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The Old Testament in Mark

Though it is not always easy to decide what constitutes a quotation and what constitutes an allusion, even a tentative list of quotations in Mark reveals that it is only in the prologue (1.2–3) that he explicitly quotes scripture as editorial comment. All his other quotations are on the lips of characters in the story (mainly Jesus). This is in contrast to the other Gospels which provide a set of quotations as a sort of running commentary on the narrative. This does not mean that Mark provides no scriptural commentary on the events that he is narrating. There is in fact a rather extensive set of allusions and echoes that fill out Mark's narrative and engage the reader in a variety of ways. But it is only in his opening words that these constitute an explicit quotation and it is for this reason that both Joel Marcus (1992) and Rikki Watts (1997) see this text as the key to understanding his use of scripture.

Quotations in Mark's Gospel

Mark's opening quotation in 1.2–3

Mark opens his Gospel with what seems to be a title ('The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'), which is linked ('As it is written in the prophet Isaiah') with a composite quotation of Mal 3.1, Exod 23.20 and Isa 40.3 ('See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'). The ascription of this composite quotation to Isaiah has caused problems, both for ancient copyists and modern interpreters. Ancient copyists dealt with the discrepancy by omitting the word 'Isaiah' and turning 'prophet' into a

plural. Thus most of our surviving manuscripts read, 'As it is written in the prophets' (hence KJV).

However, textual critics are virtually certain that the reference to Isaiah is original and so some explanation is required. The most common is that Mark is using a testimony source where the texts had already been combined. Mark ascribes it to Isaiah either because he was unaware of its composite nature or because 'Isaiah' stands for 'prophets' in the same way that 'Psalms' can stand for 'writings' (see Luke 24.44). Later Jewish texts also offer such a combination (*Exod Rabba* 32.9; *Deut Rabba* 11.9) and if Mann's (1940) reconstruction of the ancient Jewish lectionary is correct, Mal 3 was the prophetic reading (*haphhtarab*) that accompanied Exod 23.20.

On the other hand, Joel Marcus thinks the ascription to Isaiah was deliberate because Mark wants to tell his readers that 'the beginning of the good news' is 'written in the prophet Isaiah'. Isa 40.3, he says, is not cited as a proof-text for the location of John's ministry (wilderness), or to clarify his relationship with Jesus (forerunner). It is quoted because the restoration promised in Isaiah is being fulfilled. Isaiah looked forward to a time when the heavens would be rent (64.1), the Spirit poured out (61.1), good news would be proclaimed (40.9-10) and God would come in power (40.10). Mark's introduction correspondingly speaks of the heavens torn open (1.10), the Spirit descending on Jesus (1.10), the good news proclaimed in Galilee (1.14) and the dawn of the kingdom of God (1.15).

Parable purpose in 4.12

If Marcus is correct, then the quotation of Isa 6.9-10 in Mark 4.12 explains why this has not led to universal salvation. Isaiah was told that Israel would reject his message. Indeed, his proclamation would serve to harden Israel so that they cannot escape the coming judgement:

Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed. (Isa 6.9-10)

According to Mark, Jesus' proclamation has resulted in great success (1.22, 28, 33, 45) but also opposition (2.7, 16, 18, 24). In Mark 4, Jesus tells a parable about the varied responses to the word of God (4.14-20)

and explains to his disciples that there are insiders who understand and outsiders who do not. But what has perplexed commentators is that he goes on to explain that the *reason* he teaches in parables is not to aid communication but to keep outsiders from understanding. He supports this by directly applying Isa 6.9–10 to his contemporaries:

And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven".

Jeremias (1972, pp. 15–17) thinks the difficulty arose through mis-translation. The Greek word *parabole* translates the Hebrew *mashal*, which can mean riddle, puzzle, dark saying or oracle. Thus the original saying probably meant something like, 'for those outside, it all sounds like riddles'. But when this was translated into Greek, it became 'for those outside, everything comes in parables' and Mark added to the confusion by placing it in the middle of his parables chapter. Cranfield (1977, p. 155) notes that Mark's use of the third person passive ('it would be forgiven them') points to the Aramaic Targum rather than the LXX and the solution might lie in the difference between Semitic and Greek ways of thinking. Telford, on the other hand, thinks it is quite deliberate:

For Mark and his community, the very function of the parables has been reinterpreted. The parable is now seen, not as a vehicle for instruction or warning concerning the coming Kingdom of God, but as a vehicle for mystification. The parables reveal Jesus' message and status only to the initiated, in this case the Markan readership . . . the parables were *meant* to harden Jewish hearts, *meant* to make them misunderstand, *meant* to conceal . . . for history is governed by God's purposes which cannot be thwarted. (1999, p. 66)

Hypocrisy of the Pharisees in 7.6–7

Mark 7 has Jesus in dispute with the Pharisees over matters of the law (see below). Before that, the question 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' is met by the accusation 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites', followed by the words of Isa 29.13: 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' The example that follows

(7.10–13) aims to show that they have put their own traditions above the express requirements of the law.

Interpretation of the law in 7.10; 10.6–8; 10.19; 12.18–34

Though Mark does not reproduce much of Jesus' teaching, he does present Jesus as a powerful teacher ('They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'). This is particularly evident in his ability to offer authoritative interpretations of the law. In 7.10, he accuses the Pharisees of using their tradition of Corban to avoid the plain meaning of the commandment to honour father and mother. In 10.6–8, Jesus is asked to enter the contemporary debate concerning grounds for divorce. Instead, he states that the Genesis texts are primary ('God made them male and female' and 'the two shall become one flesh'), while the certificate of divorce commanded in Deuteronomy was a concession to human weakness.

In 10.17–19, the rich young ruler's question ('what must I do to inherit eternal life?') is initially answered by a summary of the commandments ('You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'). It has perplexed commentators why Jesus only quotes the second half of the decalogue (in an order otherwise unattested) and not those concerned with God. When the man confidently replies, 'I have kept all these since my youth', Jesus invites him to give up his wealth and follow him, perhaps showing him the deeper meaning of these commandments.

In 12.18–27, a story is concocted about a succession of brothers who all had to marry the same woman because the previous brother dies. The aim of the story is to ridicule belief in the resurrection by demanding to know 'whose wife will she be?' Jesus replies by quoting a central affirmation of Jewish belief that God is the 'God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob', adding the interpretative comment: 'He is God not of the dead, but of the living.' One might have thought that Jesus would have quoted one of the texts that actually speak about resurrection, such as Dan 12.2 ('Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.'). But perhaps it was more necessary to defend the point using texts from the Torah.

In 12.28–34, Jesus is asked to state the greatest commandment. He answers with the words of Deut 6.4–5 ('love the Lord your God with all your heart') but adds that there is a second ('You shall love your

neighbour as yourself'), taken from Lev 19.18. Such a combination is not unique (*Testament of Dan* 5.3 says, 'Throughout all your life love the Lord, and one another with a true heart') but Jesus' comment that there is 'no other commandment [singular] greater than these' proved immensely significant for later Christian reflection (e.g. Rom 13.8–10; 1 John 4.7–21).

Messiah's entry into Jerusalem in 11.9–10

According to Mark, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was greeted with this acclamation:

Hosanna! (Psalm 118.25)

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! (Psalm 118.26)

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! (Comment)

Hosanna in the highest heaven! (Psalm 148.1)

Psalm 118 is a festive Psalm, used at the feast of Tabernacles and the Passover. The line 'Blessed is the one who comes' originally applied to the pilgrims but the focus here is clearly on the *one* who comes, that is, Jesus. The third line does not appear to be a quotation, but a comment or response. Taylor (1952, p. 456) suggests that it might have been part of the liturgy and chanted antiphonally. But what was its meaning for Mark? Just prior to this episode, blind Bartimaeus acclaims Jesus 'Son of David', which the disciples attempt to silence (10.47–48) but Jesus apparently accepts ('your faith has made you well'). And in one further passage, Jesus himself asks how the Messiah could be David's son when David himself calls him Lord (see below). It would appear that behind Mark's Gospel lies a debate as to the adequacy or otherwise of seeing Jesus in terms of the common expectation of a Davidic deliverer (Isa 9.6–7; Jer 23.5; Ezek 34.23–24; Hos 3.5; Amos 9.11).

Purpose of the temple in 11.17

On the following day, Jesus 'entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling . . . and he overturned the tables of the money-changers' (11.15). He is then reported as quoting Isa 56.7, in combination with Jer 7.11 ('My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers.'). To simplify somewhat, opinions as to the meaning of this episode depend on whether the key word in the composite quotation is thought to be 'prayer',

'nations' or 'robbers'. If it is 'prayer', then Jesus can be seen like one of the prophets of old who contrasts heart religion with hypocritical ritual. If it is 'nations', then Jesus is forecasting the entry of the Gentiles into the people of God, including their full access to the temple (the episode probably took place in the court of the Gentiles). If it is 'robbers', then the note of judgement is uppermost, either as 'reformation' or 'destruction'. In the light of the cursing of the fig tree, which directly follows this episode, the latter is perhaps the more likely.

Rejection of the stone in 12.10-11

The parable of the vineyard tells the story of a man sending various servants to collect his share of the produce. But the tenants abuse the servants and send them away empty-handed. So the man sends his only son, reasoning (oddly) that they will respect the heir and comply. But they kill the son and so the man has no choice but to 'destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others'. The parable ends with a quotation from Psalm 118.22-23: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.'

The quotation is somewhat surprising in that the parable appears to be a tragedy, whereas the psalm speaks of something 'marvellous'. The effect is to change the emphasis of the parable from the tragic means (the death of the son) to the positive outcome (the vineyard is given to others). Most scholars think this reflects later Christian doctrine (redemption through the death of Jesus and the consequent incorporation of the Gentiles) rather than the actual words of Jesus. It is one of three explicit quotations in Mark's Gospel that offer some sort of explanation for why Jesus died.

Puzzle of David's Lord in 12.36

While most of the disputes in the Gospel begin with a challenge to Jesus, Mark 12.35-37 has Jesus on the attack. While teaching in the temple, Jesus asks, 'How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David?' He then quotes Psalm 110.1 as a riddle, for if David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?

The Lord said to my Lord,
 Sit at my right hand,
 until I put your enemies under your feet.

Many scholars have argued that Mark rejects a military Messiah in favour of a suffering servant but as Marcus notes, the issue is more subtle than that:

Paradoxically . . . the Davidic image turns out to be both too triumphalistic and not triumphant enough . . . It is not triumphant enough . . . because Jesus is victor not only over his earthly enemies but also, as his entire earthly ministry reveals, over their supernatural masters . . . That image, on the other hand, is too triumphant because the manner in which Jesus wins his definitive victory over his enemies is through his suffering and death. (1992, pp. 149–50)

It is unclear, however, whether Mark intends such a paradox or whether it appears paradoxical to us in the light of what we now know. It should also be noted that the final words of the quotation ('under your feet') are not from Psalm 110.1 but Psalm 8.6. The ending of Psalm 110.1 is 'until I make your enemies your footstool'.

Apocalyptic sayings in 13.24–26; 14.62

There has been much debate about the meaning of apocalyptic language. Certainly the majority opinion is that Jesus predicts the end of the world and his own return to earth when quoting (or alluding to) Isa 13.10; 34.4; Dan 7.13 in Mark 13.

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. (Mark 13.24–26)

However, Wright (1996, pp. 612–53) strongly rejects this interpretation, arguing that the Israelite prophets used this language to describe an 'apocalyptic' event *in history*, not as a literal description of the *end of history*. Though it is in the nature of apocalyptic language to have multiple references, Wright believes this text is primarily speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. That of course fits well with the statement that all these things will happen within a generation (13.30).

There are also difficulties in understanding the reference to Daniel's 'Son of man'. In the Similitudes of Enoch, the 'Son of man' is a heavenly

deliverer and some think Jesus is identifying with such a figure. On the other hand, there are no texts which use 'Son of man' in this way which can definitely be dated before the first century. Hooker (1967) suggests that the references are not so much to a particular figure but the whole scenario of rejection and vindication. Thus when Jesus replies to the High Priest, 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand', he is making the claim that he will be vindicated and their roles reversed (and the High Priest will come 'to see' this).

Striking the shepherd in 14.26

After the last supper, Jesus leads the disciples to the Mount of Olives and predicts their desertion, quoting the words of Zech 13.7 ('I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.'). The note of divine action is heightened by changing the imperative of the original ('Strike the shepherd') into the first person ('I will strike the shepherd'). However, the words that follow the quotation ('But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee') change the emphasis to his subsequent resurrection. Marcus thinks that Mark is responsible for this since Peter's reply ('Even though all become deserters, I will not') and Jesus' response ('Truly I tell you, this day, this very night . . . you will deny me three times') simply ignore it. He concludes that Mark has introduced the reference to resurrection and reunion, producing a paradox (good coming from evil), as in the vineyard parable. This is the second of the three explicit quotations concerning Jesus' death, both of which contain an element of paradox.

Words from the cross in 15.34

It has been a puzzle and sometimes a theological embarrassment that God's Messiah ends his life with the cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' It is of course a quotation from Psalm 22.1 and one suggestion is that Jesus was seeking to invoke the whole of the psalm, especially its more positive ending: 'For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him . . . Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it' (Psalm 22.24, 30-31). However, most scholars find this unconvincing and look for a solution in various understandings of the atonement. Thus an ancient view of the incarna-

tion was that 'only what is assumed can be saved'. If Jesus did not share the fears and anxieties of human existence, then he was not fully human and cannot therefore save humanity. On a different view, Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor 15.3) and the anxiety in Gethsemane and the agony on the cross give us a glimpse of what that cost him. The forsakenness was not the product of fear but was his actual experience; at the moment of death, he was bearing the sins of the world and experiencing separation from God. Lastly, on the penal view of the atonement (not held by many scholars today), Jesus became the object of God's wrath. Those that hold this view argue from the ransom saying (Mark 10.45) that Jesus not only died *for* us but also *instead* of us.

Allusions in Mark's Gospel

The suffering servant

Though Isa 53 is never explicitly quoted in Mark's Gospel, many scholars believe that it has deeply influenced his thought and surfaces in the passion predictions of 9.31 and 10.33 ('the Son of Man will be *handed over*'), the ransom saying of 10.45 ('For the Son of Man came not to be served but to *serve*, and to give his life a *ransom for many*') and the words of institution in 14.24 ('This is my blood of the covenant, which is *poured out for many*.'). Does Isa 53.10–12 lie behind these sayings?

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my *servant*, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he *poured out* himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of *many*, and made intercession for the transgressors.

This was the view of Cranfield, Taylor and Jeremias but Hooker (1959) sought to refute it by pointing out that:

- (1) The linguistic parallels are extremely weak. If we compare Mark's text with the LXX, we find that he uses a different word for service/

- servant, a different word for ransom and a different word for 'poured out';
- (2) Though Isa 53 is quoted elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 8.17; Luke 22.37; Acts 8.32; 1 Pet 2.22), it is never from this so-called vicarious part;
 - (3) There is no evidence prior to the first century that anyone was expecting a 'suffering servant';
 - (4) Isa 49.3 explicitly identifies the servant with Israel (or perhaps a remnant of Israel) and this is the traditional Jewish interpretation.

On the other hand, most Christian readers are still struck by the almost uncanny resemblance to Jesus that Isa 53 affords. As France says,

We find it hard to believe that allusions to so strikingly appropriate a figure in the Old Testament were merely by chance, or that the appropriateness of the figure escaped Jesus. To the Christian church the relevance of the Servant of Yahweh to the mission of Jesus has always been obvious; why should it be less obvious to him? (1982, p. 113)

The important thing for both sides in this debate is whether 'intention to allude' can be demonstrated. If it can, then although Mark does not draw attention to Isa 53 by explicit quotation, it could still be seen as the subtext that unlocks his understanding of Jesus. Indeed, it is possible to argue that allusions imply texts that are well known, whereas explicit quotations show the need to highlight them. It is clear that Isaiah is very important to Mark and this could be used as supporting evidence for the importance of Isa 53. On the other hand, if the lack of linguistic evidence and the lack of a precedent in contemporary Judaism makes 'intention to allude' a hazardous assumption, then it could be argued that the rejected stone of Psalm 118, the shepherd of Zech 13 or the righteous sufferer of Psalm 22 are all more important to Mark than Isa 53. Moo thinks all of these backgrounds are important for Mark but notes that 'Isaiah 53, like no other OT text, portrays vicarious, redemptive suffering, and portrays it as the very will of God' (1983, p. 171).

Zechariah 9-14

As well as the explicit quotation of Zech 13.7 in Mark 14.27, a good case can be made for the influence of Zech 13-14 on the whole of the passion narrative. For example, the scattering of the sheep in Zech 13.7

is followed in 13.9 by a refining ('as one refines silver') and a reinstatement ('They will call on my name, and I will answer them') which might explain Mark 14.28 (as Marcus argues). The action in Zechariah is to take place on the Mount of Olives. Admittedly, the war-like scene of Zech 14 is rather different to Mark's account of Gethsemane but this could be Mark's way of indicating the nature of Jesus' victory. It will be a time of strife, where 'each will seize the hand of a neighbour, and the hand of one will be raised against the other' (see Mark 13.12). And the final verse of the book says that 'there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord' (Zech 14.21), a possible source for Jesus' cleansing of the temple.

The righteous sufferer

As well as the explicit quotation of Psalm 22.1 from the cross, the passion narrative contains other references to Psalm 22. For example, the dividing of Jesus' garments alludes to Psalm 22.18 ('they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots') and the mockery and wagging of heads alludes to (or perhaps echoes) Psalm 22.7 ('All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads.'). Other 'righteous sufferer' Psalms are also alluded to, most obviously the drink of vinegar in Mark 15.36 (Psalm 69.21). Marcus (1980, pp. 174-5) offers this table of parallels:

Mark		Psalm
14.1	by cunning, to kill	10.7-8
14.18	the one eating with me	41.9
14.34	very sad	42.5,11; 43.5
14.41	delivered to the hands of sinners	140.8
14.55	sought to put him to death	37.32
14.57	false witnesses rising up	27.12; 35.11
14.61	silence before accusers	35.13-15
15.24	division of garments	22.18
15.29	mockery, head shaking	22.7
15.30-31	Save yourself!	22.8
15.32	reviling	22.6
15.34	cry of dereliction	22.1
15.36	gave him vinegar to drink	69.21
15.40	looking on at a distance	38.11

Conclusion

We noted at the beginning of this chapter that unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not provide a set of quotations to explain the various aspects of Jesus' life. However, it could be argued that his allusions play a similar role. Mark has told the story of Jesus' passion in such a way that it evokes the righteous sufferer of the psalms and probably also the suffering servant of Isaiah and the smitten shepherd of Zechariah. He does not try to prove that Jesus is any of these figures. He simply uses them as his 'palette' as he constructs his portrait of Jesus. In this, we can see similarities with the Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran writings, where the language of the Psalms and Isaiah is so prominent. Marcus has made a strong case for the importance of Isa 40.3 for Mark, who presents Jesus as 'leading his people through the wilderness to their true homeland in a mighty demonstration of saving power' (1992, p. 29). It is also of note that the three texts specifically quoted in connection with Jesus' death (Psalm 118.22-23; Zech 13.7; Psalm 22.1) are all subject to reinterpretation by being juxtaposed with Christian tradition: the workers of the vineyard are killed but it will be given to others; the shepherd is smitten but there will be a reunion; Jesus is forsaken but a Gentile believes.

Further reading

J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 1992

As we have seen, Marcus believes the introductory quotation signals Mark's intent to portray the way of Jesus as the fulfilment of Yahweh's triumphant march through the wilderness. This is not contradicted by the cross but is forced to collide with it so that 'the fearful trek of the befuddled, bedraggled little band of disciples is the return of Israel to Zion, and Jesus' suffering and death there are the prophesied apocalyptic victory of the divine warrior'. Thus in Mark, 'a commitment to the "old, old story" is retained at the same time that the story itself is transformed by being read in a new way. Mark has certainly learned much of what he knows about Jesus Christ from the scriptures. He would never have learned it, however, if he had not already known that Jesus Christ is the key to the scriptures' (p. 203).

R. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 1997

A valuable but less accessible book (it is his doctoral thesis). Watts agrees with Marcus that the initial composite quotation is the key to his use of scripture but wishes to make more of the Malachi quotation. Mark's aim is not only to signal the salvation background of Isaiah but also the judgement theme of Malachi. This explains the emphasis on Elijah in the Gospel, as well as the cursing of the fig tree, the cleansing of the temple and the torn curtain incidents. In an article in *Irish Biblical Studies* (1998), I reviewed this thesis and concluded that the juxtaposition is not so much between two Old Testament themes that somehow need reconciling but between certain Old Testament themes (Isa 40; Zech 13; Psalm 22) and Christian experience.

D. J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 1983

Though now somewhat dated, this book contains many helpful tables, summaries and insights. Moo thinks the allusions to Isaiah's servant are sufficient to imply a theory of atonement, while those to the Psalms show Jesus walking the way of David, 'who suffered innocently on his road to exaltation' (p. 360). Matthew follows this but Luke is more concerned with the larger themes of salvation history. John is more interested in demonstrating the significance of Jesus' 'lifting up' than showing that his sufferings were willed by God. Moo thinks the use of scriptures in the Gospels is in marked contrast to the 'arbitrary' exegesis of Qumran and insists that 'Jesus brought no new meaning to the OT texts, but demonstrated, in his life and teaching, the proper application (or signification) of the text' (p. 391).