribes and elders in the temple (11:27-33), and the Vineyard Parable immediately following seems to be addressed to the same group. Significantly, this is the one place that they are said to understand that Jesus had "told the parable against them". This would suggest that for Mark the primary meaning of the Vineyard Parable is not the transfer of God's favour from Israel to the Gentiles, but the rejection by the leaders of Israel of the beloved son. In Mark's Parable, the reason why the owner (God) did not obtain his deserved fruit from the vineyard is not because the vineyard produced no fruit (as in Is. 5:7), but because the fruit it produced was not given to the owner by the wicked tenants.<sup>40</sup> The leaders' attitude may be contrasted with Jesus' teaching on greatness. Those who are truly great do God's will, expressed in terms of service and suffering (see further section V).

Mark is using his irony in this Parable to its fullest. Jesus' enemies do not perceive, significantly not that Jesus is the beloved son (υἱος ἀγαπητός, cf. 1:11; 9:7), but a confirmation of their own intentions. The irony is that although in the Parable it is said that the owner will destroy the tenants, Mark says immediately afterwards that the leaders tried to arrest Jesus. They think they are destroying Jesus, but by doing so they are in fact destroying themselves.

#### 4. The Disciples

The role of the disciples in Mark has generated a great deal of discussion. The fact that Mark's portrayal of the disciples is inconsistent in places, may suggest, either that Mark himself (or his sources) sometimes gives both positive and negative portrayals; or that he is using this inconsistency to some particular purpose.

Part of the difficulty seems to be that Mark's disciples serve two functions - one which is based on history and one in which he uses the disciples as role models for post-Easter discipleship. In the sequence based on history, the disciples are portrayed favourably in the early sections and called to greatness; then they cannot understand Jesus because of anxious self-concern; they then come into more open conflict with Jesus; and finally break with him altogether and desert him in the passion narrative. In parallel with this, Mark also uses the disciples as models to illustrate discipleship and what that involves in terms of following, faith, understanding and relation to Jesus.

It is frequently difficult to tell in any particular passage which of these two approaches Mark is adopting, and it may be that this is, in fact, Mark's intention. He also uses the historical disciples as models or examples of what not to do, and this adds further complexity to the issue. In recording his material in this particular way his purpose may be to encourage his readers to identify with the disciples and re-assess their own role as continuing disciples of the risen Jesus. In this section, we will try to look at how Mark portrays the disciples in historical terms, and in the next section in terms of role models for discipleship, although the two may necessarily overlap.

In Mark's first chapters, Jesus' main dialogue has been with the leaders of the Jewish people in teaching, healing and disputes over the law and cult. Interspersed with this Mark records Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James and John to be his followers, and later he calls Levi (1:16-20; 2:14). The fact that Jesus has disciples is not mentioned until later (2:18) in contrast with John's disciples. For Mark, Jesus does not call these people to be his disciples, but to follow him (ἀκολουθεῖ μοι) and this from the start sets out his understanding of what being a disciple involves.

Jesus then appoints twelve to be with him (3:13-19), presumably called from a larger group of followers. Mark's use of the terms "twelve" and "disciples" is not consistent and sometimes these two phrases are interchangeable and sometimes they are distinct.<sup>41</sup> Mark stresses that it is being with Jesus that is important (see also Acts 1:21f.). Jesus says that those sitting "about him" are part of his family; that those who were "about him with the twelve" are the insiders who have been given the mystery of the kingdom; without him the disciples are in trouble on the lake and unable to heal; and it is the disciples who are with Jesus on his journey (3:34; 4:10f.; 6:48; 9:18; 8:27).

Jesus gives his appointed twelve authority to preach and exorcise (3:14f.; 6:7-13), and apart from this mission Mark gives the impression that they are with Jesus most of the time, until his arrest (14:50). This means that the disciples hear Jesus' public teaching and see his public miracles. They are also the recipients of private teaching, and they alone witness some miracles. Peter, James and John also see a healing, the transfigured Jesus and, along with Andrew hear Jesus' private teaching on the Mount of Olives (5:37; 9:2; 13:3).

However, in spite of being singled out to receive such private teaching, the disciples remain limited in their understanding of Jesus. They hear his teaching, but do not understand the Sower Parable (4:13), they see his miraculous feedings and miracles on the lake, but still do not understand (6:35-44; 8:14-21; 4:35-41; 6:47-52).<sup>42</sup> In the discussion following the feedings, Mark describes the disciples in the same way as the Pharisees, as having hardened hearts (6:52; 8:17; 3:5). Even when Jesus speaks to them plainly about his forthcoming death they misunderstand (8:32; 9:32). They misunderstand Jesus' attitude to the temple; Peter denies Jesus; Judas betrays him and they all run away after his arrest (13:1; 14:66ff.; 14:43ff.).

These positive and negative roles assigned to the disciples have been variously emphasised and accounted for by commentators.<sup>43</sup> Some view Mark's portrayal of the disciples as positive and fair, as the recipients of teaching and guarantors of the gospel; some may see the disciples on a journey of suffering, serving as an example to the community and as a foil to Jesus so that he can give more teaching; others concentrate on the misunderstanding and rejection of the disciples as a polemic against the disciples by Mark's church.

However, rather than singling out either the positive or the negative side of the portrayal and making one more dominant, a view which takes both sides into account would more consistently reflect the text as we have it. If Mark had portrayed the disciples consistently in a positive way, there would be little problem. The fact that he also includes negative statements is the real issue. The idea that the negative approach is designed to reject a group of opponents or the demise of the Jerusalem church does not

give adequate weight to the positive side of the portrayal.<sup>44</sup>

Others have suggested that Mark's portrayal is best understood from the perspective of his approach to the reader.<sup>45</sup> The fact that the disciples did not understand and that they did fall away means that they are not so good and ideal that Mark's readers cannot identify with them. The negative aspects may help the readers to identify their own failures with those of the disciples, as well as encouraging them to re-assess their own behaviour as disciples.<sup>46</sup> Here the actions and attitudes of disciples like Peter and Judas would be instructive. The failure and success of the disciples leads to a certain tension between the two. However, it is here that the portrayal of the disciples as a group in the plot, merges or spills over into their role as models to illustrate discipleship, aptly described by Malbon as "fallible followers".<sup>47</sup> As Jesus remained constant to his historical disciples, so he also remains constant to his present disciples.

##### 5. The Significance of Location

It has frequently been noted that in Mark's gospel Jesus is never still for long. He is always on the move. In the central section this movement becomes more focussed on a journey "on the road, going up to Jerusalem" (10:32). Earlier, Jerusalem is mentioned three times. Two of these references note that scribes had come from Jerusalem, confirming for Mark that Jerusalem is the home of Jesus' enemies (3:8,22; 7:1).<sup>48</sup>

The last reference to Jesus being on the way is after the healing of Bartimaeus (10:52). The next chapter begins a new section where Jesus is no longer on the way, but has arrived

outside the city.<sup>49</sup> For Mark the entry into Jerusalem is not really an entry into the city at all, but takes place on the road outside (11:8). He enters the city quietly to look round the temple.

The people of Jerusalem, rather than the leaders, come to Jesus and support John the Baptist (3:8; 1:5; 11:32), as well as receiving Jesus' teaching (11:18; 12:37), and so are not viewed by Mark in a wholly negative light, although Mark does not record that Jesus performed any miracles there. The crowd follows Jesus enthusiastically in Galilee, but the crowd in Jerusalem turn against him (15:11-15).

Although Jerusalem has been the goal of Jesus' journey (10:32), Jesus and his disciples actually stay outside the city at Bethany (11:11; 14:3). Malbon suggests that places outside the city "serve as special locations over against Jerusalem".<sup>50</sup> Bethany is a place of refuge from the opposition of the religious leaders, as well as the place of Jesus' anointing as king (14:8); the Mount of Olives is "opposite the temple", where Jesus gives extended teaching (13:3); true prayer takes place, not in the temple (11:17), but in Gethsemane (14:32); Golgotha, the place of the skull and crucifixion, is outside Jerusalem and the temple. These episodes which are central to the culmination of Jesus' ministry take place outside Jerusalem and beyond the realm of the centre of the Jewish religion. The place of the supreme revelation of God takes place, not in the temple where it had been in the past and was expected in the future, but in Jesus' death on a cross outside the city.

If Jerusalem represents for Mark all that is opposed to Jesus, Galilee serves the opposite function. Galilee is the place of much of Jesus' teaching and miracles, his disclosure and manifestation. In his first chapter Mark specifically notes that Jesus is from Galilee and it is

there that he preaches the gospel (1:9,14). Galilee also becomes the place of final disclosure where the disciples will see the risen Jesus (16:7; 14:28). Peter was perceived to be from Galilee and women followed and ministered to Jesus in Galilee (14:70; 15:40). In view of the way in which sight and blindness are significant in the narrative as ways of understanding, the prediction that the disciples will see Jesus is striking. The fact that this will happen in Galilee also reflects Mark's understanding of Galilee as the location of revelation, both in historical as well as symbolic terms.<sup>51</sup>

Running parallel with this distinction between city (Jerusalem) and country (Galilee) is a distinction between town and country locations. Although Jesus is said to teach in the synagogues (1:21,39; 3:1; 6:1), and visit other cities, his more favoured location for teaching is in the country, a house or a boat. Prior to the plot for his life Jesus is recorded as teaching in synagogues, but after his teaching has been rejected there, Mark records that he withdrew to the sea (3:7).<sup>52</sup>

In one of his summaries, Mark includes all the surrounding Gentile territory (Tyre, Sidon, Decapolis, ending at the Sea of Galilee). Even though this journey in principle is not impossible, Mark may be using the locations to present Jesus as the originator of the mission to the Gentiles. Mark certainly does not portray Galilee as Gentile territory, but more as an area open to outside influences, and "as the proper setting for portraying this new mode of divine presence which is no longer to be localised, and hence knows no boundaries".<sup>53</sup>

## Summary

Mark portrays broad groups as having a certain kind of response to Jesus. The crowd is enthusiastic and follows Jesus about because he can heal and exorcise (7:37). Although he repeatedly urges them to "listen" and "understand", they come because they are "like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34). Their perception is only superficial and in the end they are swayed by Jesus' enemies to reject him.

The scribes and Pharisees hear what Jesus has to say and see his miracles, but do not understand correctly. The only time they are said to understand, they understand, not who Jesus is, but that the parable he told was against them, so confirming their position as opponents. Jesus, however, "perceives" (ἐπιγινούς) them correctly (2:8), and he is the one to whom revelation is given, particularly at his baptism and transfiguration. How and why he is able to discern is explored in the next section.

The position of the disciples is more difficult to assess. On the one hand, they follow Jesus instantly, receive both his public as well as his private instruction. Some are private witnesses to miracles and three of them see Jesus transfigured. They have seen and heard and should be able to understand. Yet there is also a negative side. They are fearful after the sea miracles and afraid on the way. Jesus accuses them, like his opponents, of having hardened hearts. In the end, they too abandon Jesus. But in terms of Mark's plot, Jesus is always constant towards them. Their understanding is limited but he stays with them and gives them the promise of seeing him again. Mark's portrayal of the disciples may reflect the biblical theme that revelation of God may be difficult to understand and that discernment is not always easy.

Revelation in Jesus is available for all, even the whole world, to discern. In this sense there are no physical or social barriers to discernment. Yet Mark does make divisions into groups but these are based on different criteria. It is to these we now turn, to see what Mark has to say concerning correct perception and discernment.

## V. HOW IS REVELATION DISCERNED?

In the first half of his gospel, Mark includes most examples of Jesus' miracles as signs of his power and these are linked with his teaching. Some understand, some do not understand, some half understand or understand wrongly. Characters come in and out of the story showing different reactions. The second half of his gospel, Mark sets "on the way" (8:27; 9:33f.; 10:32), that is Jesus and the disciples' journey to Jerusalem. Jesus gives plain teaching to his disciples and most of this is concerned with their understanding of messiahship and its consequences for discipleship. For Mark this is a journey of revelation, including references to awe and fear (10:32).

The categories of understanding and not understanding are not necessarily fixed, and it is quite possible, especially for instance in the case of the disciples, to move from one to the other.<sup>54</sup> As such Mark may be saying that understanding is both difficult as well as something gradual and incomplete. Discipleship means starting a journey of discernment that is never complete.

Looking at the incidents Mark has chosen to record and the way in which he has done this, may show something of his understanding of correct discernment, as well as its opposite, in terms of barriers or obstacles to discernment.

### 1. Faith

Mark uses πίστις and πιστεύειν in particular ways. πίστις only occurs five times in the gospel. On four of these occasions the word is unqualified and occurs in connection

with miracles - demonstrations of God's power working through Jesus (2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 10:52). On the other occasion, Jesus encourages his disciples to have faith in God (ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ, 11:22). Mark uses πιστεύειν in a similar unqualified way, and three out of six occurrences are in connection with miracles (5:36; 9:23,24; 15:32. 1:15; 11:23,24. 9:42 is the only reference to faith in Jesus).

Many of these references to faith are in connection with miracles (note 4:40). At the end of the first record of the stilling of the storm on the lake, Jesus accuses his disciples of having no faith, and at the end of the second record, Mark says that they did not understand (4:40; 6:52). Those in Jesus' own town are described as ἀπιστίαν, so lacking in faith/ understanding that Jesus is unable to do a "mighty work there" (6:5f.) Their lack of faith was not so much that they denied that Jesus had the ability to heal, but that they did not understand that it was God's power at work in Jesus.

From Mark's use of these words for faith we may conclude that for him faith is not faith primarily in Jesus, but faith in God, and, that as references to faith occur most frequently in connection with miracles, faith has to do with discernment and understanding of God's power at work through Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

Although Mark includes in his summary sections descriptions of how Jesus healed many and all who came to him, the miracles he has selected to record in more detail do not always lead from unbelief to faith. More often than not faith must be present to make a miracle possible, and faith must also be present in order to understand miracles correctly. Those who have no faith see the miracles but do not discern God's power at work in them (3:5f,22) To them, they are simply mighty wonders (15:32).

Although most of Mark's references to faith occur in connection with discernment of God's power, Mark's summary of Jesus' message is "repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15). The disciples also went out to preach "that men should repent" (6:12). While in Greek the meaning of the word "repent" (μετάνοια) is to regret, or feel remorse, in the scriptural tradition the concept is something much more radical, primarily meaning "to turn back, to return". This returning is a matter of returning to God with one's whole being, a complete turn round and radical alteration in direction.<sup>56</sup>

The most frequent references to repentance are found in Luke's writings and he records in Paul's speech before Agrippa, Jesus' commission of Paul to go to the Gentiles, "open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). Here there is a link between seeing, repentance and forgiveness of sins. Mark records that John the Baptist preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4).<sup>57</sup> A similar link between insight, repentance and forgiveness is found at Qumran (CD 3:18; 20:32-34), as noted by Marcus, who continues, "Perception leads to repentance, which leads to forgiveness; but since the first link in this chain is denied to "those outside", so are the latter two".<sup>58</sup>

Mark's quotation from Isaiah 6 in 4:12 also links perception with repentance (ἐπιστρέψωσιν) and forgiveness. In the context of the passage, those outside are not able to hear and see correctly and hence are unable to discern and understand, and thus cannot repent and be forgiven. Mark seems to be saying both that correct perception and discernment, through faith, is necessary in order to recognise the need for repentance, and that repentance is a prerequisite for discernment.

## 2. Following Jesus

In the central section of his gospel, Mark shows Jesus "on the way" to Jerusalem, and it is here that he develops the theme of what it means to follow Jesus (8:27-10:52). Certain parallels have been suggested between the relationship of Jesus to his disciples and that of the rabbi and his pupils.<sup>59</sup> Hengel has undertaken a detailed study of this and other parallels, such as following an eschatological prophetic figure.<sup>60</sup>

In one sense, the disciples and others follow Jesus literally, and the background and social implications of this can be explored. Yet "following" is also used in a more figurative and spiritual sense. After the cross/resurrection a literal following after Jesus was no longer possible, and as the disciples become instructive for the meaning of discipleship, so "following after" becomes instructive for exploring the implications of faith.

"Following after" in connection with Jesus occurs only once outside the gospels, at Revelation 14:4 ("these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes"), and Paul does not mention following Jesus, but rather develops this theme in terms of the imitation of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Although Mark does not speak in terms of an imitation of Jesus, this concept is part of what he means by following Jesus. His followers are to expect the same kinds of things to be done to them as were done to Jesus. As Jesus predicted he would be "handed over" (παράδιδωμι, 9:31; 12:33; also 1:14), so his followers would suffer in the same way (13:9,11,12). They are to drink the cup that he drinks and be baptised with the same baptism (10:39). As Jesus' suffering is the will of God (8:31), and he becomes a "ransom for many" (10:45), so in terms of discipleship, "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (8:35). Followers are not

only to be Jesus' messengers, but also his fellow-workers. They too are to preach and teach, heal and exorcise (3:14f.; 7:7-13,30), and Jesus says he will make them "fishers of men" (1:17).<sup>61</sup>

Following Jesus in terms of discipleship does not necessarily involve following Jesus literally. The demoniac begged Jesus "that he might be with him", but Jesus sent him home to his friends; the man exorcising in Jesus' name criticised by the disciples for "not following us"; Joseph of Arimathea (5:18f.; 9:38f.;15:43). Thus Mark uses the concept of following both in a literal sense in terms of actually following Jesus, and in a figurative sense, what to be a follower of Jesus means in terms of discipleship.

Mark also uses the following/journey motif in another way - in terms of a development of understanding. The disciples follow Jesus, both literally and figuratively, on a journey of understanding and revelation. The disciples literally follow Jesus (10:32) and on the way Jesus teaches them about discipleship and what following him means. He no longer teaches in parables but speaks plainly (8:32). In spite of this, the disciples do not understand what kind of things are involved in following Jesus. They show their lack of understanding by trying to turn Jesus away from his task (8:32), arguing about rank amongst themselves (9:34;10:35) and turning away children (10:13).

While their understanding is incomplete, for Mark the important thing is that they are in fact following Jesus. For Mark following is something to be commended, because to those who follow, Jesus will give understanding. This can be seen by Mark's positioning of two miracle stories round this central section - both concerned with the giving of sight. As we have seen, Mark does not record miracle stories only for their own value, but puts a deeper significance into

them, and here his historical narrative of a journey is interwoven with a discourse on discipleship, and he has framed the whole with two sight giving stories. The journey starts with the story of the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), and ends with the healing of Bartimaeus (10:46-52). The positioning of these stories calls both the disciples and the readers to see what is happening. Following Jesus is a journey of revelation, and Jesus is the only one who can give sight.

If following Jesus is commended by Mark, the opposite is also true, both in terms of not following and also in references to seeking Jesus. The man who had kept the commandments all his life, when instructed by Jesus to give his possessions to the poor, could not follow Jesus, but went away (ἀπῆλθεν, 10:22).

Mark also seems to use the word "seeking" in a negative way. Although Jesus has compassion on the crowds and has compassion on all those who come to him, Mark portrays them negatively when they seek him out (1:36; 3:32). Mark uses ζῆτω four times to refer to Jesus' enemies who were seeking opportunities to arrest and kill him (11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11), and also when seeking evidence against him (14:55). At the tomb, the angel slightly chides the women for misguidedly seeking Jesus there (16:7).

The other reference to seeking refers specifically to the Pharisees (enemies) who come to Jesus "seeking from him a sign from heaven" (8:11). There are only two references to signs in Mark's gospel. Here the Pharisees argue with Jesus, but Mark adds, negatively, that they came to tempt him (cf. 10:2; 12:15), and also that they had specified that the sign should be from heaven. In the other reference to signs (13:22), Mark warns against false christs and false prophets who will "arise and show signs and wonders" and further

negatively adds that these will lead astray. As Geddert points out, the fact that Mark uses both seeking and signs in negative ways, suggests that both *sign-seeking* and also *sign-seeking* is rejected by the Marcan Jesus.<sup>62</sup> It is both by faith and by following Jesus that discernment becomes possible.

If Mark is critical of sign-seeking, the alternative he gives is a call to see, to discern correctly, a special discernment process to understand the real significance of all they see and hear in relation to Jesus. "Characters *within* Mark's gospel and the readers of the gospel are called to have their spiritual eyes and ears opened so that they can, by a special discernment process, come to understand the real significance of that which they see and hear (and read)".<sup>63</sup>

Jairus, when he saw Jesus, fell at his feet (5:22); the friendly scribe heard the discussion and saw that Jesus "answered them well" (12:28); the woman with the haemorrhage "had heard the reports about Jesus (5:27); the Syrophenician woman "heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet" (7:25). In each of these cases attention is drawn either to the faith or to the understanding of the individuals concerned, emphasising the connection between hearing, seeing and discernment. As we have just seen, this discernment process is brought about by faith, and summed up by Mark in instructions to the disciples to go to Galilee and see Jesus (14:28; 16:7).

### 3. Discernment as God-given

The miracle stories Mark has chosen to record do not always specifically lead to faith. In trying to grasp their function for Mark, it will be important to see where Mark

has located certain healing stories in relation to his overall scheme. Mark's main criticism of the disciples' lack of understanding comes in connection with the feeding miracles and with the passion.

After the feeding of the 5,000 (6:30-44), Mark records Jesus walking on the sea and then calming the storm, and then says that the disciples "were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves" (6:52). After the feeding of the 4,000 (8:1-11), Mark records a discussion in a boat about the disciples' lack of understanding about the feeding, immediately followed by the two-stage healing of a blind man (8:22-26).

In the extended section concerning Jesus' teaching about his suffering, the disciples obviously do not understand (Peter argues with him, 8:32; in 9:32 Mark says they do not understand; and they react by arguing who is most important and about positions of power). At the end of this section Mark records Jesus giving sight to Bartimaeus (10:46ff.).

By arranging his material in this way, Mark should not be accused of being a clumsy editor because he has included two accounts of what could possibly be the same event. The discussion in the boat about the baskets and the fragments recognises that there were two feedings (8:19-21). Both accounts describe the satisfaction of physical hunger, but the provision of food in the desert is highly symbolic and recalls the time when God fed his people manna in the wilderness. What happened at the Exodus came to be seen as a pattern for the future salvation by God, and one expression of this hope was in terms of being fed again by God (Is. 25:6).<sup>64</sup>

In the discussion in the boat after the feeding of the 4,000, the disciples answer Jesus' questions about the

number of loaves and baskets quite correctly. They have seen Jesus' miracle. Yet Jesus still accuses them of not understanding in similar terms used for outsiders (4:12; blindness, deafness, hardness of heart). By positioning a healing miracle immediately after this discussion, Mark is saying that it is only when God (working through Jesus) gives "sight" that proper understanding is possible. The two stages to this healing may also show that understanding may not come all at once, but be more of a gradual process.<sup>65</sup>

A similar pattern can be found in the record of the feeding of the 5,000. The fact that the disciples do not understand about the loaves is specifically connected with walking on water and stilling a storm. From what Mark has recorded here as well as in the later discussion about the baskets, the disciples have obviously seen and remembered Jesus' miracle, but do not understand that it is God's power at work. God is the only one who has control over the hostile waters, and if the disciples had recognised that they would have also recognised God's power at work in the feedings, and similarly, if they had understood the significance of the loaves they would also have understood that Jesus had power over wind and waves.

This pattern is also reflected in the three predictions of Jesus' passion. The disciples can hardly have failed to understand the surface meaning of Jesus' words. The fact that Peter argues with him about it shows that he understands quite well that Jesus was predicting his death, especially since Mark includes that Jesus told them plainly. But the deeper truth is that this is God's will and the disciples do not grasp the implications of this, either for Jesus or for the way of his followers.

We have noted how Mark frames Jesus' journey with two healing stories. The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida

comes not only at the end of the feeding miracle, but also at the beginning of the journey. As Jesus, using God's power can give sight to the blind man, so it is God, working through Jesus, who can give the disciples insight. At the end of the journey, Jesus gives Bartimaeus sight and enables him to "follow on the way". So it is God who will give the disciples sight and insight to do the same. What Mark is doing here is both showing what the miracle means and how that meaning is to be appropriated. "What is most important about these stories is not the substance of the miracles but the implicit epistemology: for Mark, *understanding of reality is not achieved by availability of evidence, but by revelatory insight*".<sup>66</sup>

We have seen how in the biblical tradition all insight comes from God (pp. 40, 68ff.). This concept that true discernment is a gift from God, is also reflected at Qumran: "For how can I look on Thy glory except Thou open mine eyes? How hear the words of Thy truth except Thou unstop my ears?" (1QH 18:17-21; 1QS 3:15f.; 1QH 1:8ff.). In Mark, God-given discernment is contrasted with a lack of discernment found in people. After Peter's misunderstanding of Jesus' predicted death, Jesus contrasts his allegiance to that of human beings (τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων) rather than God (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ; 8:33); concern with the things of human beings is attributed to Satan ("Ἰσχυε ὀπίσω μου Σατανᾶ"), and this is also alluded to in Peter's denial (invoking a curse and swearing, 14:71).

This point is also taken up in the explanation of the Sower Parable (4:15). As soon as the word is sown along the path, Satan immediately comes and takes it away. Marcus suggests that verses 18 and 19 are a personification that approaches demonology, so that the whole interpretation is framed by demonological descriptions.<sup>67</sup> This is part of the cosmic conflict between Jesus and Satan. If understanding does not come from God, then it comes from Satan and "this world".

Satan's opposition is powerful, but in its final stages (1:24).

Mark says that all discernment comes from God (and from God working through Jesus). Those on the inside have been given, by God, the mystery of the kingdom (4:11). Faith and following Jesus enable people to both start and continue a journey of discernment. Yet Mark also says that it is possible for people to place themselves outside God's care, and can describe this as God withholding this discernment from certain people (see further section VI).

#### 4. Doing God's Will

Whether a *significant* break is seen between 3:35 and 4:1 or not, there is a certain linking of ideas concerning those who are "inside" and those "outside". In the description of Jesus' family (3:31-5) it is they who are standing outside (ἔξω στήχοντες). They are contrasted with those who are sitting around him (ἐκάθητο περὶ αὐτὸν ὄχλος). Jesus is told, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you". Mark notes that Jesus looked around "on those who sat about him" (τοὺς περὶ αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ καθήμενους), and concludes, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother". Thus Mark is saying that there is a difference between those inside, about him, and those outside. The implication is that those who do God's will are "inside" and those who do not are "outside".<sup>68</sup>

Later in 4:10-11 Mark also refers to those who were "about him" (Jesus) (οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν) with the twelve. This group is again contrasted with those who are outside (ἐξείνοις τοῖς ἔξω). Thus those who are "inside" do the will of God and are given (by God) the secret of the kingdom. By contrast those who are outside, presumably by inference, do not do the will

of God and instead of receiving the kingdom, everything comes in parables (see further section VI).

In connection with 3:35, Best notes that at this point in the gospel "it is impossible to read any specific content into the clause 'whoever does the will of God'; it is elucidated only in what follows, especially 8:27-10:45".<sup>69</sup> This is Mark's central section and may extend from 8:22 to 10:52. It is set "on the way", and this is described by Malbon as an "enacted spacial metaphor of discipleship".<sup>70</sup> Those following Jesus struggle to understand both that Jesus is the Christ and what that means, for Jesus himself, as well as what that means for themselves as his followers and their relations with others. The disciples find it hard to understand that for Jesus, being the Christ and doing God's will, involves suffering and death as the Son of man (9:32; note  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in 8:31); and that greatness involves being the "servant of all" (9:35; especially "whoever would be great among you must be your servant" in 10:43).

Part of what being a servant means is shown in the receiving of children (9:37). Later the disciples show that they have not learnt this hard lesson. They do not receive children and send them away from Jesus (10:13-16). The teaching here concerning children is difficult to interpret. While Mark may understand these passages to mean that Jesus and revelation are literally available to children, and children were probably included in Mark's community, it is more likely that these references are to be interpreted in a spiritual sense. The main concern centres on the words "like a child" ( $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \pi\alpha\iota\delta\iota\omicron\nu$ ), and what might be the child-like qualities to be emulated. Matthew (18:1-4) has interpreted being child-like in terms of humility, and Fowl has suggested that Luke (18:15-17) interprets this as teaching against hesitation and in favour of a sudden and single-minded devotion and pursuit.<sup>71</sup>

To say that being child-like is to be little and helpless, or that it is to realise one's dependence on God, cannot be deduced from the Marcan text. If struggling to understand is the context of the whole section, perhaps "like a child" points more towards an acceptance of something not fully understood, of not having all the answers provided. This would be consistent with Mark's understanding of the kingdom of God as a mystery. Further, if the kingdom of God is not a place but God's kingly power, then this central section may be understood, not as showing the way to the kingdom, but a section showing that God's way and his will, which is his power, is in fact to be shown in service and humility, suffering and death.<sup>72</sup>

The concept of doing God's will is also expressed in terms of keeping the law, and we have seen how Jesus is portrayed both as upholding the law as well as having a superior authority (section II). In this central section Mark includes a record of Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees about divorce (10:2-12). The question is not framed, as in Matthew, about what causes may justify divorce (such as unchastity; Mat. 19:3,9), but for Mark the key point concerns the will of God. This is followed by a section concerning the commandments (10:17-22), and later Jesus also discusses the commandments with a scribe (12:28-34). Jesus seems to have understood keeping the law as an expression of doing God's will, but, at the same time, not to have understood that observance as functioning in a way that included some and excluded others (see further section IX).

Jesus himself is obedient to God's will and this resulted in his suffering and abandonment by God and the moment of death. His followers, by being obedient, can expect the same. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that this is a difficult concept to grasp and the disciples fail to understand.

## 5. Obstacles to Discernment

In each of the areas just touched on, we have noted both positive and negative aspects. Faith and repentance is contrasted with lack of faith and lack of repentance; the difference between following Jesus and not following, or seeking him; God-given discernment and discernment that is "of the world" or demonic; those on the inside who are dependent on God and do his will, and those on the outside who do not. One of the other main obstacles to discernment is described by Mark as hardness of heart.

We have seen earlier the scriptural view of the heart as the centre of a person's feeling, thinking and willing (p. 39), and Mark records Jesus saying that many evil things come from within, "out of the heart of man" (7:20-23). References to hardness of heart are frequently linked with unseeing eyes and unhearing ears (Is. 6:9-10; Jer. 5:21,23; Deut. 29:3; Ezek. 12:2). At Qumran, the person who wanted to join the community must "walk no more in the stubbornness of a guilty heart" and the one who persists will be refused entry (CD 1:6; 2:25f.) To harden and hardness (πωρώ, πώρωσις) are used in a metaphorical sense where they occur in the New Testament (Rom. 11:7,25; 2 Cor. 3:14) and, along with σκληρός, are used to describe the reluctance of people to respond to God and an inability to discern and understand correctly. This lack of openness and failure to understand seem to be closer to the meaning of the phrase "hardness of heart", rather than callous and uncaring, although the two senses may well be related.

Mark describes the Jewish leaders as well as the disciples in terms of hardness of heart, an inability to discern (3:5; 6:52; 8:17; 10:5). In these last two cases the hardness of heart is linked with a lack of understanding, specifically that the disciples did not understand about the loaves. On

one level they had seen what Jesus had done, but on another, had not discerned correctly. The same may be said of the leaders of the Jewish people. Mark portrays Jesus as giving them sufficient evidence, and yet they remain lacking in understanding, closed in and hard.

Childs interpreted the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as a lack of recognition and discernment of signs (see p. 39f.),<sup>73</sup> and although Mark does not refer to Jesus' miracles as signs, a similar concept may be reflected here. In the record of Pharaoh's hardening, the responsibility for the hardening varies between Pharaoh himself and God's doing, and this dual responsibility is also found in Mark. Hardness of heart is an obstacle to discernment of revelation and in the references to the disciples, Jesus chides them for their own responsibility in this lack of understanding.

Yet, at the same time, it is also true that God can cause a lack of understanding (see 4:12). God is described as one who has "made a separation between and light and the darkness, and divided the spirits of men" (Enoch 41:8); and "those whom he hated he led astray" (CD 2:13). This concept was later used as one of the reasons to explain why the Jewish people did not recognize Jesus and the role of Israel in God's plan of salvation (see esp. Rom. 9-11). The quotation from Isaiah 6:9f. was used in this cause. John uses it specifically to explain Jesus' rejection by the Jews (12:39-40; cf. 9:39). Here the implication is that not only was this unbelief predicted in scripture but also that it is produced by God. John understood that Jesus' signs result in obduracy, whereas for Mark it is the parables that function in a similar way.

This may explain why Mark in his context in chapter 4 concentrates more on the hearing and to a lesser extent on the seeing and does not include the reference to hardness of

heart here. 4:11 and 12 thus show that God can both give the mystery of the kingdom as well as cause a lack of understanding. Yet at the same time Mark also shows that people are responsible for their own discernment or lack of understanding.

#### 6. Jesus as the One who Discerns

In contrast to the lack of understanding of all the characters in the story, Jesus stands out as the one who perceives, the one who does have discernment. He is the one who hears, sees and discerns correctly. He is able to perceive the thoughts and motives of others: He *saw* the faith of the paralytic and his friends (2:5); he *looked upon* the rich young man and loved him (10:21); he knows what others are saying and doing (10:33; 13:43). The linked stories of the woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus' daughter portray Jesus as the one who knows what is happening. Jesus, "*perceiving* in himself that power had gone forth", "*looked* around to see who had done it", in direct contrast to the disciples who question the fact that Jesus can possibly know, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" (5:30-32). When a message came to say that Jairus' daughter is dead, Jesus *ignores* what they say.<sup>74</sup> At the house, Jesus says, "The child is not dead but sleeping" and he is laughed at. It may be significant that Mark then records that Jesus "put them all outside" (ἐξβαλὼν); they are the ones who are unable to perceive correctly, in contrast to Jesus who then heals (or possibly raises) the girl (5:35-41).

Jesus is also able to perceive unfavourable attitudes to himself. At Capernaum, Jesus knows that "the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts", and "*perceived* in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves"

(2:6-8); in the synagogue, Jesus knows that he is being watched, and "*looked around* at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (3:2-5); when asked a trick question, Jesus *knows* their hypocrisy (12:15). Jesus knows both who are his enemies and who will betray him, as well as that Peter will deny him (14:18,20,30).

Along with Peter's denial, Jesus also knows things that will happen in the future; he knows where the disciples will find the donkey and the room for the Last Supper (11:1-6; 14:12-16); he predicts his own death (and vindication) three times in the passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:32), as well as at the anointing and the Last Supper (14:8, 22-25). He also says that the temple will be destroyed and that the Kingdom will come very soon (13:2; 9:1; 13:30) although these references are of a more problematic nature.

This type of deeper perception as well as knowing the future is frequently linked in scriptural tradition with prophetic figures. Jesus was called a prophet, although did not describe himself as such (6:15; 8:28; 14:65; note the accusation in Luke 7:39; also 1 Cor. 14:24f.). One of the most significant traits of a prophet was to possess the Spirit, in fact, "to possess the Spirit was to be a prophet";<sup>75</sup> Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism (1:10), and the discussion about Beelzebul is concerned with the recognition of spiritual power (3:23-30).

Like the prophets, Jesus is also one who hears God's voice (1:11; 9:7); and is described as one who has been sent, as well as one who does God's will (9:37; 10:45; also 1:38; 2:17). His closeness and dependence on God are shown in references to Jesus at prayer, and especially in Gethsemane (1:35; 6:46; 14:32-42). Here the clearness with which Jesus perceives his immediate future as well as his obedience to God's will and the lack of understanding by the disciples is

highlighted in the way the scene is described; the sleeping disciples contrast sharply with the praying Jesus.

We have seen (p. 42) how in the biblical tradition the reaction to the prophet himself and to his message is frequently one of hostility, and may even mean death. This suffering of God's servants is taken up particularly in the wisdom traditions and in the suffering servant motif of Isaiah (Is. 53). Jesus' message too generated hostility, especially in his home town (6:4; see also Mat 23:37ff.//Luke 13:34f.; Luke 11:51 and Acts 7:52 show a line of continuity between the death of the prophets and the death of Jesus).

Mark does not seem to have understood Jesus specifically in terms of the suffering servant, although this motif may be behind his portrayal. His section of teaching on messiahship and discipleship end with the important verse, "For the Son of Man also came not be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). This is the way Jesus is to come into his glory (v.37) and only those who are prepared to suffer and serve in a similar way can share this glory (10:39-44).

All through his gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as the one who hears, sees and discerns. Jesus is both the one to whom revelation is given, especially at his baptism and transfiguration, and also as the one who discerns revelation, because he is in receipt of the Spirit, obedient to God's will and close to God in prayer. By following him his disciples are also able to hear, see and discern correctly. Jesus' discernment resulted in his suffering and death, and his followers can expect the same.

## Summary

Mark portrays revelation in Jesus as being available to all. In a similar way he also portrays that discernment is available to all. There are no social or physical barriers to understanding Jesus, and it is possible for anyone, even for instance a blind beggar or a friendly scribe, to discern the truth about Jesus. Yet Mark portrays this discernment as gradual, as only the beginning of a journey of revelation. The opposite position of lack of understanding is not, as might be expected, a complete understanding.<sup>76</sup> For Mark, that will not take place until after the parousia. While ultimately discernment is God-given, it is also something that one has to strive for and remains in the future. To those who begin this journey of discernment, God will give more understanding. The start of the journey is faith and repentance, along with following Jesus and doing the will of God. Since the followers have not reached the end of their journey yet their understanding is not yet complete.

Hence Mark stresses the continual need for proper discernment, even for those who are following on the way. They are urged to continue to listen, discern and watch and pray. The important criteria is one of following - and followers may also have hard hearts and lack spiritual perception. Those who reject, are themselves rejected. Those who follow, even if they are sometimes imperceptive and unfaithful, are given more instruction.

A failure to recognise something of who Jesus is, is to align oneself with Jesus' enemies; they reject Jesus' claims and are thereafter unable to understand any significance in them. This is characterised by desiring objective proof (sign-seeking), lack of faith/understanding and a lack of repentance. They are unable to move past an ordinary human sense perception to understand the true significance of

events. A God-given understanding is contrasted with an understanding which is human and demonic, portrayed in terms of hardness of heart and not doing God's will.

Here we may note one aspect of Mark's complex portrayal of the disciples, that of a distinction between failure to be a good disciple and failing to be a disciple at all. Mark never suggests that the disciples gave up being disciples (apart from Judas), and in this sense portrays them as very human. They find Jesus' words and actions hard to understand; they sleep in the garden because they are tired; they try to use force to protect Jesus; they run away, not to join the opposition, but because of cowardice; Peter tells lies in order to hide his commitment and to save his life. In none of these examples does Mark say that they ceased to be disciples.

The disciples as a group serve two functions in Mark's narrative - as a historical group and as instructive for discipleship. From both aspects, they are contrasted with Jesus as the one who hears God's voice, does God's will, is able to perceive the motives and hearts of others, and above all discern the significance of what is happening.

We shall look later at how Mark's concept of discernment of revelation has shaped his understanding of community (section IX), but first we shall take a closer look at hearing, as described in chapter 4; seeing as described in chapter 13; and both hearing and seeing as portrayed in the passion narrative, chapters 14-16.

## VI. PARABLES, CHAPTER 4

The proposal that Mark 4:1-34 is a compilation of several layers of tradition is about the only area on which there is general agreement. Redaction critical studies have usually followed on from a form critical analysis of the chapter into small units of tradition which were gradually collected together. Verses 4 and 36 say that Jesus is teaching the crowd from a boat, but in verse 10 he is alone with the twelve and others. Verse 33 with its contrast between "them" and "his own disciples" implies he is still teaching the crowd, although this change of audience is not specified. Most of verses 21-25 also occurs in Matthew and Luke but in other contexts.

In verse 10 Jesus is asked about "the parables" when only one has been given, and then verse 13 implies an explanation of "this parable". This may suggest that verses 10-12 have at some stage been inserted between the Sower Parable and its explanation. When the explanation is analysed it is in fact not found to be an explanation of the details of the Sower Parable. Verse 13 may provide something of a key, that the Sower Parable is a parable about parables, and the explanation is not about how this particular parable may be understood, but how all parables can be understood, and that is by correct listening.

If chapter 4 is taken as it stands, then we must assume that it made some sense to Mark, whether he or another hand was responsible for its compilation. We shall therefore be concerned to set the chapter in the gospel as a whole and see if links can be found between what is contained there and other themes in the gospel.

### Setting

Chapter 4 comes after the important statement in 3:6 that Jesus' enemies are plotting to kill him. Before this point, Mark records that Jesus taught in synagogues, demonstrated his authority in relation to the law. Most of this explanation is for the benefit of the leaders of the Jewish people. The fact that they reject Jesus and plan to kill him has two consequences. First, Jesus' relationship with them becomes increasingly hostile and the focus of teaching changes to the disciples. Second, Jesus' method of presenting his teaching changes. The reasonable, almost objective, style changes to that of the parable. We have seen how the word *παραβολή* is first used in a debate between Jesus and those whom the reader now knows to be enemies (3:23), and thus takes on a negative connotation.

This change in both audience and method does not necessarily imply that Jesus tried one method, found it unsuccessful, and then changed to another. Mark may be showing, more subtly, how his two themes of the rejection of Jesus by the religious leadership and clues as to how his message can be understood correctly come together.<sup>77</sup>

### 4:1-2 Introduction

These two verses may be Mark's own introduction as they sum up many of his themes. Jesus teaches a very large crowd "many things in parables". Mark has previously used *παραβολή* in a negative way (3:23), as something for Jesus' enemies that are hard to understand. However, given the fact that Mark stresses the point that Jesus is *teaching*, the word *παραβολή* may take on a different tone here. If parables are both an important part of Jesus' teaching and difficult to understand, the choice of the Sower Parable by Mark as his first parable may be particularly significant.

#### 4:3-9 The Sower Parable

The Parable itself is about seeds, various soil types and an amazing yield; but there must be something more to it than that for Mark to give it such importance as his first story-type parable and the only one to which an explanation is added. If the Sower Parable were taken to begin in verse 3 with ἰδοὺ and end in verse 8 with καὶ ἐν ἑκατόν, it could easily stand on its own like the other seed parables in verses 26-29 and 30-33. However, the Parable itself is framed by the words ἀκούετε and ὅς ἔχει ᾧτα ἀκούειν ἀκούετω.

Mark may be using the motif of hearing in various related ways here. First, he may want to stress the importance of this particular Parable. These are words of Jesus and therefore should be listened to attentively. Pay attention! Second, he may be alerting the reader to a hidden meaning, something not immediately obvious in terms of the parable itself.<sup>78</sup> Third he may also be suggesting that those who hear this Parable correctly will discern something of God's power at work in Jesus' teaching, and will then be able to begin to understand the who Jesus is.

#### 4:10-12 The Parable Theory

The scene now switches from the crowd to a private teaching session, and it is not clear whether or when Mark switches back to the crowd. A similar setting is mentioned for other important teaching about purity (7:17). The disciples ask (ἠρώτων) Jesus about the parables. This is the first time that the disciples ask Jesus anything (see also 9:32). In 7:17 the disciples ask Jesus about the parable (singular), presumably referring to what he has just said about the things that defile, and Jesus then gives an explanation of that particular topic. In 4:10 the disciples ask Jesus about the parables (plural). Since Jesus has only given one

parable, this might be taken to mean either that Mark is a clumsy editor and should have put parable, or that it refers to Jesus' teaching in general, that is parables like this and many others.<sup>79</sup>

It may also be possible that Mark means both, that is, both this particular parable just recorded and parables in general. The disciples note Jesus' change in teaching method and ask why he teaches in parables rather than some other form, and this also implies that they do not understand the Sower Parable. The understanding of the disciples becomes an explicit issue for the first time and is a theme recurring throughout the rest of the gospel. By the way Mark has set the question immediately following the Sower Parable he may be suggesting that this particular Parable has something to do the the issue. Mark gives an answer to the disciples' question in two parts. The first answers the question in terms of why they should be able to understand (vs. 11-12). The second answers the question how they can understand (vs. 13-20).

#### The mystery of the kingdom of God

Various suggestions have been made as to how Mark has used and understood the word μυστήριον here. As Mark includes these verses between the Sower Parable and its explanation, links have been made with the *raz-pesher* type of interpretation of scripture found in Daniel and at Qumran. If Mark had this kind of mystery in mind, then the mystery given is the Sower Parable and the explanation of that Parable is seen as the interpretation. Thus the disciples are given the interpretation of the mystery contained in the Parable. The mystery is something revealed.

Another strand of interpretation concentrates more on the social function of the mystery for the disciples.<sup>80</sup> It is

they who have been given the mystery and Mark, writing for a Gentile audience, would have associated this with the transmission of secrets to those initiated into mystery cults. The disciples are thus seen as recipients of esoteric knowledge and function in a similar way to the *maskilim* in Daniel,<sup>81</sup> as well as the sectarians at Qumran, who saw their knowledge of the revelation of divine mysteries as determinative for the constitution of their group.

To these insiders the mystery of the kingdom has been given (δέδοται). The use of the perfect tense here suggests that the mystery is something that has already been given, and the use of the passive suggests that it is something given by God. The only previous reference to the kingdom of God in the gospel is at 1:15 which also contains two verbs in the perfect tense (πεπλήρωται and ἤγγικεν). The perfect passive "has been fulfilled" also implies God's action.

Yet it is not clear either when the mystery was given or what is its content. The fact that it has been given might refer to what has just gone immediately before, that is, something in the Sower Parable; or to the fact that God has given it; or that God has given it through Jesus. Various suggestions as to the content of the mystery have also been made: that Jesus is the Messiah; that the Messiah has to suffer; that the kingdom's arrival is imminent; why people don't recognise Jesus as Messiah. The fact that Mark views everything to do with God as somehow mysterious and distant suggests that the content of the mystery should not be pressed too far. It is possible that "mystery" may function in a literary way as a kind of invitation for further exploration.

The kingdom of God itself is never defined, and is described in terms of being "like" something else (4:30). The mystery

of the kingdom is not described in terms of a proposition, such as, the "mystery of the kingdom is *that...*" In the context of these verses, the mystery of the kingdom is contrasted with a negative proposition, i.e., that some people are unable to perceive. This may suggest that the positive side is that some people are able to perceive, which would also suggest that the mystery is something to do with understanding and revelation.

This concept of God giving discernment to some and not to others, is itself described as a mystery, and Brown in his study of the term "mystery" sees this as the real parallel to the use of the word in the gospels.<sup>82</sup> Enoch says that he "saw all the mysteries of the heavens and how the kingdom is divided; and the deeds of men, how they are weighed on the scale" (41:1; see also 103:2ff.). At Qumran also, the granting of insight and forgiveness to some and not to others is seen as one of God's mysteries. "According to the mysteries of God until the end appointed by him", some people fall under the dominion of the Angel of Darkness (1QS 3:22f.). God also "reveals to them the hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray", and how, "in His wonderful mysteries, forgave them their sins and pardoned their iniquities" (CD 3:13ff.). Paul also describes himself as imparting "a secret and hidden wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2:7).

All God's ways are mysterious but he has given insiders the beginnings of understanding. In order to be able to understand the kingdom one needs God-given discernment. But as we have seen, God-given discernment is appropriated by people when they hear the word correctly, hence the framing of the Sower Parable by exhortations to hear.

### Seeing and Hearing

Verses 11 and 12 "have probably generated more secondary literature than any other passage in Mark".<sup>83</sup> In his quotation from Isaiah 6 Mark has included various changes in the text from the LXX version, which suggest that he was using a Targumic version. However it has also been pointed out that Mark is not noted for his use of exact quotations from any one version. He uses scripture more freely and this may suggest, not so much a mis-use of particular quotation, but an intentional adaptation and interpretation.

Evans<sup>84</sup> notes how the verbs in the text in Isaiah are in the imperative mood. The prophet is to go and make the people blind and deaf, *so that* they will not be able to understand. The LXX text changes the tenses to the indicative. The prophet is to keep understanding from the people *because* they are deaf and blind. The verbs in the Targumic version are also in the indicative, and so it is possible to conclude that, for Mark, those who reject the message of the gospel do so because they are obdurate to its divine truth. At Qumran this text from Isaiah was used differently again. Instead of being a word of judgement, it is used to ward and help the elect in protecting themselves from evil.<sup>85</sup>

The significant word here is  $\text{ἵνα}$ . Does it mean that the message is given in parables *because* people are deaf, blind and unable to understand (the human side); or does it mean that the message is given in parables *in order that* those who hear/see will not be able to understand (the divine side)?  $\text{ἵνα}$  and  $\text{μηποτε}$  are usually used to convey the idea of purpose. Matthew and Luke omit the  $\text{μηποτε}$  clause and Matthew replaces the  $\text{ἵνα}$  with  $\text{ὅτι}$ . These changes suggest that they found some difficulty here (Mat. 13:13; Luke 8:10).

Mark views God as the giver of discernment and so it would be consistent for him also to view God as the source of a lack of discernment or obduracy (see p. 40f.). The context in which Mark places this quotation from Isaiah concerns parables and the kingdom. Those who hear the parables correctly will discern in them something of Jesus' authority and identity. For Mark, discernment has two sides. It is both God-given, but people have to be active as well. Similarly, God can withhold discernment, and people can make themselves unresponsive. It may then not be necessary to choose between an interpretation of  $\text{iv}\alpha$  to mean because or in order that. Perhaps Mark means both. Yet it must be noted that  $\text{iv}\alpha$  usually indicates purpose, and that verse 12 is the negative side of verse 11. In verse 11, God has given those inside discernment about the kingdom; so in verse 12, God has not given those outside such discernment.

#### 4:13-20 Explanation of the Sower Parable

Verses 13-20 form the second part of Jesus' answer to the disciples' question concerning the parables. "This parable" ( $\text{τ}\eta\text{ν παραβολ}\eta\text{ν τα}\acute{\upsilon}\text{την}$ ) in verse 13 most naturally refers to the Sower Parable. The disciples have previously asked Jesus about parables, rather than for a specific explanation of the Sower Parable. The implication in the two parallel sentences in verse 13 is that if they are able to understand the Sower Parable, then they will be able to understand all the parables.

The sower sows the word, thus identifying the seed with the word.<sup>86</sup> However, the strict allegorical identification of the seed with the word does not follow through in the explanation. At some points the seed is identified with the word and at others with people who hear the word, suggesting that the explanation is not an allegorical interpretation of the Sower Parable. While it may have originally been an

explanation of the Sower Parable or perhaps even an independent parable of seeds, the way Mark has used it here is important, and we need to examine what function the explanation serves.

Mark has framed the Sower Parable with "listen" and "hear" and this theme is taken up in the explanation by four references to what happens when people *hear* the word. The reactions to the word pick up other of Mark's themes: Jesus' conflict with Satan;<sup>87</sup> tribulation and persecution because of the word (see chapter 13); that discipleship involves a giving up of everything to follow Jesus; hearing and accepting the word is the only way to bear fruit.

This is the only parable for which Mark includes an explanation and if the explanation simply served to clarify the details of the original parable, we would expect him to have included similar explanations for other such parables, or hints as to their meaning. This leads to the conclusion that the interpretation is better understood as an explanation about how parables function. Parables function like seeds, and the most important thing that affects whether the seed will grow or not, is the kind of soil it falls into - that is, whether people hear, understand and accept the word. Parables only work effectively when people hear them correctly.

Mark's understanding of revelation is therefore reflected in his understanding of parables. Although there are four different types of soil, there are basically only two different groups, those who hear correctly and those who don't (see also 8:27-29).<sup>88</sup> Things that are "of the world" can hinder people from hearing correctly, above all, Satan, as well as persecution and riches. God gives the mystery to those whom he chooses, but, conversely those who decide not to understand, put themselves outside God's care and then

cannot understand. This is both why and how parables can function both to reveal and conceal at the same time.

Mark here is making a statement about his epistemology, as we have previously noted with his miracles. Miracles of themselves do not always lead to faith, but rather the important issue is how they are seen, and what is discerned from them. Similarly, Jesus' words do not always lead to faith, the important issue is how they are heard. Mark is not saying that insiders do always understand, since their understanding is incomplete, but rather that they are able to understand. In this immediate context one of the main criteria for being able to understand is doing God's will (3:35), and along with that we may add faith, repentance and following Jesus.

#### The Rest of Chapter 4

The remaining verses, 4:21-41, can be summarised more briefly. Verses 21-25 contain a collection of possibly independent logia, put together by Mark or his source, and continue his theme of correct discernment. Kee suggests that the imagery of this section is that of light, although the word "light" does not actually occur in the passage.<sup>89</sup> While the word lamp (λύχνος) implies light, it is in the Matthean and Lukan versions that the lamp is referred to as being lit or burnt and the lamp is also the object.<sup>90</sup> In Mark, not only is the lamp the subject, but it is also described, not as being lit, but as "comes".<sup>91</sup>

In Mark, the purpose is not directly to do with the function of the light, i.e. so people can see, but the lamp comes "in order that it may be placed on the stand". Thus the fact that the lamp can be seen by all and not specifically its light-giving function is what is important for Mark. If the lamp represents Jesus and/or his teaching, Mark is saying,

not that Jesus' teaching gives light, but that Jesus and his teaching are available to be seen. Anyone can see it - the evidence is available for all to see; it is not hidden as under a bushel or bed.

Verse 24 continues the theme of discernment, βλέπετε τί ὄχοῦετε. Geddert has analysed Mark's use of the term βλέπω and concludes that he uses it as a technical term to focus on a discernment process.<sup>92</sup> Here it is used in a striking mixed metaphor, and cannot logically mean "See what you hear". Rather the meaning is, "watch out, be observant, be discerning of what you hear" and is therefore a call to discern the inner meaning of what is heard and seen.

Verses 23 and 24 link hearing and measuring, and a similar connection is also found in the Qumran literature between measuring and understanding.<sup>93</sup> Mark continues his theme of discernment and the division between those who have and those who have not is similar to the division into insiders and outsiders. Those who have some sort of understanding will be given more; those who have no understanding will not be able to understand at all.

Mark goes on to include further examples of Jesus' teaching in parables, 4:26-32. They are specifically about the kingdom of God and therefore link with verse 11. They are also both about seeds and as the Sower Parable is both about the nature of the kingdom and about the nature of true hearing, these parables may function in a similar way.

The question, "How does the kingdom of God advance?", is like the question, "How does a seed grow?" The sower doesn't know how a seed grows (v.27), Mark doesn't know how the seed grows, only God knows. It grows secretly and produces something out of all proportion from its very small beginning. The question, "How does hearing develop into

understanding?" is also like the question, "How does a seed grow?" A parable works like a seed. Only God knows how it develops secretly, but once heard correctly it can produce amazing results.<sup>94</sup>

Mark's summary (4:33-34) is similar to the chapter's opening verses (1-2) and takes up some of his familiar themes. Many complex arguments have been proposed about the redaction history of these verses, and it does seem that several different ideas have been brought together here. Jesus spoke "many such parables" (v. 33). ἐλάλει in the imperfect tense suggests that he used to speak in this way, and "parables" most naturally refers back to the story parables just given. The addition of "the word" may reflect a later tradition, (see 2:2, also a summary passage; cf. 1:14).

Verse 34 makes a slightly different point. To say that Jesus did not speak without a parable, does not make sense if "parable" is taken to mean the kind of story parables just noted, since he obviously did speak in other ways. Parable here may be taken to mean "riddle", in the sense that some of Jesus' teaching was not particularly clear ("everything" in verse 11). The fact that Mark notes that he explained things privately to his disciples takes up another of his themes, the disciples as recipients of special teaching. This does not necessarily mean that Jesus gave his disciples explanations for each of the story parables, rather, as the interpretation of the Sower Parable shows, that he showed them the means by which they could understand.

Mark concludes this chapter with his account of Jesus stilling the storm (4:35-41). Marcus notes the sleeping and rising motif here.<sup>95</sup> Jesus is the one who trusts in God and is able to sleep (καθεύδων), while the disciples, who lack understanding have to "raise him" (ἐγείρουσιν αὐτόν). The same words are used in the parable of the seed growing

secretly, the man "sleeps and rises" (4:27); Jairus' daughter is "sleeping" and Jesus tells her to "rise" (5:39,41); in Gethsemane, it is the disciples who sleep, until Jesus says, "Rise, let us be going" (14:41f.). Sleeping and rising may symbolically represent death and resurrection, but they may also be linked with discernment. Jesus, as the one who discerns correctly, knows when to be asleep and when to be awake. The disciples, whose discernment is incomplete, sleep when they should be awake (cf. 13:32-37; 14:32-42).

### Summary

Mark's chapter four has a complex structure and weaves together a variety of Mark's themes. It is concerned with insiders and outsiders, and sections are addressed to these two groups; with the function of parables, concealing and revealing; with the hiddenness of the kingdom, and with the present kingdom moving from hiddenness to manifestation.

The chapter highlights Jesus as teacher, drawing great crowds, but here Jesus' teaching is in parables. Parables both conceal and reveal at the same time: for those who are outside and reject the teaching, the result is judgement (3:23-30); those on the inside have been given the mystery of the kingdom by God. God has also given them discernment so that they are able to hear and understand correctly. Conversely, Mark can also say that God has not given those outside such discernment. These are the ones who hear but do not understand.

In terms of the gospel itself, the truth about Jesus will not be known until his death on the cross; but on a wider perspective, a full revelation will not be made until his parousia. Hooker summarises the chapter as follows: "For

Mark, the messiahship of Jesus is hidden during his ministry, and the meaning of his teaching is also hidden, except to those to whom God reveals it. The kingdom is displayed in the life of Jesus - but it is displayed like seed thrown on to the earth: you do not know that it is there unless you are let into the secret." 96

## VII. ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE, CHAPTER 13

Mark's chapter 13 is particularly addressed to Jesus' followers in the time after the cross and resurrection rather than in Jesus' contemporary situation (note 13:14,37 and 30; cf. 9:1). Yet from a narrative point of view, chapter 13 cannot be isolated from the rest of the gospel. It is only in light of this chapter that the significance of the court scene in chapter 14 and the crucifixion scene in chapter 15 can be understood. Chapter 13 points to the heavenly and cosmic significance of the earthly events to come. The editorial point of the chapter seems to be to encourage the disciples and Mark's readers to remain alert. Spiritual vigilance is needed to stay alert because of the imminent end, whether this is seen as the trial and crucifixion or the parousia. Vigilance is needed because this short time is one of both spiritual and physical danger, and it is to be achieved by the development of spiritual insight.

### The Temple

The setting of chapters 11,12 and 13 is in and around the temple. The journey is over; Jesus and his disciples are no longer on the way, but in some sense have arrived. Jesus entered Jerusalem, went to the temple and looked round, before the "cleansing" incident. We then find him walking and teaching in the temple. At the beginning of our section, Mark records that he came out of the temple, and then deliberately "sat opposite the temple" (11:11,15,27; 12:25; 13:1,3).

While many features of Mark's understanding of the temple remain unclear, the fact that Jesus sat opposite the temple

to give this long section of teaching is significant. Revelation, like Isaiah's vision and Samuel's call, no longer takes place in the temple, but outside it. We have seen how for Mark Jerusalem functions in a very negative way and the temple seems to epitomise this. The "cleansing" of the temple is not really a cleansing at all, as if the temple would remain, but in a purified state. The way Mark has recorded his material shows that he sees Jesus as completely overthrowing the temple and its cult.

Jesus shows he can forgive sins (2:6-12), and this means, not only that he is doing something only God can do, but also that there is no longer any need of the temple cult.<sup>97</sup> The temple incident is framed by the fig tree episodes (12-14; 20-25), and, whatever else they may teach, imply that because the temple and cult have produced no fruit they will wither away.<sup>98</sup>

Mark records that the disciples *heard* what Jesus said about the fig tree, and later when they *saw* it again they *remembered* (11:14,20,21). This same sequence of hearing, seeing and remembering is made by Jesus to encourage the disciples to understand the deeper significance of the feeding miracles. Here it is used to point to the significance of the dead tree. Jesus then says to the disciples, "Have faith in God". For Mark faith denotes not trust but understanding, and it is as they call these things to mind and remember them that they discern their true meaning.

We have seen how the Vineyard Parable (12:1-9) is an attack on the Jewish leadership, but the addition of verses 10-11 about a renewed cornerstone sets the parable in a temple context. One of the results of the leadership's rejection of the son is that he (i.e. Jesus) will become the most important stone in a new kind of temple.<sup>99</sup> The story of the

woman anointing Jesus (14:3-9) may also point to the end of the temple. She anointed Jesus on his head, like the anointing of a messianic king; but the event takes place, not in the temple, but in the leper Simon's house in Bethany. Geddert suggests that the widow's money in the temple, her "whole living", was wasted there.<sup>100</sup>

We may therefore conclude that Mark says that the old temple will be destroyed and that a new temple centred on Jesus will replace it. Here we find that the imagery used of destruction and rebuilding becomes mixed.<sup>101</sup> 12:1-12 and 14:57-64 speak of the mutual rejection of Jesus and the Jewish leadership, as well as the destruction of the temple and the resurrection all together. The implication seems to be that Israel's leaders, by identifying with and protecting the temple, would lose the temple and their lives. Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple and cult, and by losing his life at their hands, would in fact save his life and replace the temple with a new kind of access to God.

In view of Mark's distinctive use of βλέπετε later in the chapter, it may be significant that the disciples say, "Look (ἴδε) what (wonderful) stones!"; and Jesus replies, "Do you see (βλέπετε) these great buildings?" (13:1f.). The disciples are simply looking, and not discerning the significance of what they are seeing; nor, by implication have they discerned the significance of Jesus' actions and words in relation to the temple.

#### Discernment and Signs

When Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew ask, "When will this be, and what will be the sign?" (13:4). There are some parallels here with the introduction to the discussion about parables in chapter 4. In chapter 4 it is not clear whether the

disciples are asking about the one Sower Parable, or about parables in general. So here, it is not clear whether they are asking about the destruction of the temple, "When will this be?" (RSV translation, although the Greek has ταῦτα, meaning these things). This is parallel to the second part of the question, "What will be the sign when *these things* are all to be accomplished?" (ταῦτα πάντα). It may be that Mark assumes that the destruction of the temple would be part of a series of events leading to the end.

The disciples ask for the sign as a means of recognising the approach of the end, as in chapter 4 where they ask for a means of understanding the parables. Concerning parables, Jesus does not give a reply in the form, "this is what this parable means", but, "this is how you can understand all parables". Similarly here; Jesus' reply does not say, "these are the events and this is what they mean", but, "this is how you can understand all these events". Concerning the parables, they are to listen and understand; concerning these events, they are to see and understand.

The time frame appears to change at 13:5. Verses 1-4 are set in the time in Jerusalem immediately before the passion, whereas verses 5-37 are set in the implied future of the story. Mark is making several points here for his readers. As there was a need to discern correctly before the cross, there will be a continuing need to discern after. Although the crucial point of revelation is at the cross, the time afterwards will not be one where discipleship, discernment and faith would no longer be required. In fact the opposite is the case and the demands of discipleship are on-going.

*Verses 5-8*        The years after the resurrection were particularly unsettled and some may have believed that such events meant the imminent end. The references to wars, earthquakes and famines are familiar in apocalyptic

literature for the final tribulations.<sup>102</sup> But Mark has worded his last phrase "the beginning of the sufferings" (ἀρχὴ ὀδύων); they are called again to be discerning (βλέπετε) that they are not misled or deceived (μὴ θροσῖσθε). The present imperative (ἀκούητε) may also imply repetition, when you keep hearing of war. The end is coming, but not yet, so keep attentive.

*Verses 9-13* While the sufferings referred to in verses 5-8 are general, those in verses 9-13 are specifically experienced by believers. They are called to discern, not in order that they may avoid persecution, but in order to realise that it is to be expected and not escaped. As God is the one who has given them insight initially, so too, via the Holy Spirit, will he continue to give believers discernment to respond correctly in times of crisis.<sup>103</sup>

*Verses 14-27* This discernment to remain faithful witnesses in times of persecution, seems to be disregarded in the following verses - when the temple is destroyed, the disciples are to flee (φευγέτωσαν). Although Mark is careful not to give a detailed timetable, it does appear that he viewed the destruction of the temple as the mark of the beginning of the end. He repeats references to "in those days", linking the present time with the cosmic upheavals of the end (13:17,19,24). He also includes references to the imminence of the end in "this generation" (13:30; cf. 9:1), and portrays the climax of the end events as Jesus coming from heaven as Son of man (13:24-27; also 8:38; 14:62).<sup>105</sup>

### The Fig Tree

The disciples are to discern from all these things but especially they are to learn from the fig tree, another "parable". The references to the fig tree in chapter 11

(vs. 12-14, 20-21) are interspersed with Jesus going in and out of the temple. The fact that the fig tree is in leaf but lacks fruit and then withers away, may reflect Mark's understanding that the temple had not fulfilled its purpose and is therefore destined to be destroyed.

The second reference to the fig tree is more allusive. The Greek (μάθετε τὴν παραβολὴν) is not so well brought out in the RSV translation, "learn its lesson" (13:28). We have seen that Mark (and Jesus) could interpret parables allegorically (the Sower and Vineyard) so it is possible here to interpret the fig tree as representing the temple, and the parable suggesting something that has a deeper meaning that may be hard to understand. The parallelism implies that when you see fig leaves,<sup>106</sup> you *know* summer is near; so, when you see certain things happening, you *know* "he is near".<sup>107</sup>

If, as is probable, Mark was writing prior to the fall of Jerusalem, but at a time when this catastrophe was a possibility, we may suggest that Mark thought the destruction of the temple was the mark of the beginning of the end. We may also note Mark's concern with false prophets and false messiahs, which frame his references to the temple (vs. 5f. and 21f.; see also 1 John 2:18; 4:1-3). These events are imminent, at the very gates and within this very generation.

#### The Doorkeeper Parable

There is a change in tone in verses 32-37. The disciples are not only urged to be discerning (βλέπετε), but also to watch (γρηγορεῖτε). Geddert in his study of these two words, finds a clear distinction between the two: the first to mean "be discerning" and the second to mean "remain faithful".<sup>108</sup> These verses are Jesus' answer the disciples' question in

verse 4, "When will this be?" Jesus says to his disciples that he does not know, and Mark says to his readers that "you" do not know (v.33). What Mark is saying here is not necessarily that the end will come soon, but that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly.

Parallels between the Doorkeeper Parable and the Gethsemane account have often been noted. Both have the "watching-coming-finding-sleeping" motif, as well as references to the hour (ἡ ὥρα) in common; and watching (γρηγορέω) is used by Mark only in these two texts. To "watch" seems to have both a literal as well as a symbolic meaning. In the parable the disciples are urged to watch four times in case they are found asleep; in Gethsemane, they are urged to watch three times and found asleep three times.

In Gethsemane the disciples cannot do what Jesus asks of them, and they also "did not know what to answer him" (14:40). Mark also notes at the transfiguration that they did not know what to do or what to say, because they were afraid (9:6; see also 9:32). He is urging them to remain faithful and to be vigilant in view of the imminent end. In order to do this they will need to be especially discerning. Mark therefore seems to make a connection between correct discernment and correct action, and calls his readers to be discerning as well as to be faithful.

### Summary

The overall message of Mark 13 reflects the situation of Mark's community before the fall of the temple. In common with other apocalyptic writers, he writes in the context of a mounting crisis, which he sees as building up to the final end crisis. Jesus gives specific teaching to the elect in

order to help them understand the significance of these events. As in Daniel, there seems to be no suggestion of the elect joining in the battle, but of enduring the suffering right to the end.

However Mark also counter-balances what might develop (or has already developed) into fervent apocalyptic enthusiasm. He specifically warns against sign-seeking. Those who are able to discern the signs will not thereby be able to work out a timetable for the date and hour of the end. Rather they will discern that the signs are to encourage believers to perceive that the tribulations in general and their suffering in particular are part of the trials of the end. The end is very near, but not yet (v.7); these sufferings are just the beginning (v.8); other things will happen after that tribulation (v.24); within this generation, but not immediately (v.30); and most importantly, no one knows, only the Father (v.32).<sup>109</sup>

It seems likely that Mark saw the destruction of the temple, not just as an important example of the kind of events to happen, but the major event that would mark the beginning of the end. Yet there are also some suggestions that he saw Jesus' death itself as the beginning of the end, and we have seen how the imagery of the destruction and re-building of the temple and the death and resurrection of Jesus are interlinked.

Since Mark has placed the Doorkeeper Parable both at the end of his apocalyptic discourse and at the beginning of his passion narrative, he may see in it relevance for both. The two parts of the the Parable could well have been two eschatological parables of Jesus; one beginning with something like the Parable of the Talents (work while you wait) and the second a Parable of the Watchman (stand faithful). Mark may have made it a parable about the passion

and placed it in an eschatological context, or conversely given an eschatological parable passion overtones.

References to the day and hour may speak of Jesus' passion (see 14:41, 2:20), and references to the time (ὁ καιρός) speak of God's time (13:33; 1:15). The four three-hour watches find parallels in the passion narrative as well as references to cockcrow. What may originally have been an eschatological parable has been placed here by Mark to emphasise the eschatological and cosmic significance of the passion. Up to this point Jesus has urged the disciples to be discerning; now he urges them to be faithful to act correctly in light of their discernment. In both areas he portrays the disciples as failing.

#### VIII. THE PASSION NARRATIVE, CHAPTERS 14-16

The Passion Narrative is full of Marcan irony, and contrasts two broad groups of people: the disciples, who have heard, seen and begun to understand, but fail in their actions; and the opponents, who have heard, seen and not understood and, on their terms, succeed in their actions. Jesus himself is the one who has truly discerned, is truly obedient to God's will and paradoxically reveals God's power in his death.

From what Mark has said earlier his readers know that the scribes, Pharisees and chief priests are enemies and will eventually kill Jesus. They *perceived* that the Vineyard Parable was told against them, and then they were *seeking* to arrest Jesus by stealth. Judas offered to betray Jesus and "when they *heard* it they were glad" (12:12; 14:1,10). Mark also refers to Herod hearing John the Baptist "gladly", and the readers know what happened to him (6:20).

Mark specifically says the witnesses were false and did not agree. They say, "We *heard* him say ..." On one level, Mark does not record that Jesus ever said these words, as so they are false because they could not have heard him say so. On another level, it is clear that Mark did understand that Jesus' death and the destruction of the temple were intimately connected, and it is therefore possible that Jesus did say something similar. It may be important for Mark to stress that the witness was false because they had not heard/understood correctly what Jesus was saying, or that this is Mark's irony that the witnesses are in fact saying something true in spite of themselves.

The high priest, however, has no need of witnesses. He *hears* Jesus' reply to his question about his identity as the

Christ, but he hears it as blasphemy. Whether the question was actually put in this form and whether Jesus answered "I am" is a matter of debate,<sup>110</sup> but in terms of Mark's irony it is significant that it is the high priest himself who is asking the question. It is only the high priest who can proclaim God's chosen one as the Messiah. He is asking the correct question, but has already decided what his response to the answer will be in order to find some grounds to condemn Jesus to death (v. 55).

Pilate, not only wondered (θαυμάζειν) at Jesus' reply, but also perceived (ἐγίνωσκεν) the motives of the chief priests (15:5,10). This could be a possible chance of escape for Jesus or for Pilate himself, but the crowd, which has not been mentioned since 12:12, makes another appearance - to be manipulated to turn against Jesus and call for his death. Three times Pilate puts questions to the crowd, heightening the dramatic irony (15:9-15). He offers to release the King of the Jews: the crowd call for Barabbas. He asks what he shall do with "the man whom you call King of the Jews": the crowd say, "crucify". He asks, "Why, what evil has he done?": the crowd shout all the more, "Crucify him".

The Roman soldiers then do call Jesus, King of the Jews, but this is explicitly stated to be mockery (15:20). One of the other mockeries referred to (14:65) is that of Jesus being blindfolded and told to prophesy, increasing the irony of the situation that Jesus' enemies think they can see and that Jesus cannot. The chief priests and scribes continue the mockery when Jesus is on the cross, saying, "... come down from the cross, that we may see *and believe* (15:32). This is exactly the kind of evidence and method Mark has been arguing against all through his gospel. They are asking for a sign on their own terms, which is exactly what Jesus has said he would not give and warned his disciples against (8:11-15).

In terms of the narrative, this is the culmination of "seeing and not perceiving" described in 4:12. Those who are outside will look and look and not perceive, even when the evidence is under their noses.<sup>111</sup> Jesus is displayed publicly as a king before them, and yet they *don't* see. If Jesus were to do what they asked he would not in fact be the Messiah, the Son of God, because these roles can only be understood in terms of a suffering Son of man.

Next Mark refers to the bystanders. They hear Jesus calling out, and Mark specifically points out the difference between what Jesus actually said and what they thought they had heard. Not only is their hearing suspect, as they think he is calling Elijah, but then they too wait to see whether in fact Elijah would come to rescue him. There may have been some current expectation that Elijah would come to the help of the godly in their time of need, but since Mark has already identified John the Baptist with Elijah, and he has been put to death, there is no possibility of any help.

All the other people in the plot of the passion, when they speak to or about Jesus, do so in antipathy or mockery. Earlier, Jesus has been perceived as a dangerous rebel (14:48); the scribes and Pharisees have arranged his arrest; the chief priests accuse him of blasphemy and ask for evidence on their own terms. Pilate is swayed by the fickle crowd. The Roman soldiers torture and mock, and yet others mis-hear Jesus' final words and still look for a sign. All these different perceptions about what a king ought to do, be and say are wrong, and makes them blind to what is going on.

This portrayal is in contrast to that of Jesus: he knows his betrayer, and although says very little, declares the truth about himself (14:42,62; 15:2). It is only Jesus who *sees* what is going on, as he predicted. This is in sharp

contrast with Peter who, declares, "I neither *know* nor *understand* what you mean" (vs.68,72); and until the cock crows does not *remember* what Jesus had said would happen to both of them. Mark's portrayal of Jesus through the passion shows, more than the other gospels, the utter desolation of Jesus. The reader knows, in contrast to all the other people, that what Jesus says is true. The fact that he cries out to God (note, not to the Father) in agony heightens his utter desolation and abandonment on the cross (15:34). This is a moment of darkness when the only true "insider" becomes an "outsider".

The culmination of this part of the passion narrative is just one verse about the centurion. There may be many reasons why it would be inappropriate for Mark's community to accept that a centurion, of all people, should be the first to recognise Jesus.<sup>112</sup> But, conversely, Mark may have specifically chosen a centurion as the most unusual and most unlikely character to do this. He is the first person to recognise Jesus as the Son of God after his death. And the corollary follows that if he can do it, anyone can; and perhaps also that this is so unusual, it must be God who has made it possible for him.

It was only *after* Jesus had died that he was he able to understand. He saw, not a spectacular sign or some kind of miracle, but simply the fact that Jesus died, as no doubt he had seen many others die in a similar way. Yet Mark has little to say about how it was that the centurion was able to make this statement. His irony may also be acute here in the motif of reversal: the crucifier acknowledges the crucified.

The centurion says, "Truly this man was the (or a) Son of God". The readers have known this from the start of the gospel; God declared it of Jesus at his baptism, as well as

at his transfiguration (1:11; 9:7). Yet it is only now that they know exactly what the role of the Son of God is, that it is to be understood in terms of a suffering Son of man. All through the gospel while there may have been genuine perceptions of Jesus' identity, until this moment they have remained incomplete. Mark's themes of rejection and suffering, revelation and recognition come together here. This again points to the fact that only God can give this insight, this seeing and understanding.

Between Jesus' moment of death and the declaration of the centurion, Mark records that the temple veil was "torn in two, from top to bottom" (v.38). Some have seen this as an intrusion into the story-line and question how Mark in fact could know that it happened at that precise moment. The text could continue without interruption from verse 37 to verse 39. But taking the text as it stands, it is obvious that Mark, or the tradition he was using, saw some connection between Jesus' death and the tearing of the temple veil.

We may note the significance of the order: Jesus dies; the temple veil is torn; the centurion is then able to know who Jesus is. The same word for tear apart (ἐσχίσθη) is used here as at Jesus baptism (1:10), and both are in the passive. God tears open the heavens to enable Jesus to know he was his Son, by *hearing* his voice. God tears the veil to enable the centurion (and in effect all others) to know that Jesus is his Son by *seeing*, by discerning, the significance of his death.<sup>113</sup>

In view of the destruction and re-building of the temple motif noted earlier, it seems more likely that Mark understood the torn curtain, not as symbolising a new kind of access to God, where the "temple" is maintained in theory if not in practice as a place where people can come in to meet with God; but rather as a complete destruction of that

sort of meeting place between God and his people. This is to be replaced by a "meeting place" in Jesus, as the crucified king in a temple "not made with hands" (14:58).

Apart from the references to Peter's denial, the last time the disciples were mentioned was after Jesus' arrest when they all ran away (14:50), and perhaps it is also ironic that they do not see the crucifixion. They played no part in the final drama. Mark does not bring them in again until very near the end of his narrative, and then only indirectly (16:7).

His immediate concern at this point is with the women. They are the ones who are "looking on", albeit "from afar"; they who had *followed* and ministered to Jesus in Galilee, *saw* where Jesus' body was put (16:40f.). It is not clear as to why Mark did not mention these women earlier. Some have argued that Mark was aware of their presence, but deliberately obscured it. Mark may be using his irony here again - those who in a religious drama, would be considered to be far on the outside, that is the Roman centurion and the women, are in fact true insiders.

If for Mark the cross is the point of ultimate revelation, then his brief description here of events after the cross, point to its cosmic significance and a new period of revelation. The sun had risen, a small detail perhaps, but this is in contrast with the record of the three hours of darkness just before Jesus dies.<sup>119</sup> The only angel in the narrative appears here (ἄγγελος, 16:5; apart from the reference to angels at Jesus' temptation, 1:13), highlighting the importance of this event.

The women were seeking to anoint his dead body - both actions were misguided. Mark uses seeking in a negative way and Jesus has already been anointed at Bethany. Elsewhere in

the New Testament the resurrection is referred to as God raising Jesus, and the use of the passive here implies the same (ἡγέρθη). The angel tells the women to see the place (ἰδε). Interestingly here this seems to be more of a factual looking than a call to discern something from the evidence. Although there does seem to have been strong and relatively independent strands of evidence that the tomb was in fact empty, this does not seem to have been a major point in later discussions about the resurrection, and there is no record of an undisturbed tomb or tomb veneration.

The angel sends the women away from the tomb to tell the disciples that they will see Jesus in Galilee, confirming what Jesus had predicted earlier (14:28). The disciples themselves are now able to speak of what they have seen (Jesus' glory) since he is now risen (9:9). By reporting the event in this way, Mark confirms that the event has in fact happened.

Other "private" events in Jesus' life are spoken of by Mark - the baptism voice, the temptation, the transfiguration, Gethsemane. But the resurrection is the one supremely private and personal event, not only for Jesus himself, but also for Mark's readers. Mark offers his readers no proofs of the resurrection in terms of resurrection appearances. Only the discerning believer can confirm the reality of Jesus' risen power; it is only by following Jesus to Galilee that he can be seen. "Galilee" thus takes on a more symbolic significance as the place where anyone can "see" Jesus by a process of spiritual discernment.

This is consistent with Mark's understanding of faith as a matter of insight and not merely of information. The disciples did not understand about the resurrection earlier although Jesus had specifically predicted it (8:31; 9:9,31; 10:34; 14:28). He does not give many clues as to how his

readers will know - but if they follow the risen Jesus, they will see him, and then they will know.<sup>114</sup>

The journey motif in the gospel is not only a physical journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, but it is also a journey of revelation. Each of the passion and resurrection predictions are given "on the way". Yet in another sense this journey does not finish at Jerusalem. Jesus, who was walking ahead of them, now goes ahead of his disciples to Galilee. The texts after each of the predictions are phrased in general terms of anyone and whoever, applicable to all. The disciples and any followers of Jesus have to keep on journeying, following, cross-bearing, suffering, witnessing and discerning.

This idea of a revelation journey may help to explain the puzzling end to the gospel. In terms of the plot, one may assume that the angel told the truth - that Jesus did go before them to Galilee and that the disciples did see him there. But it is consistent with Mark's style that he does not tell his readers what they saw - both in terms of *what* it was they saw or what they *saw*, that is, understood or discerned. The fact that Mark wrote a gospel at all shows the on-going nature of discipleship. It is as if he is sending his readers back to the beginning to start the journey all over again.

## IX. REVELATION AND COMMUNITY

Commentators have recently been giving increased attention to the corporate dimensions of discipleship and to the social implications that such a discernment of revelation may have. Insights of sociology and social anthropology into the nature of groups and their self-definition suggest that the social identity of a group depends largely on the distinctiveness of its practices and beliefs. The identity of a group and the boundaries it sets for its self-definition and self-differentiation may have important social implications.<sup>115</sup>

In looking in more detail at what might be deduced about Mark's community, one immediate problem is the fact that there is virtually no direct information about it. The main evidence we have is from the gospel itself, and it is often very difficult to determine whether a particular passage or emphasis is there to reflect the current views of the community or to correct, counter-balance or deny certain opposing views. Here we shall be focussing, not so much on the community "behind" the gospel, but on the community which can be discovered from within the "story-world" of the gospel itself.

A shared world view as well as an understanding of revelation, shaped the understanding of community reflected in the book of Daniel as well as in the separated community at Qumran. Their theological constructions were not just theories, but had practical effects, both in the ordering of the community, as well as providing a definition for its very existence. We will note certain similarities here with Mark's community, as well as some significant differences.

## 1. An Inclusive Community

In one way or another the concentration on and adherence to particular aspects of the law or an inspired interpretation of the law gave rise to bitter disputes as well as a variety of sects and parties. This adherence to the law can be described in terms of "zeal" - a zeal reflecting a desire to mark boundaries between one group and another.<sup>116</sup>

Another reflection of the use of boundaries can be found in the use of the word "sinner". Dunn<sup>117</sup> notes that although in the Psalms the sinners are both the wicked and the Gentiles (Ps.9:17), this does not necessarily mean that the Gentiles are wicked in the sense of being murderers and robbers, but that they are lawless and outside the boundaries already set by the Psalmist (see Gal. 2:15). This understanding of sinners as those outside Israel was later used to reflect divisions within Israel (see 1 Macc. 1:43; 2:44,48). At Qumran the division between the righteous and the sinner is not that the sinners behave in a lawless way, but that they do not follow the law as interpreted by that community (CD 4:8; 1QS 5:7-11; 1QH 7:12).<sup>118</sup>

Thus when Mark records that Jesus "came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (2:16), this does not necessarily mean that the sinners are those who behave in a lawless way, but that they are the ones who have been declared outside the boundaries, the boundaries set by those who consider themselves to be the righteous.

These boundaries set by the righteous are also reflected in an understanding of holiness. The Sadducees stressed the maintenance and participation in the cult as detailed in the law, centred on the temple. The Pharisees attempted to maintain this sort of purity designed for the temple in

everyday life. Intense concern with this maintenance of holiness also became an essential requirement for being part of an eschatological community. So Daniel is depicted as a pure and ideal member (1:8; 3:6;15). The community at Qumran felt it necessary to withdraw altogether from a corrupt society, and physically separated themselves both from Gentiles and apostate Jews.

In different ways, then, these groups used various aspects of the law to define the boundaries of their particular group, to justify their assumption that only their own group was acceptable to God. A definition of community as a group acceptable to God is just as important for Mark, but the ground rules for membership are rather different. Membership of Mark's community is voluntary and consists of those who have heard and accepted Jesus' message. It is their relation to Jesus rather than observance of the law that is determinative. The new community is not to be defined by any current aspects of holiness.

A Jesus who had paid little attention to the regulations of the law would not have posed much of a threat to the establishment, since he would be self-condemned. The issue more concerned the fact that Jesus was observant of the law, but did not observe it in an acceptable way. He seems to have rejected an attitude which made the way in which religion was conducted and personal relationships governed dependent on an exclusive observance of the law and tradition. For Jesus, observance of the law is not seen as a boundary marker, and neither is failure to observe the law regarded as an exclusion. "The truly great will not define the borders of the Christian fellowship so that it includes only themselves".<sup>119</sup>

While leaders eventually die and groups come and go (Acts 5:33-39), Jesus, because of the resurrection, is able to

have a continuing relationship with his followers in a way that Daniel and the Teacher of Righteousness are not. They are to engage in mission which is seen as a sharing in Jesus' own mission and as an echoing of his own message.

Although the *maskilim* function as teachers, they do not seem to have had a particular desire to reach others outside their group. The relationship between the Qumran community and Essenes in the wider community is not clear, but the covenanters do not seem to have had a specific programme to draw in new recruits.<sup>120</sup> For Mark's community, their knowledge is not something inward looking. Their message is not to be kept within the group but is to be actively shared with others, indeed with the whole world (14:9). It may be significant that, unlike the self-understanding of the community at Qumran, Jesus did not use the term "remnant" to describe his followers.

In order to become a member of Mark's community there are no previous requirements, either to be wise or trained as a teacher or to undertake a long period of initiation. To hear and understand, to see and perceive is all that is required, although there may be a gradual development in understanding. It is not suggested that within the community the amount of knowledge possessed is a criteria for superiority, and the twelve do not have a hierarchical role. It is a discernment and recognition of who Jesus is that is determinative, not how much knowledge is possessed.<sup>121</sup> Membership of the group is voluntary and members may come from any social background, although how far this is an abstracted ideal and how far a genuine reality is hard to determine.

The rules and qualifications for participation in Mark's community are thus rather different from those set out by other groups or sects of the time, especially in terms of

its non-exclusiveness and openness. Yet other points of similarity may be found, more especially with the definitions of boundaries in terms of revealed insight, predominant in Daniel and at Qumran.

## 2. A Community Based on Revelation

Membership of Mark's community is based on certain claims about divine revelation, the discernment of that revelation in Jesus, and an understanding that such discernment leads to salvation. The concept of revelation as a determining factor in group definition is a familiar one in eschatological groups. Daniel and the *maskilim* form a separate group because God has revealed his mysteries to them. At Qumran the community is defined as such because God has revealed his secrets to them (1QH 1:21). In these cases the boundaries of the group are defined by the recognition that only some have received this revelation and that this fact is determinative for membership of that particular community.<sup>122</sup>

In Daniel there is an emphasis on the distinction between revelation and interpretation. The revelation may be given in the form of visions or in scripture. The interpretations are frequently given by an angel in the context of a vision. The Qumran community saw itself as an extension of the heavenly world, and as such the hidden secrets of scripture had been made uniquely known to them. They have not only seen angels but have also "heard the voice of Majesty", and were already part of the eternal fellowship. Thus members of the elect Qumran community can be described as "children of the eternal mystery" (1QS 2:25 ).

In Mark the disciples as insiders receive private disclosures as well as private teaching or explanations.

They are given the mystery of the kingdom in contrast to the outsiders (see also 1 Cor. 15:51; 2 Cor. 12:1-10). Part of this mystery is the very division of people to whom revelation is given and those to whom it is not. Discernment is God-given, and the matters that are to be discerned concern, not only interpretations of scripture, but the revelation given in and by Jesus. It is his words that need to be heard and his actions that need to be seen, and both need to be discerned correctly.

Mark's frequent references to suffering may suggest a community actually experiencing some form of persecution. Whether persecution was the result of the setting up of boundary markers to define the community, or whether persecution itself led to the sharper definition of those markers is hard to determine. Mark records that Jesus told his followers to "take up the cross" and "drink the cup" and in the explanation of the Sower Parable "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word", the present tense suggests present persecution (8:34; 10:39; 4:17; and 13:9).

The suffering of the righteous remnant of the people of God followed by their own vindication is a common feature of an apocalyptic world view. The *maskilim* were willing to accept death rather than sacrifice their ideals. Although they were to play a passive role and offer no military resistance in the crisis, they expected victory for themselves, even if some were killed. Knowledge of the mystery which had been revealed to Daniel would save him and his friends from final destruction.<sup>123</sup> Their ultimate deliverance at the end of the age is secure, when "Your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book" (12:1). This concept is also found in earlier vindications, such as the delivery from the furnace and lions.

The Qumran community was also willing to accept death, but saw themselves actively involved by participating in the final battle. The elaborate preparations described in the War Scroll were designed to ensure victory for themselves. "And you, the sons of his covenant, be strong in the ordeal of God! His mysteries shall uphold you until he moves his hand for his trials to come to an end" (1QM 17:8-9). Here too knowledge of the mystery will save the community from destruction and give them victory (CD 8:32-34).

The members of Mark's community were to take a non-violent role. This is not a political role in the sense of having as a primary purpose the changing of political or economic systems, but neither was it a-political in the sense of simply accepting social structures and conventions. Jesus' followers are to continue to discern, to be alert and to be witnessing, and their preaching itself had social and political implications for community organization. Yet their victory would come in seeming defeat. As Jesus' death was a victory in defeat, so his followers will gain their lives by losing them (8:37f.).<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, this opposition to the kingdom is to be expected. If the kingdom of God is at work, then it is actively provoking a counter-reaction. The cosmic struggle against Satan makes evil appear to work harder. Opposition is actually provoked by the preaching of the word (4:13-20, where Satan snatches the word away).

If suffering itself was expected as heralding the end-time, speculation about the timing of the end was also a characteristic apocalyptic view. Mounting political crises were seen in terms of the final cosmic struggle, and suffering was to be expected as part of the end-time eschatological suffering. For Daniel, his interpretation of the 70 weeks led him to understand that he was living in the last half of the final week before the end (9:24-7).

Suffering would come in the time of Antiochus and his death would happen at the same time as God's great and final judgement. For Qumran, the covenanters saw themselves in some sense as already participating in the glory of the heavenly realm, and they are to join with the angelic armies to defeat their opponents, probably seen as the Romans.

While Mark appears to have expected the end to come within his generation (9:1; 13:30), probably with the destruction of the temple, he also speaks against a preoccupation with discerning dates and times. No one, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" knows the day or hour (13:32). While the end will come soon and suddenly, the sufferings are only the beginnings of the general end-time sufferings.

The records we have concerning Daniel and Qumran stop short of saying what happened to their leaders or in the imminent battle. While Mark stops short in one sense, if it is assumed he was writing before the destruction of the temple, he is also able to write about what happened to his leader. His understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection has implications for his community in terms of their continuing discipleship. While Mark's community, like those of Daniel and Qumran, are in one sense still waiting, in another they know that something decisive has already happened.

Perfection of knowledge will not be possible until the renewal of the age and perfect wisdom was seen as an eschatological gift of the time of salvation itself.<sup>125</sup> Yet the *maskilim* do appear to grasp and understand the knowledge given to them. The Qumran members underwent a period of training as well as of ranking on how well they both knew and kept the law; those who failed were downgraded or excluded. "If a man quit the general body in order to walk in the stubbornness of his own heart, he is never to

return to formal membership of the community" (CD 7:22-24; also 7:18-19). For Mark the failure of the disciples to understand, in spite of being given private teaching by Jesus does not result in exclusion from the community. It means that the members of his community are to continue to discern and perceive, to hear and to see, not only by studying, meditating on and interpreting God's word in scripture, but by continuing to hear and perceive, to see and understand God at work in the words and actions of Jesus, and as they follow him and do the will of God.

Mark does not give his readers any proof of the resurrection in terms of resurrection appearances. He includes a message from the angel to the disciples that Jesus "is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you" (16:7). Galilee was the location of the revelation in Jesus as well as the start of his mission and the beginning of a new way of life for his followers. After the resurrection "Galilee" takes on a more symbolic meaning and becomes the place where anyone can "see" Jesus by discernment, the place where the mission and witness to the whole word begins and the place where a new way of life affecting family and social relations starts.<sup>126</sup> The order of the instruction is "Go and see", not "See and go". It is in the going that disciples will see, and the fact that Jesus has "gone before" (προάξω, 14:28) has a sense of leading, as a shepherd leads his sheep.

We may also note the last words of the angel, "as he told you". This may specifically refer back to Jesus' saying about going before the disciples to Galilee, but it may also direct the disciples to other things that Jesus had told them. He had told them about his own death and resurrection as well as the fact that his followers would suffer and be vindicated; he had given them instructions about discipleship and its implications for social relationships.

Remembering what Jesus said and did is thus important for the continuing life of faith, and this is not just remembering facts but discerning their significance.

These references and contexts imply that the disciples did not understand the words and actions of Jesus at the time, and that it was only later, after his death and resurrection, as they looked back and remembered, that the significance became more clear. We have seen (p. 24f.) how in the OT "remembering" is concerned with discernment and making God's acts in the past relevant for the present. The record of the words and actions of Jesus developed first in an oral tradition and these traditions were meditated upon and interpreted before Mark collected them into a gospel. In this way Mark's readers can continue to discern revelation in Jesus by seeing, hearing and remembering what he did as they read the record of events recorded in the written gospel.

### Summary

We have seen how any social group that wishes to be distinctive draws some form of boundary markers to determine the membership. In Israel's history this was seen in terms of observing the law and later in observing particular interpretations of that law. The Sadducees and Pharisees and the communities formed round the leaders Daniel and the Teacher of Righteousness also laid great stress on the maintenance of a particular kind of purity to define their own groups. For Mark's community traditional concepts of holiness and purity were not used to define their group. While the study of scripture and the heritage it provides is certainly not abandoned, the law and interpretations of the law were not used in an exclusive way to keep others out.

Whoever does the will of God, and whoever is not against us, is to be included (3:35; 9:40).<sup>127</sup>

One of the main boundary markers for Mark's community was an understanding and discernment of revelation in Jesus. An understanding of revelation as something that is received only by a special, elect group has features in common with other apocalyptic writings. Another common feature was to see the times in which they were living as of cosmic significance, the beginning of the end-time struggles, giving rise to suffering. While Daniel expected the final battle to take place against Antiochus, Qumran expected the war with Rome to be the last battle. Mark, too expected the fall of the temple to herald the end and Jesus' parousia. Yet for Mark an event of cosmic proportions had already taken place, the coming of Jesus himself and especially his death on the cross. For Mark the role of the redemptive figure is not that of one who rises up in military revolt to defeat pagan powers, but one who fulfils his mission by death on a cross, and thereby defeats Satan.

For Mark the cross is the most important moment of revelation. The period up to that point was one when some people had some understanding of who Jesus was. The period after the cross is one when it is possible for anyone to understand if they discern correctly. After the resurrection, since Jesus' presence is no longer localised, this may take place anywhere. Yet this does not mean that it is a period when all will understand, but a period when all can and are able to understand. Hence the continual stress on perception and vigilance. Understanding is not yet complete, and is an on-going process. Only at the parousia will all finally understand.<sup>128</sup>

Mark's portrayal of the disciples as ones who don't always understand gives no claim to superiority based on knowledge

in his community. His community is to keep listening, to keep discerning and to keep faithful as they follow Jesus on the way of discipleship. Thus, while Mark has certain links with an apocalyptic viewpoint in terms of the revelation of mysteries to an elect group, for Mark this is not combined with a strict adherence either to the law or to a particular interpretation of scripture, and this makes his community strikingly open-ended and non-hierarchical.

The biblical tradition affirms that all understanding comes from God. For Mark, the disciples heard God's voice on one significant occasion, when Jesus was transfigured. God said, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (9:7). The disciples were instructed to listen to Jesus as they literally followed him, and Mark's community are to continue to listen to Jesus as they continue to follow him. They are able to do this by "remembering" the words and actions of Jesus as now recorded in Mark's written gospel.

## X. CONCLUSION

Mark has written a gospel and the events described there give him and his community a perspective on the whole purpose of God. What he has written has a relevance for his present, but only the reader who discerns will perceive that this is the case. Discernment of who Jesus is, is thus a crucial issue, and Mark is concerned to show how his reader can discern Jesus correctly. In order to do this, he includes in his gospel descriptions of how people did understand, did not understand or misunderstand Jesus. He also includes hints and lessons for his readers as to how they themselves may understand Jesus correctly.

Mark sets his gospel in God's time and begins by saying that Jesus is God's Son, although what exactly this means is not clear until the end when Jesus dies as the suffering Son of man. Jesus came and taught and healed, and by doing so with power and authority showed God at work in him. Mark says that neither Jesus' teaching nor his miracles always lead people to faith in God. They only do so if they are perceived correctly. In order to discern God at work in Jesus a God-given discernment is needed.

Mark takes up scriptural themes of hearing and seeing as ways of discernment. Jesus gave physical sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and those who were able to discern correctly, perceived God at work in Jesus here. But Mark also uses these miracles in a symbolic way. It is God who is able to open blind eyes and heal deaf ears so that people may perceive Jesus correctly.

In his use of hearing and seeing in both physical and symbolic ways, Mark takes up a theme found in Isaiah. There

the theme of healing of hearing and sight is set in the context of end-time blessings, and these texts are also used literally and metaphorically. The texts in Isaiah are not linked with a specific end-time figure, but Mark has used them to show how Jesus brings God's end-time into the present.

Mark says that it is possible for people to put themselves in a position where God's discernment will not be available to them. Those who have no faith cannot be physically healed by Jesus to see and hear, and neither can they be symbolically healed in order to perceive who Jesus is. Rather they seek definitive signs in order to be convinced, and are aligned with Satan and the world.

Mark understands that God is responsible for discernment and conversely that God can also be responsible for a lack of discernment. Mark also says that people themselves are responsible for their own discernment or lack of it, and that God confirms a lack of discernment in those who have already decided that way. The passage in Isaiah 6, in its context, is addressed as a word of judgement to Israel. When Mark uses this quotation in chapter 4, it is addressed to those outside, and as such the meaning seems to take in both aspects - they are outside because they do not perceive, and they are also outside in order that they will not perceive. If the gospel is addressed to Mark's community, this may suggest that the "outsiders" are now considered to be those who are not part of Mark's self-defined social group of "insiders".

Mark's gospel shows how the past is relevant for the present, and this is highlighted especially in his portrayal of the disciples, both as a historical group as well as role models for discipleship. The disciples are recipients of Jesus' special teaching and private explanations as well as

of the mystery of the kingdom of God. Mark's community is thus an esoteric group, where knowledge that they are elect and in some sense chosen by God serves to strengthen the community in times of testing and persecution. Yet Mark also portrays the disciples as failures. They were given explanations in private and still did not perceive who Jesus really was or know how to behave correctly. They have heard and seen, but since they are still in the world, their discernment remains incomplete; they are "fallible followers".

Throughout the gospel Jesus is portrayed as the only one who discerns correctly, and especially in the passion narrative he stands in stark contrast to all the other individuals or groups of people. He is the one who discerns revelation, is in receipt of the Spirit and fully obedient to God's will. His opponents are those who think they can see and discern, and think they are in control, are completely blind to the truth, even when that truth is right in front of them.

While the cross is the most important point of revelation in the gospel, complete understanding is still not available and will not be until the parousia. In the meantime, the period of waiting, is a period of the beginning of the end-time sufferings. Here Mark uses the motif of perception, not so much in connection with an initial perception of who Jesus is, but an on-going discernment. This unique time of testing discipleship involves intense vigilance and special discernment. Discernment is needed to understand the cosmic dimension to the time of their suffering, and discernment is also needed to remain faithful.

Incidents in the gospel show that anyone, anywhere is able to believe, and since Jesus' presence is no longer localised, it is possible for anyone to become a follower of Jesus if they have discerned correctly. Mark's gospel does

not just describe Jesus' words and deeds, but indicates too the way in which they should be perceived. God gives discernment to those who want it. This is seen in terms of correct seeing and hearing. Faith, following Jesus and doing God's will ensure not only a beginning, but also that those who have begun to understand will continue to do so. They remember the words and actions of Jesus as now recorded in Mark's written gospel. Mark understood his gospel to be revelation, proclamation *about* Jesus Christ, as well as proclamation *of* Jesus Christ. If everything Jesus said and did is in some sense parabolic, then the gospel too functions like a seed. How it is understood depends on how it is perceived, and how it is perceived depends on how it is heard and seen. God enables people to hear and see correctly, and this is the mystery of the kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

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Some concept of revelation by God is fundamental to the biblical tradition. Discussion has frequently centred on how that revelation is given, but there has been little exploration of the part to be played by people in the discernment of that revelation. This study has looked at one biblical author's understanding of both aspects: how, when and in what ways Mark understands revelation to be given, as well as how, under what circumstances and in what ways he understands revelation to be discerned.

This study has shown the value of using a redaction critical approach, combined with literary criticism, as one way of examining a particular theme in Mark's gospel. In exploring the way he has arranged his material and placed individual stories in his overall narrative, I have shown how Mark moves between the historical situation and instruction for the life of faith. The historical disciples as well as Mark's readers undertake a journey of revelation by following Jesus on the way.

I have shown how Mark's form of writing, that of narrative, builds on the biblical tradition, also presented in the form of a narrative and describing the relationship between God and his people. Within his narrative Mark builds on these traditions known to him, but some of the concepts contained there are developed or re-defined. One of his main themes concerns the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus and the arrival of end-time blessings. The healing of the blind and deaf, exorcisms and the defeat of Satan, forgiveness of sins, salvation, God's power at work through prophecy and the Spirit, are now all seen to be present in Jesus.

For Mark the coming of Jesus and the kingdom of God also involve a new understanding and re-interpretation of some other concepts. His setting of Jesus' work in Galilee and surrounding Gentile areas, as well as his use of Galilee in a symbolic way, gives new meaning to the previous hope of the re-possession of the land of Israel. Jerusalem and the temple as the centre of that land are also understood differently. There is to be no new temple building or city, and Mark portrays the glorious expectations of Israel's traditions as paradoxically fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I have also shown how Mark understands the people of God or the beneficiaries of God's blessing in a different way from his tradition. In the OT revelation defined the people of God as Israel, those to whom God had revealed his will in the covenant law. The post-exilic period saw a fragmentation into groups, frequently combining an exclusive claim to revelation and a strict adherence to the law, one part of the law or one particular interpretation of the law. For Mark, membership of the people of God is re-defined in relation to Jesus. Membership of that group is not restricted to the people of Israel, or to a sub-group within Israel, but is open to anyone; that is, anyone who has discerned God's revelation in Jesus, and responds in faith and obedience.

For Mark the supreme example of one who discerns fully is Jesus himself. The question of discernment by Jesus is not specifically explored, and discernment is examined more in terms of people's response to Jesus. Without entering into the debate about Jesus' own historical consciousness, we can say that Jesus' experience of God and internal conviction of who he was, can be verified by what he said and what he did. For Mark he is the one who discerns completely, who is seen

at prayer and in receipt of the Spirit. He is the one who obeys God's will fully, even to his death.

Yet the presence of God's power in Jesus is not always immediately obvious and a spiritual discernment is necessary to understand this to be so. Thus the healing of blindness and deafness can also be used in a symbolic way. Those who hear and see, that is discern, Jesus correctly, will discern that he is the Son of God. In the OT, the stories within the story are paradigmatic. So too for Mark the stories within his story are lessons for his reader. By reading his story readers can learn how this discernment can take place.

Mark also reflects the scriptural theme that God's revelation is surprising and even paradoxical. Preconceptions and assumptions can blind people to the truth. This is shown by Mark in the earlier part of his gospel where assumptions about the way God's Son should act are questioned, and especially in his passion narrative where assumptions about what a king ought to be like are challenged.

Mark also shows that revelation is not always easy to discern, and that God's grace is needed here. It is a mystery that is both hidden and surprising, as well as something to be grasped and understood. Although revelation is given, it is something that can only be partly grasped and never fully understood. Discernment of revelation therefore needs to be continuous and on-going. Mark's portrayal of Jesus shows that a true understanding or discernment of Jesus is only possible for those who undertake his way of humility and suffering. Without that, any hearing of Jesus is not a true hearing and any seeing of Jesus would be a seeing that fails to see.

This study has selected and concentrated on one gospel. The different approaches taken by the other gospels could fruitfully be explored. Lucan themes may be contained, for instance, in his account of the journey to Emmaus, which concerns the question of the discernment of the risen Jesus (24:13-32). Matthew's gospel has an emphasis on obedience to the will of God as revealed and taught by Jesus. Jesus' presence is on-going, although discernment of that presence may not always be easy (28:17,20). John, in his gospel, explores the question of discernment, not so much in his passion narrative, but in his account of Jesus' trial (especially 19:13-16). This theme is specifically taken up in connection with Jesus' opponents in chapter 9 (cf. vv. 24,29).

Since the gospels witness to the Jesus of history, they retain a certain sense of eschatological urgency which may be lacking in other NT material. Although, for instance, Paul's letters give few examples of his preaching, it would be possible to explore the theme of revelation and discernment in his writings. Paul says that "faith comes from what is heard" (Rom. 10:17), and he also reflects the dynamic of the biblical tradition that the word of God comes to people through human words (1 Thes. 2:13; 1 Cor. 15:10). His writings may give more attention to discernment as an on-going and continuing process, particularly in connection with moral and ethical concerns.

Recent studies have highlighted the social implications of faith in the early church communities. The dynamics of the discernment of revelation as defining the boundaries of a particular group could also usefully be explored, especially in connection with the eventual separation of Christianity from Judaism.

On one level this hearing and seeing may be considered somewhat mundane or superficial. On another level, what is seen and heard may have a profound effect upon a person's heart and mind. Since God is personal and communicates with his people through other people, a mundane seeing and hearing can also be transformed into a spiritual seeing and hearing. What is seen, heard and discerned in a spiritual context can have a profound effect on a person's understanding of and relationship to God. When Mark's readers discern his gospel correctly, that gospel functions as revelation.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Classically expressed in Lessing's "ditch" between historical judgements and claims of the divine.
2. Moberly, "Nature", p.157.
3. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* do not include articles on revelation or discernment. The *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* has an article on revelation and one on the discernment of spirits. The *New Dictionary of Christian Theology* has an article on revelation and epistemology, but not on discernment.
4. See further, Petersen, *Literary*, p.19.
5. See Perrin, *Redaction*, p.41.
6. For further discussion on these topics, see Knight, "Revelation", in Knight, *Tradition*, p.147f. and Barr, *Old*, p.89f.
7. Barr, *Old*, p.70.
8. Moberly, "Story", p.77.
9. Wright, *People*, p.38.
10. For instance, Freyne, "Disciples".

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Barr, *Old*, p.88.
2. Views of the complex relation between history and revelation vary from, for example, W. Pannenberg who links revelation with history, to K. Barth who defines revelation in Christocentric terms.
3. See Clements, *Prophecy*, p.34ff.
4. See Childs, *Theology*, p.41ff.
5. Barr, *Old*, p.22, points out that "God speaks" means God communicates, not that he speaks, for example in Hebrew. See also Ps. 17:6: "Incline thy ear to me, hear my words".
6. Habel, "Call Narratives", p.317, and analysis by Cross, *Myth*, p.164ff.
7. Clements, *Prophecy*, p.31, notes the introduction into vision of a marked auditory element.
8. Clements, *Prophecy*, p.28.
9. Knight, "Revelation", p.152, in Knight, *Tradition*.
10. Different approaches to "remembering" are put forward by J. Pedersen in *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 1926, criticised by J. Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 1961 and B.S. Childs in *Memory and Tradition*.
11. Childs, *Memory*, p.55.
12. This hearing is complementary to the concept of seeing God's work in creation; see further Chapter Two.
13. This link is expressed linguistically in the forms ἀκούω and ὑπακούω.
14. See the extended discussion by Wright, *People*, Part II.
15. There is some uncertainty about both the meaning and scope of the prohibition of images. See further, Moberly, *Mountain*, p.166f.
16. Moberly, "Serpent", p.1.
17. See Clements, "Patterns", p.196f., in Tucker, *Canon*.

18. Charette, "Liberty", sees a link between release of captives and the breaking of the yoke of foreign domination to serve faithfully under the yoke of God.
19. Carroll, "Poets", p.25, and Crenshaw, *Conflict*, p.103f, see the inability to resolve this question as leading to confusion, but Childs, *Theology*, p.139ff, sees this uncertainty as part of the canonical process.
20. Clements, *Prophecy*, p.28f.
21. These kinds of issues are taken up in Matt. 7:13-23.
22. Sinai: Ex. 24:9-11, 33:11-34:35; 1 Kings 19:9-18; Jerusalem: 2 Sam. 24:15-17; Is. 6:1; Ps. 84:5,8.
23. For different perspectives concerning the temple, see Levenson, "Temple", p.35, in Green, *Spirituality*.
24. Although "face" in the context of theophanies means God's very person and not just that one side. So so speak "face to face" refers to a direct communication.
25. Sanders sees the temple as central and understands Jesus' words and actions against the temple as the only ones which had "ascertainable results"; *Jesus*, p.267.
26. Wolff, *Anthropology*, p.44. See 1 Samuel 25:37f. where Nabal's heart is said to have "died" ten days before his death.
27. Noth, *Exodus*, p.67.
28. Kuyper, "Hardness", p.462.
29. Childs, *Exodus*, p.172ff.
30. von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p.202.
31. Evans, *To See*, p.19.
32. Evans, *To See*, p.51.
33. Cross, *Myth*, p.193.
34. While a history of traditions approach may see this as polemic against Baal and Divine Warrior traditions, a thematic approach would view this as against a view which would restrict God to appearing in only one kind of way.
35. This theme is taken up in terms of the disciples not recognising Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:16), and

Mary at the tomb thought Jesus to be the gardener, until he spoke her name (John 20:15f.).

36. Schneiders, *Text*, p.59, describes faith as a "fundamental openness of the person to transcendence".

37. See also John 9:24,29.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Urbach, "Self-Isolation", p.273.
2. Hanson divides these groups into realists and visionaries. Hanson, "Apocalyptic", pp.37-60.
3. There is no evidence that this was the Pentateuch as known today, and there also appear to have been disagreements over laws concerning foreigners, eunuchs, cult, calendar and the high priest. See Hanson, "Apocalyptic", p.48 and Blenkinsopp, "Interpretation", p.7.
4. Sheppard, "Prophecy", p.278.
5. Fishbane, "Revelation", p.350.
6. Blenkinsopp, "Interpretation", p.10, comments, "We can hardly exaggerate the importance of this shift whereby the prophetic claim to authority is taken over by the interpreter of prophecy."
7. Ben Sira's identification of wisdom and torah may also be a polemic against the influence of Greek-type wisdom which rests only on human reasoning.
8. Some of this wisdom tradition is reflected in Jesus' sayings, and Matthew identifies Jesus as God's wisdom. See Suggs, *Wisdom*, p.31ff.
9. Orton, *Scribe*, p.40ff.
10. From a later period, the Talmudic treatise Baba Bathra 12a says that prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the sages.
11. Hengel, *Judaism*, I, p.136.
12. Orton, *Scribe*, p.68. Compare also 1QH11:2: "What am I, that Thou shouldst teach me the counsel of Thy truth, and give me understanding of Thy marvellous works".
13. Nickelsburg, *Literature*, p.55.
14. Barton, *Oracles*, p.60, notes that all the figures chosen from the past were ones before the time of Ezra.

15. Hengel, *Judaism*, pp.210ff., notes that many in the Hellenistic period valued 'wisdom' all the more if it was to be found in obscure writings from a remote culture.
16. Rowland, *Open*, p.85.
17. Vermes, *Scrolls*, p.45.
18. Knibb, *Qumran*, p.180, translates "everlasting Council" as "eternal fellowship"; cf. 1QS 2:25a.
19. Bruce, *Exegesis*, p.8.
20. Longenecker, *Exegesis*, p.43, notes that "In contradistinction to rabbinic exegesis which spoke of 'That has relevance to This,' the Dead Sea covenanters treated Scripture in a 'This is That' fashion."
21. See also 1Q34.
22. Rowland, *Open*, p.189.
23. See further on dualities, Wright, *People*, p.252ff.
24. On the situation of Galilee, see Freyne, *Galilee*.
25. See also Syriac Baruch 5:7; Apoc.Abr. 9.
26. Hengel, *Judaism*, II, n.632, p.137, suggests that this drink might reflect the use of drugs.
27. See Mat. 4:2 and Luke 4:2, although fasting is not mentioned in Mark here.
28. Compare Mat. 13:17 where the disciples are said to see and understand what the prophets did not, and Mark 4:11 where those on the inside are given to understand what those on the outside cannot.
29. Orton, *Understanding*, p.68.
30. Vermes, *Scrolls*, p.43.
31. Vermes, *Scrolls*, p.44.
32. Orton, *Scribe*, p.123.
33. Orton, *Scribe*, p.122, quoting 11QPsaDavComp 1:2-11.
34. Wright, *People*, p.337.
35. Wright, *People*, p.333.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. "There would also be general agreement that a major aspect of the Marcan purpose in christological," Perrin, "Christology", p.99. "The miracle of the coming community which the Risen One himself will call into life and send out into the world," Schweizer, "Portrayal", p.57. "His primary objective was pastoral," Best, *Following*, p.12.
2. Kee, *Community*, pp.64 and 75.
3. Weeden, *Traditions*, sees a conflict of christologies as the background. Tannehill, "Gospel", analyses compositional techniques used by Mark to influence his readers. Dewey, *Debate*, uses rehetorical criticism to analyse literary structure.
4. This theory was first proposed by Wrede in 1901 (ET 1971) and is discussed in Tuckett, *Secret*.
5. Hill, *Sociology*, p.52-54; Kee, "Setting", p.247.
6. Robinson, *Trajectories*, p.71-113, discusses the gattung of Q.
7. For background to the phrase "Son of God", see Dunn, *Christology*, p.14f.
8. Achtemeier, "Many Things", p.472f., notes Mark's frequent use of the words "teacher" and "teaching", and their different uses by Matthew and Luke.
9. In 1:28 it is unclear to which phrase κατ' ἐξουσίαν is to be linked. It can either read "a new teaching with authority", or "with authority he commands the unclean spirits". For Mark Jesus' authority is shown in both activities.
10. Viewed differently in John where the miracles are signs which witness to Jesus' glory; 20:30f.
11. Catchpole, "Silence", p.9, suggests that "fear" is one of the usual responses in the biblical tradition to a manifestation of God or his power.

12. Borsch, *Parable*, p.x, says of parables that "They draw us beyond normal ways of seeing and hearing, challenging the imagination and the heart, in order to offer new possibilities of meaning and understanding."
13. Jeremias, *Parables*, p.227, suggests that Jesus also performed "parabolic actions" although it is hard to draw a clear distinction between "parabolic" and "symbolic". See also Hengel, *Leader*, p.67 n.116.
14. See Hooker, "Mark", in Carson, *It is Written*, pp.220-230.
15. Jesus looks up to heaven as the source of his power, 7:34.
16. Matthew more frequently uses the phrase "kingdom of Heaven"; Mat. 13:24,31,33.
17. The Psalms speak of the King of glory (24:7-10) and the Kaddish prays for the establishment of God's kingdom. See also, Test. Moses 10:1; Syb. Oracles Bk. 3, 7:66,7.
18. Luke interprets the woman's action as the response of a forgiven sinner; Luke 7:36-50.
19. 1:8 says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit, which is an unfulfilled promise as far as the gospel narrative is concerned.
20. Some embarrassment is shown by the other evangelists that Jesus should have been baptised by John; Mat. 3:14f.; see Dunn, *Unity*, p.153f.
21. See Hooker, *Message*, p.35.
22. See Acts 19:13; Tobit 8:2-3; Josephus *Ant.* 8:46-47.
23. Isaiah 24:21-22; 1QS 4:18-19; Rev. 20:1-3; Jubilees 23:16-32.
24. In 11QMelch the figure of Is. 61:1 is identified with the eschatological prophet, although the idea that this prophet would also be a wonder worker is not very strong.
25. Elsewhere only at Acts 7:56; Heb. 2:6 referring to Ps. 8:5; Rev. 1:13, 14:14 referring to Dan. 7:13.
26. For summary of discussion on Son of man, see Casey, "Method", pp.17-43.

27. It is possible that the version of the saying in 9:31 is the earliest and simplest form and may also reflect some sort of pun or parabolic saying.
28. Knight, "Revelation", in Knight, *Tradition*, p.168, notes, "We need to claim for humanity a more significant, active role in the revelatory process than is commonly done".
29. John the Baptist calls for national and not individual repentance; these references may suggest the whole nation is now ready and John's mission accomplished.
30. Malbon, "Disciples", notes that 8:34 is the only reference to Jesus calling the crowd and the disciples.
31. See Boobyer, "Miracles", p.81f.
32. Hooker, *Message*, p.50, suggests that the gathering up of the broken pieces may indicate a mission to the Gentiles.
33. The scribe is described in friendly terms his questions are not trick ones (12:8).
34. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p.375f., describes women following Jesus as "an unprecedented happening in the history of that time" in a society where women were submissive and inferior to men.
35. Hengel, *Leader*, p.68, notes that "Holding converse with children" and being where the poor gather together, "keep a man from studying the Law".
36. At 7:14 note how the crowd, who are called to hear and understand, are subtly separated from the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus criticises.
37. Dunn, *Partings*, p.166, notes that any event recalling the manna miracle in the wilderness or prophetic hope of a fruitful desert or a shepherd king providing for his flock would arouse messianic hopes; see also Exek. 34:23; Ps. Sol. 17:45.
38. Significantly Jesus' dispute is with the scribes, who have come from Jerusalem, and the whole passage may be an attack on the temple as the location of God's forgiveness.

39. Hengel, *Leader*, p.14, n.36, notes a social distinction here when Jesus is described as a carpenter. Scribes and Pharisees, because of their knowledge, were generally of a higher social position.
40. See Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.120f.
41. Best, "Twelve", p.34, concludes that Mark has no developed theory of the twelve and Israel.
42. This kind of division is also found at Qumran, where the sons of righteousness walk in the ways of the Prince of Light, and the sons of perversity walk in the ways of the Angel of Darkness, but the Angel of Darkness also leads some of the sons of righteousness astray; 1QS 3:20-22.
43. For different views, see Black, *Disciples*, pp.47-54.
44. For a "negative" approach, see Weeden, *Traditions*.
45. Beavis, *Audience*, analyses Mark from a reader response point of view, especially pp.13-44.
46. This is suggested by Dewey, "Methods", p.42.
47. Malbon, *Followers*.
48. Freyne, *Galilee*, p.56, notes here how the scribes and the discussion on the law in 7:1-13, is significantly set in a Gentile section of the gospel.
49. Freyne, *Galilee*, p.61, suggests this contrast between movement in Galilee and being static in Jerusalem may also reflect attitudes - Galilee being more open to change and Jerusalem being set in its ways.
50. Malbon, *Space*, p.31.
51. Freyne, *Galilee*, p.269, notes that all the gospels view Galilee differently, but all with positive symbolism.
52. Goulder, "Characteristics", p.52f., notes that Mark's parables are more concerned with nature and the countryside; those of Matthew more with people, kings, workmen, merchants; those of Luke with town life.
53. Freyne, *Galilee*, p.63.
54. Moule, "Mark 4:1-20", in Ellis, *Neotestamentica*, p.99.
55. Contrast Luke's gospel where faith is very much faith in Jesus (8:12,50; 17:19; 22:67; 24:25); and Matthew where

- faith is trust (14:28-33; 13:19). See Telford, *Temple*, p.81.
56. This call to return to God is particularly prominent in Jeremiah (3:14,17,22; also Is. 55:7; Hos. 6:1). At Qumran the members could call themselves the converts of Israel (1QS 5:1,8; CD 4:2).
57. Dunn, *Unity*, p.152, notes that εἰς can mean for or into; "forgiveness of sins is the result of repentance and not of the baptism as such". See also Mat. 3:7ff. which is critical of those pious who thought they did not need repentance.
58. Marcus, *Mystery*, p.117.
59. For this suggestion, see Gerhardsson, *Origins*, pp.15-24.
60. Hengel, *Leader*.
61. The metaphor of fishermen spreading their nets seems to have been used mostly in negative terms (Jer. 16:16; 1QH 3:26; 5:8).
62. Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.33.
63. Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.48.
64. Hooker, *Message*, p.48.
65. Johnson, "Bethsaida", notes the use of different tenses for the words βλέπεις and ἐμβλεπω and suggests that the use of the imperfect implies a continuing experience of new vision.
66. Kee, *Community*, p.58. He also notes that the criticisms of the disciples' lack of understanding about the loaves may be seen, not necessarily as an attack on their stupidity, but as Mark saying that even the disciples could not understand the situation correctly without God-given discernment.
67. Marcus, *Mystery*, p.63.
68. See also 7:8-13 concerning the commands of God, and how for Matthew following the commands of Jesus is important, 28:20.

69. Best, *Following*, p.162.
70. Malbon, *Space*, p.69
71. Fowl, "Receiving", p.157. Some have seen the children in 9:37 as a metaphor for the missionary disciples; cf. use of "receive" in 6:11. See Best, *Following*, p.78ff.
72. Marcus, *Way*, p.33.
73. Childs, *Exodus*, p.172f.
74. παρακούσας can mean ignore or overhear.
75. Dunn, *Jesus*, p.82.
76. See 1QS 3:20-22 on the imperfection of knowledge and incomprehension in the elect community.
77. See Dewey, *Debate*, p.195f; and Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.42.
78. See Enroth, "Hearing", p.598f.
79. This imprecision is also noted by Matthew and Luke. Matt. 13:10, "Why do you speak to them (the crowds) in parables?"; and the answer in terms of fulfilment of Isaiah prophecy. Luke 8:9, "His disciples asked him what this parable meant"; and the answer in terms of purpose, retaining the *ivα*.
80. This is suggested by Watson, "Function", pp.60-65.
81. Freyne, "Disciples", pp.8-12. There is also an agreement between Matthew 13:11 and Luke 8:10 against Mark, where the disciples are said to have been "given to know the secrets of the kingdom".
82. Brown, *Background*, pp.13-16
83. Beavis, *Audience*, p.8
84. Evans, *To See*, p.62.
85. For discussion of 1QIs. 6:9-10, see Brownlee, *Meaning*, p.186f.
86. So also in Isa. 55:10f.; 4 Ezra 4:27-29.
87. The overthrow of Satan in 3:23ff. is also referred to as parable.
88. How hearers responded determined their whole life now and in the future: see Mat. 7:24-7; Luke 12:8f.; John 15:22.

89. Kee, *Community*, p.161.
90. Lamp sayings: Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; Matt. 5:15 and Luke 11:33 from Q. Hidden/revealed sayings: Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; Matt. 10:26 and Luke 12:2 from Q.
91. Jesus refers to himself as someone who has come, rather than one who has been sent; 1:38; 2:17; 10:45.
92. Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.81.
93. 1QH 14:18-19; 1QS 9:12,14-15.
94. Many other points can be drawn from these parables concerning eschatological time, the kingdom of God, a plant growing by stages, harvest.
95. Marcus, *Mystery*, p.180.
96. Hooker, *Message*, p.29.
97. Freyne, *Galilee*, p.60, notes that δοξαζειν in 2:10 may reflect a cultic gesture more appropriate to the temple than a house.
98. See Telford, *Temple*, p.238.
99. 4QFlor 1:10ff. interprets the promise to David of a son who would build the temple in terms of a royal messiah in the last days.
100. Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.135f.
101. Telford, *Temple*, p.211.
102. See for instance, Jubilees 23:13.
103. Cranfield, *Mark*, p.397, notes how εις μαρτύριον may mean both given the opportunity to believe, or evidence against, depending on how it is received.
104. Antiochus Epiphanes erected an altar to Zeus in the temple in 168 BC (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 1 Macc 1:54), although Mark may associate this with the anti-Christ.
105. Note how Luke 21, written after the fall of Jerusalem, is careful to separate the the fall and the parousia.
106. Whether or not this may be horticulturally true of a fig tree, the point seems to be that "when you see, you will know".
107. It is uncertain whether γινώσχετε is in the present or imperative, v. 29.

108. Geddert, *Watchwords*, p.103f.
109.  $\pi\epsilon\pi\iota$  may mean the timing or the character, or both.
110. Matthew (26:64) and Luke (22:67,70) both record a more ambiguous reply.
111. Note the use of  $\text{iv}\alpha$  here and in 4:12,22
112. Johnson, "Mark 15:39", pp.3ff.
113. Chronis, "Veil", p.110.
114. See Kee, *Community*, p.174.
115. Kee, "Setting", p.247.
116. See Dunn, "Pharisees", p.271, for a discussion of "zeal".
117. Dunn, "Pharisees", p.276ff.
118. The extant literature is from "inside" the circle of the righteous, and if it had been from those "outside" a different understanding may have been reflected.
119. Best, *Following*, p.83. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p.297, notes the connection between social stratification and religion and how the most important positions were reserved for those deemed to be "full Israelites".
120. 1QS 8, CD 4:9-12 suggest a welcoming of outsiders; while 1QS 9:16-17; 10:19-25 suggest outsiders should be hated and saving knowledge concealed from them.
121. Daniel and his friends are said to have wisdom and understanding ten times better than that of the other magicians and enchanters (1:20), and the members of the Qumran community were ranked annually on their knowledge of the law and obedience.
122. See also 2 Baruch 48:2-3; 4 Ezra 12:36-7. Although Ezra does not seem to believe that possession of esoteric knowledge creates an exclusive community of the saved; neither does Ben Sira. See Nickelsburg, "Wisdom", in Neusner, *To See*, p.81.
123. Freyne, *Disciples*, p.9.
124. Compare Wisdom 2:11,22; 3:3, where the death of the just is seen as genuine wisdom.

125. Hengel, *Judaism, I*, p.208.
126. John 2:11 states that Jesus' first miracle was "at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory".
127. There may, however, be a considerable difference between theory and practice; the theoretical self-perception and the practical social reality may not correspond.
128. See Martyn, "Epistemology", p.285, in Farmer, *History*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>Int.</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Nov.Test.</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,</i> edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964-1976.
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche</i> <i>Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche</i> <i>Wissenschaft</i>

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