

Chapter 4: Mark's Apocalyptic Discourse in Character, Plot and Narrative

4.1 Introduction¹

In the last chapter, I argued that the Gospel of Mark both shares the symbolic world exemplified in Jewish apocalyptic tradition, and engages in apocalyptic discourse for particular literary and theological aims. In the present chapter, I argue that a tracing of the characters from Mark 3:22–30 through the rest of the narrative – Jesus, the scribes, Satan, and the Holy Spirit – further delineates that symbolic world and apocalyptic discourse. Mark introduces all its characters at the start of the Gospel. First, the Holy Spirit casts Jesus into the wilderness to engage in conflict with Satan. Then, Jesus emerges to engage in conflict with human beings, particularly the scribes and other religious leaders (1:22, 27; 2:1–3:6). Mark 3:22–30 serves to join these human and cosmic figures in a single construal, cosmic conflict. That is, human and cosmic worlds do not simply operate parallel to each other, but intersect in Jesus' ministry. Mark's construal provides a perspective on the development of each character in his narrative.

4.2 A Character Study

Jesus is locked in a cosmic battle against Satan, and this conflict is at the heart of Jesus' ministry. Mark's development of the characters in the Beelzebul account illuminates the symbolic world of the Gospel and the aims of his apocalyptic discourse.

¹ In this chapter, I develop some material from a previous article, Shively, "The Story Matters." I use this material with permission.

4.2.1 Mark's Characterization of Jesus

Mark opens the Gospel by establishing Jesus as the one who preaches the kingdom of God and who exorcises demons. In particular, the brevity of the prologue (1:1–13) fixes the reader's attention on Mark's characterization of Jesus as God's Spirit-empowered Son who fights against Satan. The narrator's summary of John's message is that someone stronger than he will come and baptize people in the Holy Spirit (vv. 7–8). Jesus appears and is himself baptized in the Holy Spirit, who thrusts him into the wilderness to face Satan's testing (vv. 9–13). Mark introduces Jesus in the context of a cosmic battle. Subsequently, Mark portrays Jesus taking the offensive posture in a struggle against demonic forces.

After Jesus begins his public ministry by announcing the presence of the kingdom of God, his first public activity builds upon the wilderness conflict. He enters the synagogue at Capernaum where he teaches and casts out an unclean spirit (vv. 21–28). As I demonstrated earlier in this study,² the exorcism that accompanies Jesus' teaching both confirms his authority and demonstrates the purpose of his mission. The demons ask, "Have you come (ἦλθες) to destroy us?" (v. 24). Jesus' rebuke, "be silent, and come out of him!" (v. 25) suggests a positive answer to their question and the unfolding narrative confirms it. When a search party finds Jesus after he has gone off to pray, he responds, "Let us go on to the next towns, so that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out (ἔξῆλθον, v. 38)." Mark follows with the summary statement that Jesus then went throughout Galilee, preaching and casting out demons (v. 39). Indeed, Jesus has come to destroy demonic power as he preaches the kingdom of God.³

Soon afterwards Jesus expands his ministry through the Twelve when he gives *them* authority to preach and cast out demons (3:14–15). Mark opens his Gospel by linking preaching and exorcisms as the central components of Jesus' authoritative activity. In the Beelzebul controversy, therefore, the Markan Jesus comments not only about how he accomplishes exorcisms, but also about the very character and

2 See my discussion in ch. 2.

3 T. A. Burkill also connects the demons' question, ἦλθες ("have you come?") in v. 24, with Jesus' statement, ἔξῆλθον ("I came out") in v. 38, and emphasizes Jesus' divine purpose to come into the world to preach the gospel, pointing ahead to 2:17. T. Alec Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 37.

purpose of his ministry: He has come to rescue those held captive by Satan's power (3:27).

Mark's emphasis on Jesus as exorcist is unique when compared to Matthew and Luke. In those Gospels, Jesus' healing ministry is the key counterpart to his teaching, rather than exorcisms. For both, exorcisms are portrayed as a subset of healing. Matthew frames his initial description of Jesus' ministry with two identical summary statements: Jesus went around "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction" (Matt 4:23; 9:35).⁴ The material between these summaries depicts Jesus as teacher (chs. 5–7) and healer (chs. 8–9). At the close of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew appropriates a summary statement from Mark 1:22, "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt 7:28–29). But Matthew connects the authority of Jesus solely with his teaching rather than also with his exorcisms as Mark does.

Luke introduces Jesus' ministry with a summary statement that emphasizes his teaching ministry: after appearing in the power of the Spirit, "he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (Luke 4:14–15; cf. v. 44). Jesus' first activity in Luke's Gospel is to teach in the synagogue at Nazareth that the prophecy of Isa 61:1–2 has been fulfilled in the hearing of those present. Luke is preeminently concerned with the Spirit-filled authority of Jesus' word to teach, heal, and liberate the oppressed (Luke 4:18–19, 32, 36, 39; 5:5, 9–11). Neither Matthew nor Luke pairs Jesus' teaching with his exorcisms in their summary statements of his ministry the way Mark does (cf. Mark 1:39). Furthermore, while Mark places Jesus' conflict with Satan in the wilderness at the front of his Gospel and the Beelzebul conflict as Jesus' first discourse, Matthew and Luke both place birth narratives at the front of their Gospels. Matthew has the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' first discourse, and Luke has the synagogue speech in Luke 4 and the Sermon on the Plain as Jesus' first discourses. Mark uniquely portrays Jesus as the one whom God has sent to engage in a conflict with Satan. His focus on Jesus' exorcisms highlights the battle he has come to fight.

In the second chapter, I demonstrated how Mark recontextualizes Isaiah's Strong One of Jacob in order to present Jesus as the strong

4 Both verses read, διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν.

one who now wages war against the cosmic opponent of God's people. The language that John the Baptist uses to describe Jesus expands the dimensions of this conflict. John declares that, "the one who is stronger (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός) than I is coming after me" (Mark 1:7). In what capacity is Jesus stronger than John, or what can he do that John cannot? The reader perceives that Jesus is stronger by the power of the Holy Spirit to engage in conflict with Satan. While John baptizes with water, this stronger one will baptize with the Holy Spirit (v. 8). Jesus appears and is baptized with the Holy Spirit, who enters into him (εἰς αὐτόν, v. 10) and casts him into the wilderness for a struggle with Satan (vv. 12–13). The Holy Spirit is a power that John does not have, that equips Jesus for this conflict. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus the one who is stronger than John for a battle against a cosmic enemy. This suggests that the Holy Spirit and Satan engage in a heavenly struggle enacted in the ministry of Jesus. Mark's outlook is akin to Jewish apocalyptic compositions that display heavenly battles enacted on the earth, through which God's appointed agents fight evil spirits and their leader on behalf of the righteous.⁵

The portrait of Jesus as a strong warrior is supported by Mark's other uses of ἰσχυρός. For example, the ones who are strong (οἱ ἰσχύοντες) do not need a physician (Mark 2:17), but those who are sick. Jesus is the stronger one who is able to heal people from the oppression of disease and sin. No one is strong enough (οὐδεὶς ἰσχυεν, 5:4) to subdue the Gerasene man who lives in the tombs, possessed by a demon. Jesus, the one who possesses the Spirit, proves to be the stronger one who frees the man from demonic activity so that he no longer bruises himself and returns to his right mind (v. 15). Mark gives the reader eyes to see that sin, disease, and the destruction of human life is the result of demonic activity in the world, from which people are unable to free themselves. Like Jewish apocalyptic tradition, Mark understands human suffering, sin, disease, and injustice in light of demonic activity, and portrays a heavenly battle that corresponds to human conflict.

5 In Daniel, the battle between the angels of the nations corresponds to human wars. *1 Enoch* associates Satan or evil angels with kings and rulers of the nations that act against the righteous and depicts the holy angels that protect them. The *Testament of Levi* portrays God as the commander of angelic army that executes punishment on Beliar and his spirits of deceit. The *War Scroll* describes an eschatological war fought in heaven and on earth between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness and their angelic counterparts. See my discussion in ch. 3.

Early on, the Twelve have a measure of success in their engagement in the conflict, when they go out to preach and cast out demons (6:7–13). As they grow in their misunderstanding of Jesus, however, they also grow in their ineffectiveness in the combative ministry to which Jesus has called them.⁶ When Jesus comes down the mountain where he had been transfigured, he finds that his disciples are not strong enough (οὐκ ἴσχυσαν, 9:18) to cast a demon out of a boy. Only Jesus, the stronger one, is able to free him (vv. 25–27).

Finally, the place called Gethsemane becomes for Jesus and the Twelve a place of testing, which is implicitly an act of Satan (cf. 1:13). Jesus warns Peter to stand for this test when he asks, “are you not strong (ἴσχυσας) to watch one hour?” (14:37). Peter and the rest prove not to be strong enough to watch and pray and avoid the test, and so flee when Jesus is seized. Once again, Jesus proves to be the stronger one who submits to God’s will, ultimately yielding his life to the way of the cross. Here, being the stronger one pertains to overcoming the temptation to save one’s life rather than lose it (cf. 8:35). Jesus yields himself to death and destruction, which encompasses the realm of sin, disease, and injustice perpetrated by demonic activity. In the first half of the Gospel, Jesus displays the power of the stronger one by preaching, casting out demons, by healing, and prevailing over the forces of nature. In the second half of the Gospel, he displays the power of the stronger one by yielding to suffering and death.

After each prediction of his impending death and resurrection, Jesus had taught his disciples that the one who wishes to save his life must lose it (8:35), that whoever wants to be first must be last of all (9:35), and that whoever would be great must rather be like a servant than like one who lords authority over others (10:42–45). Jesus offers his own mission as an example of power in the kingdom of God: the Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45). When he is raised, the Markan Jesus’ view of power receives divine confirmation (16:6). This view of power, that what is hidden as weakness will be revealed as glory, reflects apocalyptic thought. For example, in the Similitudes, the reality of the glory of the elect is concealed by their oppression. When the glory of the Elect One, or Son of Man, is revealed, the glory of the elect ones will also be re-

6 In the *Testament of Solomon*, Solomon has authority and to invoke angelic power over the demons, but he becomes ineffective when he gives in to his desires.

vealed, and they will all rise.⁷ In Mark, however, the elect imitate the Son of Man in his suffering. The Son of Man will suffer, die, and then rise. The elect are to take up their cross and follow him, to endure until the end, and they also will rise in glory (Mark 13:27). The expression of power in Mark resembles that in the book of Daniel, where martyrdom is the means to purification and glory for the righteous in the heavenly realm (Dan 12:1–3).

4.2.2 Mark's Characterization of Satan

Apart from Mark 3:27, Satan appears in Mark's narrative only three times (1:12–13; 4:15; 8:33). In the temptation narrative (1:12–13), Mark establishes Satan as Jesus' first and foremost adversary. Mark's brief description portrays the Spirit-empowered Jesus and Satan engaged in a cosmic battle. The Holy Spirit is a cosmic figure that has come down from heaven to dwell in Jesus (v. 10), and thrusts Jesus into a conflict with Satan by casting him into the wilderness (v. 12). Satan's primary activity is to test Jesus (πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ σατανᾶ, v. 13), similar to the activity of Satan and evil spirits in Jewish apocalyptic compositions.⁸ In addition, Jesus is with the wild beasts (v. 13), which are associated with demons in Jewish apocalyptic texts.⁹ The appearance of Satan and the wild beasts in Mark's account evokes a picture of Satan with a pack of demons.¹⁰ When Jesus faces such opposition, angels appear and minister to him (Mark 1:13). Several Jewish apocalyptic texts depict angels coming to the aid of those engaged in conflict with dan-

7 1 En. 46, 62.

8 For instance, 1 Enoch portrays the Watchers leading human beings into sin, deception and violence. In *Jubilees*, Mastema/Belial/Satan and his evil spirits seek to lead people into sin and to destroy them. In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the *Testament of Solomon*, demonic powers draw human beings into moral failure, by drawing them into sin and ruling over them. The Qumran literature portrays human beings as victimized by Belial and his spirits, who seek to draw them away from God's covenant and imprison them in sin. See my discussion in ch. 3.

9 *T. Iss.* 7.7; *T. Benj.* 5:2; Isa 13:20–22; 34:13–14; Bar. 4:35.

10 Commentators associate the beasts with evil powers or demons (Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 66; A. Y. Collins, *Mark*, 153); or view the wild beasts as completing Mark's portrayal of the wilderness as a hostile setting (Stein, *Mark*, 64).

gerous spiritual enemies.¹¹ This background suggests that Jesus struggles against Satan and his demonic host with heavenly help. The dualistic struggle is evocative of a battle scene with earthly and cosmic dimensions.

In contrast to Matthew and Luke, Mark does not explicitly state the content or outcome of the wilderness testing. In their accounts, Jesus is tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1; Luke 4:2), who leaves after Jesus has bested him (Matt 4:11; Luke 4:13). Jesus emerges from the wilderness victorious and begins his public ministry (Matt 4:12–17; Luke 4:14–19). In Mark, Jesus' emergence from the wilderness, where he survives Satan and the wild beasts to proclaim the presence of the kingdom of God, is not a definitive statement of victory. The temptation narrative does not tell the reader what Jesus' testing consists of, that or how he overcame Satan, or even that Satan left. Rather, it depicts a struggle, suggesting that Jesus' ministry will be marked by conflict.¹² Mark does not need to repeat Satan's name continually throughout the Gospel to demonstrate that Jesus' struggle with Satan continues.¹³ Mark's concentration on the power struggle between Satan and the Spirit-filled Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel, both in the temptation account and in Jesus own explanation of the purpose of his ministry in the Beelzebul

-
- 11 For example, in *1 Enoch*, four holy angels intercede on behalf of the people who cry out for justice against the rebel angels and their offspring, and execute judgment against them. In *Jubilees*, God sends angels minister to human beings by binding demons so that they will not have power over human beings to lead them astray. Similarly, in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, God sends angels to protect the righteous from sin and to accompany them in battle, and to fight and punish Beliar and his spirits, and angels punish the demons in the *Testament of Solomon*. In addition, in 1QM angels come alongside the Sons of Light to aid them in their conflict against the sons of darkness. See my discussion in ch. 3.
- 12 This is similar to the view of James Robinson, who views Jesus' conflict with Satan in the wilderness as continuing in the exorcisms throughout the narrative. Robinson, *Problem of History in Mark*, 28–42.
- 13 I base my understanding of Mark's presentation of Satan on characterization rather than on statistics. This contrasts with the approach of Ernest Best, who views Satan as immobilized at the temptation account, so that there is no cosmic struggle throughout the Gospel. He comments that at Gethsemane, "Jesus also undergoes temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane (xiv. 32–42)... Jesus sees opposed two wills, his own and God's. Satan is not even mentioned. The temptation now definitely comes from within Jesus himself. There is here no cosmic conflict (the strengthening angel of the Lukan account might imply such) but the simple struggle of human will against divine will." Best, *Temptation and the Passion*, 30.

discourse (1:12–13; 3:22–30), establishes the presence of satanic activity for the whole Gospel. Through the rest of the narrative, the activity of Satan appears both explicitly and implicitly.

The most obvious implicit evidence of satanic activity in Mark's Gospel is demonic possession. Satan's army of demons enters and controls human lives throughout the narrative, indicating that Satan retains a measure of strength. Mark records four exorcisms (1:21–28; 5:1–20; 7:24–30; 9:14–29), as well as summary statements about Jesus' exorcisms (1:32–34, 39; cf. 3:11–12). Jesus gives authority also to the Twelve to perform exorcisms, and they travel around and cast out many demons (6:13). Mark's emphasis on demonic activity implies the strength of demons and their ruler. As I argued in the last chapter, Jesus' exorcisms depict the vanguard of the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

After the Beelzebul discourse, the interpretation of the parable of the Sower explicitly names Satan as the one who takes away (ἀρῶ) the word of God that is sown along the path (4:15). Jesus' interpretation places the blame, in part, with Satan for the response people have to his person and message. Right after the interpretation of the parable, Jesus calls out to the crowd, "if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear," and instructs them to pay attention to what they hear, because "to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away (ὃ ἔχει ἀρῶσεται, future passive of ἀρῶ, 4:25; cf. 4:15). The use of ἀρῶ recalls v. 15, which describes Satan taking away the word people have heard. The passive voice in v. 25 implies the satanic activity explicitly named in v. 15. That is, from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away *by Satan*. Throughout the Gospel, hearing is an important theme and is associated with receiving and understanding Jesus' word (e.g., 7:14, cf. v. 18; 8:18; 8:38 with 9:7). Not only Jesus' opponents, but also his own disciples have a hearing problem. Since Mark has had Jesus explain the problem of hearing and reception in terms of satanic activity, concrete examples of it may be viewed as Satan's work, even though Satan is not explicitly named.¹⁴ Satan seeks to keep people from hearing and receiving the word of God, similar to the ideas expressed in apocalyptic thought.¹⁵

14 Mary Ann Tolbert develops this point in *Sowing the Gospel*, 85–230.

15 In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Beliar and his evil spirits seek to lead people into moral and ethical failure; in *Jubilees*, Mastema and his evil angels

Indeed, in a world where Satan rules, Satan's power extends to affairs other than demon possession. Mark describes Jesus' other conflicts in terms of exorcisms. For example, Mark uses the language of exorcism to describe Jesus' calming of the storm in 4:39. That is, Jesus rebukes the wind (ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ) and tells the sea to be silent (καὶ εἶπεν τῇ θαλάσσῃ· σιώπα), just as he commands the unclean spirits (4:39; cf. 1:25; 3:12; 9:25). Moreover, when Jesus performs a prophetic action in the temple (11:15–19) he casts out corrupting agents, just as he casts out corrupting agents from human beings (ἐκβάλλειν in 11:15; cf. 1:34; 3:22; 7:26).

Satanic activity is implicit in Jesus' conflict with human opponents. If Satan is responsible for the failure to hear and receive Jesus' word, then the religious leaders who fail to respond to Jesus with understanding may be among those from whom Satan has taken what was sown.¹⁶ Mark uses the same language to describe the actions of Jesus' opponents that he has used to describe the actions of Satan and his demons. Satan had tested Jesus in the wilderness (πειράζω, 1:13). Similarly, the Pharisees test Jesus by seeking a sign from him (8:11), and by attempting to entrap him with their questions (πειράζω, 10:2; 12:15).¹⁷ Also, the goal of the demons in Mark's Gospel is to destroy the lives of those whom they possess (ἀπόλλυμι, 9:22; cf. 5:3–5). When Jesus challenges the authority of the religious leaders, they seek to destroy him (ἀπόλλυμι, 3:6; 11:18). This portrayal of the leaders expresses an apocalyptic symbolic world, in which human events intersect with heavenly ones.¹⁸

Satan tests Jesus through his own disciples. As Satan tested Jesus before he began his public ministry (1:12–13), Satan likewise tests Jesus explicitly at the mid-point of the narrative. Now, Satan's threat even penetrates Jesus' inner circle. One of the Twelve is the agent of Satan's testing.¹⁹ When Jesus predicts his suffering and death Peter rebukes him,

seek to lead people into sin and covenant failure. In *1 Enoch*, fallen angels deceive people, corrupt them, and lead them into sin. In the Qumran literature, Belial and his spirits draw people away from the covenant and lead them into sin. See my discussion in ch. 3.

16 Susan Garrett also makes this point in *Temptations of Jesus*, 63–6.

17 Robinson argues that the debates between Jesus and his opponents extend the exorcisms and thereby the cosmic struggle begun at Jesus' baptism and temptation. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark*, 43–53.

18 See my discussion of heavenly beings in ch. 3.

19 See Susan Garrett's discussion of the disciples as agents of testing in *Temptations of Jesus*, 69–87. She argues that the disciples test Jesus in that they “not only fail

charging him to deny his mission (8:32). Peter rejects the way of suffering and death. Because he acts as an agent of Satan, Jesus rebukes him accordingly: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not thinking according to God's ways, but according to human ways" (v. 33).²⁰ Satan is active not only among Jesus' opponents, but also among Jesus' closest followers. This activity indeed confirms Satan as a strong man.

Satan's testing intensifies as Jesus draws nearer to the cross. The narrator implies Satan's activity at the place called Gethsemane (14:32–42). At this place, Jesus faces the test to deny his mission again when he himself asks God, "take this cup from me" (14:36).²¹ Jesus' excruciating conflict (vv. 33–36) recalls Peter's earlier rebuke. Now, the test Jesus faces does not come through the agency of another human being. Mark depicts the distress and trouble of Jesus' soul so as to suggest that the struggle comes from within Jesus' own being.²² Though Jesus prays that "the hour" and "the cup" would pass from him, he overcomes that struggle and commits his future to the will of God (14:36). That this is a test is confirmed by Jesus' exhortation to his disciples to imitate him by watching and praying lest they themselves enter into a test (εἰς πειρασμόν, v. 38). Jesus' language recalls that of wilderness test (πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ σατανᾶ, 1:13). Jesus resolutely shows that he has not denied the will of God, but has committed himself to it when the hour of his suffering and death comes (14:36b, 41). Though Mark does not explicitly name Satan in the Gethsemane account, he clearly implies satanic activity.

to urge Jesus forward on the path [of suffering] he must follow, but they even act to lead him astray from that path" so that they are a "satanic obstacle in his path" (p. 81).

20 See also Garrett, *Temptations of Jesus*, 78–9.

21 Garrett argues that Jesus' prayer is only preparation for a test he will later face, and is not itself a test. The similarity in subject matter between this prayer and Peter's rebuke, i. e., the denial of suffering and death, and Mark's depiction of the distress and trouble of Jesus' soul suggests that Mark does portray Jesus facing a test as he prays. See Garrett, *Temptations of Jesus*, 93.

22 Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane is evocative of those depicted in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The patriarchs warn that evil spirits seek to overpower human beings to lead them astray from following God's will, and also make exhortations to overcome the internal, individual struggles to choose God so that the evil spirits will flee. *T. Sim.* 3:5; *T. Iss.* 7:7; *T. Dan.* 5:1; *T. Naph.* 8:4; *T. Benj.* 5:2. Of all the patriarchs, Joseph is the only one able to resist demonic threat in order to choose God and obey. In the Christian interpolation, Joseph becomes a type of Christ.

Though Satan and his demons yield to the power of Jesus throughout the story, Satan is an active power throughout Mark's narrative, engaging both Jesus and those who follow him in conflict. Satan remains active to exert a measure of power over demons and people (through demon possession and the uprooting of God's word) and to engage Jesus in conflict (in the wilderness, at Caesarea Philippi, and at Gethsemane). Mark 3:22–30 suggests that the goal of Jesus' struggle against Satan is to free human beings from demonic oppression. In addition, my analysis demonstrates that Satan's captivity includes demonic efforts to destroy human life and to lead people astray. In fact, my analysis suggests that apart from demonic possession, most demonic efforts throughout Mark are aimed at enticing human beings to reject the will of God due to faulty hearing or understanding. Jewish leaders, disciples, the crowd, and Jesus himself are subject to such demonic activity. If, according to Mark 3:22–35, Jesus' mission is to liberate people from Satan's house to create a new household composed of those who do God's will, then he will struggle against Satan for the hearts and minds of human beings to do it.²³

4.2.3 Mark's Characterization of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit appears infrequently in Mark (only in 1:8, 10, 12; 3:29; and 13:11), but Mark's concentration on the Spirit in the prologue establishes this figure as the controlling power at work in Jesus through the rest of the narrative.²⁴ When John the Baptist speaks of the coming one who is stronger than he, the reader perceives that Jesus is strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit to engage in conflict with Satan. While John baptizes with water, this stronger one will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:8). Jesus appears and is himself baptized with the Holy Spirit, who enters into him (εἰς αὐτόν, v. 10). The rending of the heav-

23 Similarly, John Riches comments that, "Mark's primary focus... is on the struggle for the human will: Jesus' true brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God (Mk 3.35), and explores how Jesus, the stronger one has "the power to overcome the dark forces that radically undermine the human will." John Riches, "Conflicting Mythologies: Mythical Narrative in the Gospel of Mark," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 47.

24 Robinson discusses the identification of the Holy Spirit with power in the Markan introduction and its background in biblical tradition in *Problem of History in Mark*, 29.

ens at the descent of the Spirit (σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, v. 10) broadens the scope of the event to cosmic proportions.²⁵ This cosmic Spirit manifests power by driving Jesus into the wilderness (ἐκβάλλει, v. 12) to struggle against Satan. As the story continues, Mark applies the same vocabulary when Jesus drives out demons (ἐκβάλλει, e.g., 1:34; 3:22; 7:26), inviting the reader to imagine the Spirit as the power by which Jesus performs exorcisms, even though the Spirit is not explicitly named.²⁶ Mark does name the Holy Spirit in 3:29, confirming this figure as Jesus' power source for exorcisms.

The Holy Spirit appears once more after 3:29, in the context of the Olivet discourse. Jesus speaks to four of his disciples about a time beyond the scope of the narrative when his followers will be delivered over to councils, beaten in synagogues, and stand as witnesses before governors and kings for his sake (13:9–13). He tells them not to worry about what they will say when they are delivered over to trial because the Holy Spirit will give them their words “in that hour” (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ, v. 11). “That hour” does not denote a particular occasion, but connects Jesus' followers to the eschatological time of his suffering. In the place called Gethsemane, Jesus prays that the hour might pass from him (14:35), and after an excruciating night of prayer he yields to God's will and says, “the hour has come (ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα), the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (v. 41). “The hour” is the time when Jesus and his followers are delivered over to their enemies.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus' instruction to his followers envisions them imitating the struggle of his own ministry (13:9–13). Read in the Gospel context the appearance of the Holy Spirit evokes the role of the Holy Spirit that Mark has previously established in the narrative. Mark has given the reader eyes to see Jesus' ministry as a power struggle between two opposing sides with human and heavenly counterparts. Jesus' promised intervention of the Holy Spirit to his followers (13:11) expands the reader's line of vision to see the supernatural dimension to the human struggle.

After having established the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry, Mark seems to have forgotten the Baptist's prediction that Jesus would institute a new Spirit baptism for his followers. It becomes evident, however, that Jesus' whole ministry is directed towards that bap-

25 This recalls the plea of the prophet Isaiah that God would rend the heavens and come down to earth (Isa 64:1).

26 See also Robinson on this point, *Problem of History in Mark*, p. 29.

tism. When his disciples do not yet understand his third prediction of his passion, he asks them, “are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” and then assures them that they will indeed imitate him (10:38). Mark 13:9–13 now describes the time when John’s prediction will have been fulfilled, when they indeed imitate Jesus, and the Holy Spirit strengthens them to join his struggle “in that hour” against human and, by implication, cosmic opponents. The intervention of the Holy Spirit in 13:11 suggests that the struggle of Jesus’ followers, like the struggle of Jesus himself established in 3:22–30, and in the wilderness before that, is not simply a human one but a supernatural one.²⁷

In their struggle to proclaim the gospel, Jesus’ followers will be beaten in synagogues (13:9), and will be delivered to death by their own family members (v. 11). Just as Jesus’ exorcisms brought him into conflict with his religious and blood family (3:21–22), his follower’s faithful testimony will likewise bring them into conflict with their religious and blood family. During this time of conflict, the Holy Spirit provides divine help, but God does not remove their affliction. In fact, the words that the Holy Spirit gives them to say in the hour of their need do not rescue them from persecution or death. The main message for Jesus’ followers is that the one who endures to the end will be saved (13:13).²⁸

The narrator is preparing the reader for what will soon happen to Jesus himself, though he speaks about the future of his followers. The three-fold prediction that Jesus’ followers will be delivered over to their enemies and to death (παράδιδωμι, 13:9, 11, 12), recalls Jesus’ threefold prediction that he himself will be delivered over to his enemies and to death (παράδιδωμι, 9:31; 10:33; see also 8:31). After the Olivet discourse, Jesus is delivered over to a council (14:53–65) and a governor (15:1–5). He is beaten, not in a synagogue, but in the precinct of the high priest (v. 65). In the place called Gethsemane, Jesus had prayed that “the hour” (ἡ ὥρα, 14:35) might pass from him, but then submits himself to God’s will. When those who will betray and arrest him are coming, he says, “the hour has come” (ἤλθεν ἡ ὥρα, v. 41). That is,

27 Mark exhibits apocalyptic thought reflected in compositions such as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Testament of Solomon*, and the Qumran literature in which those who struggle against various opponents receive divine help. See my discussion of heavenly beings in ch. 3.

28 The message in Mark 13 echoes the message of the book of Daniel, to which it alludes throughout. Dan 2:28 in Mark 13:7; Dan 12:12 in Mark 13:13; Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 in Mark 13:14; Dan 12:1 in Mark 13:19.

the eschatological time of Jesus' suffering and death have come, and Jesus faces it resolutely. Although the Holy Spirit is not explicitly named, these connections imply that when Jesus stands as a witness before the high priest, what he says is given to him in "that hour," by the Spirit. When the high priest asks him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (14:61), the reader may imagine that it is not Jesus who speaks but the Holy Spirit when he breaks his silence and answers, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 62; cf. 13:11). The direct result of these words is not that Jesus is delivered from his opponents. Rather, he is delivered to death. The high priest tears his clothes, the entire council condemns Jesus to be killed, and those present beat and mock him (vv. 63–65). As a result of the words that Jesus speaks, he experiences a loss of worldly power that ultimately leads to his death. The implication is that for both Jesus and his followers, the Holy Spirit does not empower the escape from suffering and death, but the endurance of it (Mark 13:13).

4.2.4 Mark's Characterization of the Scribes

The scribes play a more prominent role in Mark's Gospel than any of the other Jewish leaders.²⁹ Only the scribes are part of the drama from Jesus' first public ministry at the Capernaum synagogue (1:28) to the final mocking of Jesus at the cross (15:31). Throughout the Gospel, Mark emphasizes their position as teachers of Israel. Specifically, the crowds in the Capernaum synagogue recognize their role as teachers (1:22), and Jesus uses their teaching as a point of departure for his own (9:11; 12:35). In addition, Mark emphasizes their position as custodians of Israel's righteousness. During Jesus' Galilean ministry, the scribes join the Pharisees to oppose Jesus' view of sin, ritual purity and the law (2:6–3:6; 7:1–23). Mark has Jesus constantly trump the scribes' teaching and authority in order to demonstrate that Jesus is

29 The scribes appear 21 times in Mark. By contrast, the Pharisees only appear 13 times (four of those times alongside the scribes) and do not take part in the seizure or trial of Jesus even though they earlier plot to destroy him. Although the chief priests are also mentioned 21 times, this group only appears twice outside of the seizing and trial of Jesus (chs. 14–15) and both times with the scribes.

the one God has sent to fulfill those purposes and inaugurate God's kingdom (1:22–28; 2:6–12; 9:11–13; 12:35–37; cf. 27–33).

Not all scribes in Mark's Gospel, however, appear in a negative light. Mark portrays the lone scribe who approaches Jesus in the temple as a sympathetic figure (12:28). Mark's juxtaposition of Jesus' commendation of the lone scribe in 12:28–34 with his condemnation of the scribes in vv. 35–37 makes this point. The scribe's encounter with Jesus is not polemical like those with the religious leaders leading up to this story.³⁰ The chief priests, scribes and elders challenge Jesus' authority (11:27–33); the Pharisees and Herodians seek to trap him (12:13–17); and the Sadducees ask him a trick question (vv. 18–27). By contrast, the lone scribe is moved to question Jesus because he hears Jesus' response to the Sadducees (vv. 18–27) and sees that he has answered them well (v. 28). Whereas the scribes as a group are characterized as teachers, this scribe seeks to be taught – by Jesus! After the various groups of religious leaders test Jesus, the scribe genuinely engages him about the law, and Jesus affirms that he is not far from the kingdom of God. Unlike in Mark, the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke present a legal expert questioning Jesus in order to test him (Matt 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–28). This difference suggests that Mark has a particular literary and theological aim. The positive characterization of individual Jewish leaders like this scribe, Jairus (5:22–23), and Joseph of Arimathea (15:43), make them stand out in Mark's narrative, showing that Mark excludes no one from becoming a follower of Jesus who responds to him in faith.³¹

Nevertheless, Mark depicts the scribes *as a group* in a negative light. Mark alone among the Gospels portrays the scribes who have come down from Jerusalem as the opponents of Jesus in the Beelzebul controversy. From one perspective, the narrator lumps all the Jewish leadership groups together to represent the opposition to Jesus.³² As a group, they continually question Jesus' authority, teaching, and actions, and fi-

30 See also A. Y. Collins, *Mark*, 565.

31 Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 195–96.

32 I assume that Mark's depiction of the Jewish leaders reflects the first-century historical and social context, but also that Mark develops their characterization in the narrative for theological aims. See also Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 131–65, especially 156; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, 2001), 144, 241–76.

nally plot and carry out his destruction. In Jerusalem the scribes plot with the chief priests and elders to carry out Jesus' death (11:18; 14:1; 43, 53; 15:1, 31). These groups are flat characters, or one-dimensional with consistent and predictable traits, words, and actions.³³

From another perspective, however, Mark develops the scribes as a particular character group. The uniqueness of the scribes' characterization is found in those parts of the story where they appear alone. In particular, out of all the Jewish leadership groups, only the scribes appear in conflicts with Jesus over his exorcisms. During his first public teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (1:21–28), the people marvel that Jesus teaches them as one with authority, and not as the scribes (1:22). Their wonder increases when Jesus casts out a demon: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (v. 27). Jesus' exorcisms elevate and confirm the new and authoritative nature of his teaching. Because Jesus' authority threatens that of the scribes, they seek to discredit him publicly by ascribing his exorcisms to demonic powers (3:22–30). From Mark's perspective, the scribes seek to preserve their authority and power at the expense of choosing God's side in a cosmic battle.

The scribes challenge the authority of Jesus to perform exorcisms again later in the Gospel, this time when Jesus' followers try to exercise that authority (9:14). This scene recalls the Beelzebul controversy. At that time, Jesus had descended a mountain after setting apart the Twelve (3:13–19), and engaged in a general controversy over exorcisms with the scribes (3:22–30). Now, Jesus, with some of the Twelve, descends the mountain where he had been transfigured and encounters a controversy over exorcism with the scribes. The similar setting of 9:14–29, the appearance of the scribes, and similar vocabulary (the use of ἰσχύω in 9:18; cf. ἰσχυρός, 3:27; the repetition of δύναμαι in 9:22, 23, 28, 29; cf. 3:23, 24, 25, 26, 27) evokes 3:22–30 and suggests that the controversy is the same. Although the argument in 9:14–16 is not explicit, it is likely a controversy about the authority to cast out demons. Since a master trains his disciples, the scribes' argument with the

33 Opposed to flat characters, round characters are complex characters who exhibit both good and bad traits. Whereas the Jewish leaders as a group are flat characters, the disciples are round characters. For an explanation of the use of "flat" and "round" characterization to analyze Mark's Gospel, see Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 116–117; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism" in *Mark and Method*, 35.

disciples functions as a veiled critique of Jesus' activity (cf. 2:18, 23–24). Jesus had given the Twelve the authority to preach and cast out demons (3:13–15) an imitation of his own mission. He sent them out to perform these tasks, and they had a measure of success (6:7–13). Now, they are not having success because of their lack of faith (v. 19). Only Jesus can cast the demon out of this boy, and when he does, it look like the boy is dead. Yet, Jesus lifts him up, alive (v. 27). Mark portrays this exorcism as a rescue from death. The scribes' challenge to Jesus' authority and power over Satan and the demonic world is an implicit challenge to his authority and power over death.

When Jesus hangs on the cross, the scribes exert their authority over Jesus and explicitly challenge his authority and power over death. At the crucifixion, Mark singles out the scribes among those who mock him and say, "he saved others; he is not able (οὐ δύναται) to save himself" (15:31). The one who is able to cast out Satan, who is able to enter the strong man's house and bind him (δύναται, 3:27), who is able to save the boy with the unclean spirit (δύναμαι, 9:22–27), is declared to be unable to save himself. The scribes, who had come down from Jerusalem to challenge the source of Jesus' power (3:22) are chief among the opponents who make this final pronouncement about Jesus' loss of power. They are looking for a straightforward display of conventional, lording-it-over-others power when they add, "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe" (15:32a). They cannot believe because they do not understand that Jesus' form of power will not be exhibited by coming down from the cross, but by staying on it. Rather than lording power over others, Jesus resolutely serves others, to the point of giving his life as a ransom for many (10:42–45; cf. 8:35; 9:35). He appears to be defeated and destroyed by those who have wielded worldly power. Yet, things are not as they seem. The young man at the tomb announces that Jesus' form of power has not led to death and destruction, but to its opposite. Confirming that God has displayed power in Jesus, the young man at the tomb announces that this Jesus who was crucified is risen (16:6).

In the end, the scribes are among those who manifest satanic, worldly power. According to the apocalyptic symbolic world established in 3:22–30, these human opponents reflect cosmic forces, and are caught up in the conflict between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God.

4.3 Conclusion

I have argued that Mark 3:22–30 constructs a symbolic world that displays Jesus' ministry primarily as a struggle against Satan by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of liberating those held captive by demonic power for participation in a new community. This character study expands the dimensions of the symbolic world and apocalyptic discourse of Mark 3:22–30 in three ways. First, Mark establishes that Jesus is the strong one whose mission is to fight against Satan. Second, Mark indicates that the persecution human beings experience is a result of satanic activity. The extent of Satan's work against Jesus includes struggles against human opponents, including the scribes, other Jewish leaders, his own disciples, and even his own flesh. Moreover, human beings in the Gospel struggle against inclinations to abandon the word they have heard preached, to conduct improper worship, and to deny Jesus. Through these struggles, and not only through demon-possession, Mark portrays Satan as a continuing power throughout the Gospel.

Third, Mark indicates the activity and power of the Holy Spirit on behalf of Jesus and his followers. My analysis suggests that the activity of the Holy Spirit leads Jesus and his followers to the endurance of suffering and even death. Throughout the Gospel, Mark establishes that disease, sickness, and death are the realm of Satan. Mark's apocalyptic discourse fits his literary and theological aim, to explain a crucified Messiah and to call disciples to follow him. Jesus has come to free people from Satan's captivity and power, ironically, by refusing worldly power to the point of losing his own life. Provisionally, we may state that the function of Mark's apocalyptic discourse is to communicate that what appears to be subjugation, weakness and death is, in fact, God's power for overcoming satanic forces to establish God's kingdom. Mark thereby redefines what may appear to human eye to be "down" – subjugation, weakness, and death – and turns it "up."³⁴ This worldview creates a basis to call a community to accept and enact the mission of Jesus, and to suffer for his sake.

In addition, this character study supports the conclusions of my exegetical analysis. The way Mark develops the characters that appear in the Beelzebul controversy makes it impossible to interpret the parables in 3:23–27 as depicting a straightforward loss or display of power, whether Satan's or Jesus'. It is only through a look at the whole narrative

34 See my discussion of symbolic world and metaphor in the first chapter.

that the reader comes to see that the stronger one overpowers the strong man by refusing worldly power. That is, the meaning of the parables is tied to the meaning of Mark's whole story.