

‘THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK HAS BEEN PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED BY THE AUTHOR’S REFLECTIONS ON THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES’.
DISCUSS.

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark is a text deeply rooted in the Jewish Scriptures, presenting Jesus not only as the fulfilment of ancient prophecies but also as the embodiment of God’s redemptive plan for humanity. Mark achieves this by interweaving direct quotations, allusions, and composite references to scriptural texts, drawing on traditions familiar to a Jewish audience while offering a reinterpretation through the lens of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. By doing so, Mark creates a theological framework that challenges contemporary messianic expectations, reshaping them around the suffering and servanthood of Christ.

This essay explores the intricate relationship between the Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Scriptures, focusing on how Mark employs these texts to define key theological themes. The discussion begins with an analysis of Mark’s use of Isaiah to establish Jesus as the stronger one, a fulfilment of Second Isaiah’s new exodus narrative. It then examines the presentation of Jesus as the Suffering Servant (Mk. 10:45), the Son of God (Mk. 1:11), and the authoritative interpreter of the Law (Mk. 2:23–28), highlighting the Gospel’s intertextual depth and its engagement with scriptural traditions.

Furthermore, the essay investigates the Passion Narrative, where Mark utilises prophetic texts, apocalyptic imagery, and narrative irony to frame Jesus’ death as the climactic moment of divine purpose. The Gospel’s nuanced portrayal of abandonment, vindication, and covenantal renewal not only distinguishes it from other Synoptics but also reinforces its theological emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah for all people.

Through this exploration, the essay demonstrates how Mark’s sophisticated use of the Jewish Scriptures invites readers into a deeper understanding of Jesus’ identity and mission, while simultaneously reconfiguring traditional perceptions of divine power and

messianic fulfilment.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOSPEL OF MARK AND THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

The Gospel of Mark employs Jewish Scriptures, particularly the book of Isaiah, to shape the way Jesus is perceived by readers or hearers of the text. In most instances, direct quotations from the Old Testament are attributed to the spoken words of Jesus.¹

However, this does not detract from the Gospel writer's broader intention to incorporate Jewish scripture through various means.

As a notable example, Marie Noonan Sabin highlights a parallel between the creation narrative in Genesis and the opening verse of Mark's Gospel. The use of the term Archē (beginning) can be understood within a Jewish context as an intentional link between these two scriptural accounts.² Consequently, the proclamation of the Good News of Christ in Mark begins with an allusion to the Creator and moves forward from this foundational point with the incarnation as a continuation of the work of the Father.³

This is added too by an Isaianic framework adopted by the Gospel writer akin to Second Isaiah. Jesus is portrayed as the 'stronger one' (Mk. 1:7), echoing the new exodus theme in Isaiah 40, for the purposes of establishing Him as the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan and through whom both close proximity to God and victory can be found.⁴ A myriad of further usage of Isaiah, and the Old Testament more generally, can be drawn on to establish an intertextual approach by the author to convey the Messianic nature of Jesus Christ (some of which will be explored in the next section). Despite this, the usage of such is at times inconsistent and lacks visibility.

¹ Steve Moyise, 'Jesus and Scripture according to Mark's Gospel', in *Jesus and Scripture* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010) 13.

² Marie Noonan Sabin, *Reopening the Word: Reading Mark as Theology in the Context of Early Judaism* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2003) 35.

³ Peter Nagel, 'The Theological Significance of the Isaiah Citation in Mark 4:12', *HTS Theological Studies*, 72.4 (2016) 4.

⁴ Morten Hørning Jensen, 'Atonement Theology in the Gospel of Mark as Isaianic Proximity to the Divine', *Biblica*, 100.1 (2019) 94.

The allusions and direct quotations of the Old Testament throughout Mark are often intertwined and embedded in the story telling of the Gospel to the point they form an integral part of the text and could be easily missed without careful exploration.⁵ In addition, the author employs composite references which conflate multiple Old Testament sources to form a new paraphrase to emphasise a point being made by the author.⁶ As such, the Gospel writer demonstrates a detailed understanding of the precursor texts utilised and offers a dualism where Old Testament echoes can be both established via detailed exploration or missed entirely depending on the skill, focus or agenda of the reader/recipient.

KEY THEMES IN MARK INFLUENCED BY THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

a. JESUS AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT – MARK 10:45

Mark 10:45 serves as the cornerstone for understanding Jesus' mission on earth. Mark presents the Messiah as coming to serve and ultimately surrender his own life for the benefit of others. This is reflective of the culminating message of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53. Isaiah's servant, though innocent, suffers directly and explicitly at the hands of God as part of His design and purposes.⁷ The conclusion of such suffering is death but one that substitutionary in nature, taking on the sins of Israel and the world.⁸ Crucially, the servant not only embraces the unmerited punishment levelled at them, but they do so with a gentleness and meekness that reflects acceptance of role and unwavering surrender.⁹ Mark intentionally echoes the spirit of Isaiah 53 to present Jesus as the suffering servant who will bear the iniquities of many by operating as a servant who willingly and intentionally serves and surrenders to the will of the Father.¹⁰

⁵ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 99.

⁶ Willem S. Vorster, 'The Production of the Gospel of Mark: An Essay on Intertextuality', *HTS Theological Studies*, 49 (1993) 392.

⁷ Joseph Blenkinsop, 'The Sacrificial Life and Death of the Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)', in *Vetus Testamentum*, 66 (2016) 2.

⁸ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 371.

⁹ Michael Barre, 'Textual and Rhetorical-critical Observations on the Last Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)' in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 62.1 (2000) 16.

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 500.

In doing so, Mark also supports a diversion from Second Temple judaistic expectations of the Messiah. The Davidic Messiah was to be an individual who would embody the concept of a warrior prince, with the ability to overthrow the enemies of Israel.¹¹ Not only would such a Messiah deal with enemies but their primary function would serve to restore Israel to a state of independence and prosperity.¹² Yet, in his alignment with Isaiah 53:12, Mark utilises the Jewish Scriptures to present Jesus not as a warrior or king in the expected sense, nor as someone solely concerned with Jewish nation, but rather the anointed saviour of πολλῶν (many).¹³

b. JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD – MARK 1:11

Mark's Gospel begins with an explicit portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God. This theme is reinforced in the baptism theophany, where a declaration from heaven builds upon this understanding. Mark's presentation is deeply rooted in Old Testament allusions and echoes, particularly in Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Scholars frequently argue for a connection between these passages, and while both references are valid, they may appear incomplete in isolation. This observation underscores Mark's characteristic use of composite references and subtle intertextuality.

Psalm 2, an enthronement psalm traditionally associated with the coronation of Israel's kings¹⁴, provides a strong thematic connection to Mark 1:11. In the heavenly declaration, the Father affirms the identity of Jesus as the Son, drawing on the language of Psalm 2:7. This affirmation emphasizes the Son's status and identity¹⁵, raising the question of what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. Mark develops this connection further by incorporating the term ἀγαπητός (beloved), which signifies Jesus as uniquely cherished, highlighting his special relationship with the Father.¹⁶ Botner notes that the opening words of Mark 1:11, derived from Psalm 2:7, function as a

¹¹ John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 19.

¹² J. Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000) 310–11.

¹³ Craig A. Evans et al., *Mark 8:27–16:20* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018) 122.

¹⁴ Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 65.

¹⁵ Robert A. Guelich et al., *Mark 1–8:26* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018) 34.

¹⁶ Guelich et al., *Mark 1–8:26*, 34.

‘performative utterance’, conferring authority upon the anointed King.¹⁷

This declaration is further enriched by its connection to Isaiah 42:1, which serves to complement the imagery of Psalm 2. Although Isaiah 42:1 shares few common words with Mark 1:11, Newman’s comparative analysis suggests that Mark intentionally aligns Jesus with the Servant of Isaiah.¹⁸ This alignment identifies the Son as the chosen one, anointed by the Spirit, and uniquely appointed for God’s purposes.

Through this interweaving of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42, Mark presents Jesus as both the authoritative Son and the chosen Servant. He is depicted as operating in divine authority, enjoying a unique relationship with the Father, and fulfilling his role as the anointed one, central to the purposes of God.

c. JESUS’ AUTHORITY AND FULFILMENT OF THE LAW – MARK 2:23-28

Mark 2:23–28 presents a significant narrative in which Jesus asserts his authority over Sabbath observance through a reinterpretation grounded in the Old Testament. The controversy begins with the Pharisees accusing Jesus’ disciples of breaking Sabbath laws by plucking grain, an act they deem unlawful. In order to tone down the potential controversy, the writer builds Jesus’ defence upon the actions of David in 1 Samuel 21:1–6, where David and his companions ate consecrated bread.¹⁹ By invoking this scriptural precedent, Mark presents Jesus as situating himself within the Jewish tradition of interpreting the Law with flexibility when human need is at stake.²⁰ This appeal resonates with the humanitarian intent of the Sabbath where the Sabbath is framed as a gift of rest and restoration for all creation.²¹

¹⁷ Max Botner, *Jesus Christ as the Son of David in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 87.

¹⁸ James M. Neumann, ‘Remembering God’s Beloved Son: Jeremiah 38:20 LXX and Mark 1:11’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 142.3 (2023) 496.

¹⁹ Arland J. Hultgren, ‘The Formation of the Sabbath Pericope in Mark 2:23–28’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 91.1 (1972) 41.

²⁰ Mikeal C. Parsons, “Mark 2:23–28,” *Interpretation*, 59.1 (2005) 58.

²¹ John P. Meier, ‘The Historical Jesus and the Plucking of the Grain on the Sabbath’, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 66.4 (2004) 570.

The theological significance of Jesus' response is encapsulated in his statement, 'The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath' (Mk. 2:27). This aphorism redefines the purpose of the Sabbath, shifting its focus from rigid legalism to prioritising human welfare.²² It reflects a deeper understanding of the Law's divine intent, where compassion and necessity take precedence over ritualistic observance. Jesus' subsequent declaration, 'the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath' (Mk. 2:28), builds on this reinterpretation. By using the title 'Son of Man', Jesus aligns himself with the eschatological figure in Daniel 7:13–14²³, who is granted dominion and glory by God. This allusion underscores his divine prerogative and positions him as the authoritative fulfiller of the Torah.

By integrating these Old Testament references, Mark presents Jesus not merely as a defender of his disciples' actions but as the one who fulfils and transcends the Law. The use of Davidic typology and Danielic eschatology situates Jesus as the authoritative mediator of God's covenant, challenging contemporary Jewish legalism and reframing Sabbath observance as an expression of divine mercy and restoration. Through this narrative, Mark uses the Old Testament to portray Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of the Torah and the embodiment of its original intent, bridging the continuity between the Law and the Gospel.²⁴

THE ROLE OF THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES IN FRAMING THE GOSPEL

Mark's Passion Narrative demonstrates unique theological depth and literary structure, setting it apart from the other Synoptic Gospels. One of Mark's defining characteristics is its implicit use of Jewish Scriptures to frame Jesus' crucifixion as the climactic moment in God's redemptive plan.²⁵ This interweaving of scriptural echoes highlights the theological and eschatological significance of the narrative, aligning it with broader

²² Craig A. Evans et al., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021) 10.

²³ Evans et al., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Mark*, 10.

²⁴ James R. Edwards, 'The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37.2 (1994) 225.

²⁵ Mphumezi Hombana, 'The Shaping Stratum of the Markan Passion Narrative', *HTS Theological Studies*, 79.2 (2023) 5.

themes of fulfilment and divine purpose.

A distinctive feature of Mark's Passion is its emphasis on Jesus' solitary suffering, heightened by the failure and abandonment of his disciples.²⁶ This narrative thread reflects the prophetic tradition, particularly Psalm 22, whose motifs are woven throughout the text to underscore themes of anguish and ultimate vindication.²⁷ Mark's presentation of the Psalm highlights mockery and abandonment to emphasise Jesus' role as the suffering righteous one.²⁸ Another critical element is Mark's incorporation of Zechariah 13:7 to explain the scattering of the disciples. This prophetic allusion underscores the inevitability of Jesus' suffering as part of God's redemptive plan and accentuates his isolation on the path to the cross.²⁹ Unlike other Synoptics, Mark places this scattering within a broader eschatological framework, aligning it with the divine orchestration of events leading to the cross.³⁰

Mark's depiction of the temple's destruction offers another layer of theological nuance. The prediction of its fall (Mk. 13:2) and the tearing of the curtain at Jesus' death (Mk. 15:38) are not mere narrative devices but deeply symbolic acts. These moments evoke themes of divine judgement and the renewal of covenantal relationships, portraying Jesus as the new locus of God's presence.³¹ By directly connecting these events to Jesus' crucifixion, Mark highlights the transition from the temple's centrality to Jesus' mediating role in the new covenant. The use of apocalyptic imagery further sets Mark's narrative apart. The darkness that descends at Jesus' death (Mk. 15:33) serves as more than a dramatic device; it is a marker of cosmic significance. This event echoes Amos 8:9, linking Jesus' crucifixion to the Day of the Lord and presenting it as an eschatological turning point.³² This apocalyptic framing reinforces the theological

²⁶ Sharyn Dowd and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, 'The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125 (2006) 274

²⁷ Robert H. Smith, 'Darkness at Noon: Mark's Passion Narrative', *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 44 (1973) 333.

²⁸ R. Mark Shipp, 'Psalm 22: The Prayer of the Righteous Sufferer', *Christian Studies*, 25 (2011) 49.

²⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Finding Meaning in the Death of Jesus', *The Journal of Religion*, 78.2 (1998) 196.

³⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 650.

³¹ George W. E. Nickelsburg, 'The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 73 (1980) 177.

³² Robert H. Smith, 'Darkness at Noon: Mark's Passion Narrative', 334.

gravity of the moment, portraying Jesus' death as both redemptive and inaugurative of a new era.

Irony is another tool Mark employs to deepen the theological resonance of the Passion Narrative. The mockery of Jesus as 'King of the Jews' (Mk. 15:16-20) juxtaposes the soldiers' ridicule with the theological truth of Jesus' kingship. Froelich argues that this ironic tension, pervasive throughout the narrative, underscores the paradox of divine power manifesting through suffering and apparent defeat.³³ This literary device invites readers to grasp the profound reversal at the heart of the Gospel message.

In summary, Mark's Passion Narrative uniquely utilises Jewish Scriptures, apocalyptic imagery, and narrative irony to present Jesus' death as the culmination of divine prophecy and the inauguration of a new covenant. By emphasising desolation, inevitability, and cosmic significance, Mark's account portrays Jesus as the forsaken yet vindicated Messiah, fulfilling God's redemptive purpose and reshaping the theological landscape of the early Christian.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Gospel of Mark presents a sophisticated and theologically rich interplay with the Jewish Scriptures, positioning Jesus as the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan. Through a nuanced use of intertextuality, Mark embeds direct quotations, allusions, and composite references to illuminate Jesus' identity and mission. The Gospel's reliance on Isaiah and other prophetic texts underscores its portrayal of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, the authoritative Son of God, and the ultimate fulfiller of the Law. These depictions challenge Second Temple Jewish messianic expectations, reshaping them around themes of servanthood, suffering, and divine purpose.

³³ Margaret Froelich, 'Irony and Interpretability in Mark's Passion Narrative', in *Christian Origins and the New Testament in the Greco-Roman Context: Essays in Honor of Dennis R. MacDonald*, ed. by Margaret Froelich (Claremont: Claremont Press, 2016) 141.

The Passion Narrative serves as the climax of Mark's engagement with the Jewish Scriptures, emphasising Jesus' solitary suffering and his role as the righteous sufferer foretold in Psalm 22. Mark's incorporation of prophetic allusions, such as Zechariah 13:7, and apocalyptic imagery, including the tearing of the temple curtain and the descent of darkness, underscores the eschatological significance of Jesus' crucifixion. These elements highlight the cosmic implications of Jesus' death, presenting it as the turning point in God's covenantal relationship with humanity.

Furthermore, Mark's use of irony invites readers to grapple with the paradox of divine power manifesting through suffering and apparent defeat. By juxtaposing human mockery with divine truth, the Gospel reveals the profound reversal at the heart of the Christian message.

Ultimately, Mark's narrative is more than a historical recounting; it is a theological masterpiece that bridges the continuity between the Jewish Scriptures and the Gospel. Through its interweaving of scriptural traditions, Mark invites readers to recognise Jesus as the culmination of divine prophecy, the inaugurator of a new covenant, and the Saviour of many. This enduring message continues to inspire and shape Christian thought, demonstrating the depth and richness of Mark's theological vision.

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