

JESUS AND SCRIPTURE

Studying the New Testament Use
of the Old Testament

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Introduction

Jesus was a Jew, and like other Jews he was brought up to believe that the Scriptures of Israel were not simply human wisdom but a gift from God. Tradition held that Moses ascended Mount Sinai and brought back the Ten Commandments, along with a host of other laws now recorded in the Torah (Hebrew name) or Pentateuch (Greek name). We know the books as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and together they formed the foundation of Jewish life. Christians are inclined to think of the numerous laws as a burden, but the Jews thought otherwise: ‘The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes’ (Ps. 19.7–8). There are verses in the Gospels where Jesus expresses a similar view (Matt. 5.17–19; Mark 7.9–13).

Along with the Torah, or law, Jewish tradition recognized a second group of writings, known as the prophets. This was divided into the former prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the latter prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve). In many ways these books were regarded as commentary on the law, either telling the story of Israel and its relationship with the law (the covenant), or speaking out when Israel or (more often) its leaders were failing to keep it. It was because of such failures that the prophets began to speak of a new age when righteousness and justice would prevail (Isa. 1.26–27). Such hopes were diverse, some pointing to a glorious future for Israel (Isa. 60.19–22), some to universal peace (Isa. 11.1–9) and others to a completely new heaven and earth (Isa. 65.17). Scripture was often referred to as ‘the law and the prophets’.

A third group was simply known as the writings. Many of the books are what we would call wisdom (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes), but the most important book was Psalms. The fact that it is divided into five books (1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150) like the five books of Moses is indicative of its importance for Israel. Not only does it contain hymns and laments for public worship, it also provides the language of private prayer. It is widely quoted throughout the

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New Testament and, as we shall see, was particularly important for Jesus. The writings also contains books like Ruth and Daniel, which later collections (like the Greek Bible) would place after Judges and Ezekiel respectively. Many scholars believe this third section was still in a state of flux at the time of Jesus, and it is interesting that Luke ends his Gospel with Jesus declaring: ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled’ (Luke 24.44). It is possible that ‘psalms’ here stands for ‘writings’ (as its prominent member), but it may equally suggest that the third section of the Hebrew Bible was yet to be finalized.

The Jews of Jesus’ day spoke Aramaic, but nearly all of these books were written in Hebrew. Thus when the Scriptures were read in the synagogues there was a need to translate them into Aramaic, and the name given to these translations was Targum (plural Targumim). Most of the Targumim that have come down to us are from a much later period, and it used to be thought that they were only known in oral form in Jesus’ day. However, we have now found fragments of Targumim among the Dead Sea Scrolls (Leviticus and Job), proving that at least some of them were written documents in the first century CE. What is interesting about this is that when we compare these Aramaic translations with the Hebrew texts, they are more like paraphrases than literal translations. For example, the first phrase of Genesis 2.7 (‘the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground’) has been greatly expanded in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to: ‘And the Lord God created man in two formations; and took dust from the place of the house of the sanctuary, and from the four winds of the world, and mixed from all the waters of the world, and created him red, black and white.’ Although there are no examples in the Gospels of Jesus quoting such expansions, there is evidence that he was sometimes influenced by their wording.

However, of much greater significance for our study is the fact that the principal sources for our knowledge of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written in Greek, including the sayings of Jesus (with a few exceptions like *ephphatha* in Mark 7.34 and *talitha cum* in Mark 5.41, where the Aramaic has been preserved). At some point in the transmission of Jesus’ sayings they were translated into Greek, including his quotations from Scripture. Now this presents a particular difficulty because the Hebrew Scriptures had already been translated

into Greek, a version known as the Septuagint (often abbreviated to LXX, a usage we shall follow throughout this book),¹ and like the Targumim it does not always agree with the Hebrew text. In fact the accuracy of the translation varies greatly from book to book. In the Torah, or law, the translation is fairly literal, but in the wisdom books the differences can be quite extensive. The important question this raises is whether, when the translators recognized that Jesus was quoting Scripture, they translated his words for themselves or availed themselves of the translation already in circulation. In cases where the LXX offers a literal translation of the Hebrew there is no way of telling, but in cases where it differs from the Hebrew the evidence suggests that the translators usually availed themselves of the LXX – or a revision of it – rather than offer their own translations.²

New English Translation of the LXX (NETS)

There have until very recently been only two translations of the LXX into English, those of the American scholar Charles Thomson (1808) and the English cleric Sir Lancelot Brenton (1844). But in 2007 a group of scholars used the latest manuscript evidence to produce NETS. This is an extremely useful resource for two reasons. First, each book or section of the LXX is introduced by a short essay on the characteristics of its original translator. Second, it has adopted the strategy of conforming the translation to the NRSV whenever the Greek and Hebrew are close, and departing from it when they are not. Thus the English reader can compare the NRSV – which is a translation of the Hebrew text – and NETS and get some impression of the similarities and differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions, and of the effect of these on the meaning of the text. For example, the Hebrew of Isaiah 29.13 makes the following accusation of Israel: 'their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote'. The LXX has rendered this: 'in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts and teachings', and this is the form quoted in Mark 7.6–7 (see page 21).

The evidence of the Gospels

The four Gospels found in the New Testament present Jesus as quoting from nearly 60 different verses of Scripture and making at

least twice that number of allusions and more general references. The popular view is that Jesus frequently quoted from the prophets, but there are in fact more references to the law (26) and the writings (16) than to the prophets (15 – including one from Daniel, which appears among the prophets in the LXX but among the writings in the Hebrew Bible). The distribution is interesting. The quotations from the law are drawn from Deuteronomy (11) and Exodus (8), with only three from each of Genesis and Leviticus and one from Numbers. From the prophets it is principally Isaiah (7), with two from Hosea and one from each of Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, Micah, Zechariah and Malachi. From the writings, all are from Psalms (and one from Daniel). This distribution resembles that of the Qumran community (from which come the Dead Sea Scrolls), where the most quoted books are Psalms, Isaiah and Deuteronomy.

To those unaccustomed to modern biblical studies, it might be thought that our next step is simply to examine each of these verses (in context) and then draw conclusions about Jesus' use of Scripture. However, the nature of the Gospels means that our task is rather more complicated than that. For example, if we look at the story narrated in Mark 12.28–34, we see that Jesus responds to the question of which is the greatest commandment (Mark 12.28) by saying: 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these' (Mark 12.29–31). Many have thought this to be a mark of Jesus' genius. Not only does he give the 'standard' answer (to love God) but he couples it with the command to love neighbour, thereby ensuring that religious zeal is never at the expense of social concern. However, before we get too excited about discovering the key to Jesus' use of Scripture, we need to look at an earlier story that occurs in Luke:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

(Luke 10.25–28)

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In this story it is the lawyer who is the genius who brings together the two commandments, not Jesus. But it does not end there. Luke tells us that the lawyer asked a further question: ‘And who is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10.29), to which Jesus replied by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ (Luke 10.30–35)

Jesus then challenges the lawyer by asking him which of the three acted as neighbour to the man, a question that the lawyer is forced to answer: ‘The one who showed him mercy’ (Luke 10.37). Thus Luke agrees with Mark that the question about the greatest commandment provides an illustration of the genius of Jesus’ teaching, but does so in a very different way. For Mark, it is the bringing together of the two commandments; if this were the only Gospel we possessed we would conclude that Jesus was the first to do so. However, Luke suggests that the lawyer could do this without even pausing for thought, suggesting that it was a commonplace. For Luke, the genius of Jesus in this incident was not his use of Scripture but the telling of a poignant parable.

This example suggests that in order to describe Jesus’ use of Scripture we must attend to two tasks. First, we must study what each Gospel writer has to say about Jesus’ use of Scripture and seek to determine his method and purpose. Thus if we had not gone on to read the parable of the Good Samaritan we would have seriously misunderstood Jesus’ response to the lawyer. Second, if we are to understand Jesus’ use of Scripture we must engage in historical criticism to decide what Jesus *must* have said to give rise to the various accounts we find in the Gospels. Of course, there will be some examples where the Gospels are largely in agreement, but there are

Table I.1

<i>Matthew 27.46</i>	<i>Mark 15.34</i>	<i>Luke 23.46</i>	<i>John 19.30</i>
And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'	At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'	Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.	When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

others where they are not. To illustrate this, consider the final words of Jesus from the cross as shown in Table I.1.

Matthew and Mark are virtually identical except that Matthew's 'Eli, Eli' represents the Hebrew of 'My God, my God', while Mark has the Aramaic. It is a quotation of Psalm 22.1 and thus relevant to our study. Matthew and Mark both think that Jesus ended his life by identifying with David's cry of agony in Psalm 22.1. The only issue is whether Jesus said the words in Hebrew or Aramaic. Luke also thinks that Jesus ended his life with a quotation of Scripture, in this case Psalm 31.5. However, the content of the passage in Luke is very different. Luke presents Jesus as dying in faith and offering his spirit to God, rather than crying out in despair or perhaps even anger. Which is more likely to be true? John is different again. Here there is no quotation of Scripture, but the words 'and gave up his spirit' have a similar function to Luke's quotation. It is important to realize that the questions we are raising do not spring from a particular 'sceptical' or 'unbelieving' approach to Scripture; they arise because of what we find in Scripture and our desire to know the precise words that were spoken.

- Did Jesus end his life by quoting words from Scripture (Matthew/Mark/Luke) or not (John)?
- If he did, was its content that of reverent submission (Luke) or agony and despair (Matthew/Mark)?
- If it was from Psalm 22.1, did he utter the words in Hebrew or Aramaic?

One response to these differences is to conclude that Jesus must have said all of the sayings and that each Gospel has been selective in what it records. I will call this the ‘maximalist’ approach as its strategy for dealing with differences between the Gospels is to seek harmony. Its rationale is twofold. First, it is clear that Jesus must have said a great deal more than what we have in the Gospels, so it is quite plausible that each Gospel represents only a selection of what Jesus said. Second, a historian will generally try and use as much of the available evidence as possible in reconstructing the past. Any theory that involves discounting 50 per cent or even 75 per cent of the available evidence does not command much confidence.

On the other hand, there are difficulties with such a view. First, although it suggests that it is simply taking the evidence at face value, it cannot avoid constructing hypotheses of its own. For example, if Jesus is thought to have said all of the above sayings, a decision still has to be made as to which is the final saying. The question is not trivial, as film makers have shown. Did Jesus cry out in agony in the early stages of the crucifixion (Matthew/Mark) but accept his fate towards the end (Luke), eventually realizing that his work on earth was complete (John)? Or did Jesus begin with trust (Luke) and believe his work was done (John), but as the agony of the crucifixion increased, end his life by crying out in despair (Matthew/Mark)? The point is that the ‘maximalist’ approach has not really solved the difficulty; it has merely transferred it to another place.

Second, the maximalist approach raises difficult questions about the integrity of the Gospel writers. If Jesus did in fact say all of these sayings and the sequence was that he ended his life in despair (Matthew/Mark), then is not Luke being rather misleading by only quoting the positive saying? Of course, Luke doesn’t actually deny that Jesus spoke of being forsaken, so one could argue that he is not technically at fault. But does his silence not amount to misrepresentation? Readers of Luke would come away with the view that Jesus ended his life in reverent submission, with no hint of the despair recorded in Matthew and Mark.

The Synoptic problem

For over two centuries scholars have been trying to determine the relationship between the Gospels. Anyone who reads the Gospels

carefully will soon discover that Matthew, Mark and Luke have much in common but John is very different. With the exception of the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water, John has a completely different set of miracle stories from the other three Gospels, which became known as the Synoptic Gospels (meaning they can be seen together). John is seen by most scholars as the latest of the Gospels, and contains a great deal of theological reflection on such themes as Jesus' pre-existence, incarnation and divinity.

This contrast is easily seen by considering how each Gospel begins. Mark begins with the adult Jesus coming to John for baptism and experiencing the descent of the Spirit, which empowers him for a ministry of teaching and healing. Readers of Mark have no reason to think that Jesus was anything 'special' before this event. In contrast, both Matthew and Luke begin with two chapters of nativity stories that show that Jesus had a miraculous birth (by the Holy Spirit). This explains why he grew up to have a ministry of teaching and healing; he was 'special' from the moment of conception. However, while readers of Matthew and Luke have no reason to conclude that Jesus had an existence before his birth, this is precisely what the opening chapter of John states. Jesus was in the beginning with God but also 'became flesh and lived among us' (John 1.14). And it is from this perspective that John tells his story of Jesus, so that the meaning of the words 'It is finished' is that Jesus came from God to do the will of God and is now returning (John 17.1–5).³

Now while we are not to imagine that the Gospels represent three stages of theological development (Jesus as empowered human, Jesus as miraculous human, Jesus as divine human), most scholars do believe that Mark was the earliest Gospel (c. 65 CE), that it was followed by Matthew and Luke (c. 75–85 CE) and that John was the latest (c. 95 CE). The reasons for this can be found in most introductions to the Gospels and need not detain us further.⁴ When applied to Jesus' final words on the cross, this understanding suggests that Mark is closest to what Jesus actually said. This is reproduced by Matthew, except that he changes the Aramaic saying ('Eloi, eloi') to the Hebrew ('Eli, eli'), either because he thought it more apt that Jesus would quote the Hebrew text or because he thought it better explains the confusion with the name 'Elijah' that follows. Luke has a different purpose for writing his Gospel and wishes to emphasize how Jesus lived his life in service for others. He thus substitutes for Psalm 22.1 a different psalm of David – Psalm

31.5. John is more concerned to show that Jesus has fulfilled his mission, and has no interest in showing that Jesus ended his life citing Scripture. For him, the words 'It is finished' have more meaning.

This I shall call the 'moderate' view. It accepts that real events lie behind the Gospel stories but believes that they have been embellished as each Gospel writer adapts the tradition to meet his readers' needs. Thus Mark is known as the 'suffering Gospel' and seems to go out of its way to emphasize the suffering aspects of Jesus' ministry. John is at the other end of the spectrum, emphasizing that what looked like suffering was in reality Jesus' victory. Both are emphasizing those things their readers need to hear, but Mark's earlier date means that it is generally more reliable than John. The word 'generally' is important here. The earlier Gospels are generally more reliable than the later ones but that does not mean that everything in the latter is unreliable – it is possible that they sometimes had access to earlier sources that were unknown when the first Gospels were written.

There is a further feature of modern scholarship relevant to our study. Some 200 verses of Jesus' teaching are present in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. These include such sayings as the Beatitudes ('Blessed are the meek . . .'), the Lord's prayer ('Our Father . . .') and certain parables, such as the marriage feast. Where did these sayings come from and are they earlier or later than Mark's Gospel? Most scholars believe they come from a sayings collection that is referred to as 'Q' (from the German *Quelle*, source) and is a decade earlier than Mark. Thus the traditional answer to the Synoptic problem is that Matthew and Luke both expanded Mark by incorporating additional teaching from Q and material that was known only to them (designated 'M' and 'L'). The 'moderate' view of Gospel study is that we can have some confidence in sayings found in Mark and Q but need to exercise caution with material found only in Mark or Luke (M and L), especially if it appears to serve the main emphases of these Gospels.

Before we embark on our study there is a third group of scholars that I will call 'minimalist'. By and large they agree with the analysis presented above but do not regard Mark as an accurate record of what Jesus said and did, which has implications for the accuracy of Matthew and Luke. Their reasons go back to a book by William Wrede, a famous German scholar active at the very beginning of the twentieth century.⁵ He challenged the consensus view that Mark's abrupt and candid style was indicative of eyewitness testimony by

showing that Mark is pursuing a theological agenda just as much as the other Gospels. For example, it was often said that stories that end with the disciples misunderstanding Jesus would hardly have been invented by the early Church. But Wrede suggested that Mark goes out of his way to portray Jesus as misunderstood, in order to explain the discrepancy between what the first disciples believed and what the later Church was proclaiming. For example, in Mark 8 the disciples are completely baffled as to how Jesus can feed a crowd of 4,000 with a few loaves and fishes, but not long before this – Mark 6 – they had seen Jesus feed a crowd of 5,000. Their lack of understanding is incomprehensible.

One of the key positions of modern ‘minimalists’ is that Jesus did not predict the future destruction of the world and his own return to earth. This has commonly been taught in churches (‘he will come again to judge the living and the dead’) and appears to be the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels – see Table I.2.

The key argument for the authenticity of these ‘apocalyptic’ sayings is that the end of the world did not come within a generation and Jesus has still not returned. Who then would have invented sayings that in the 70s and 80s (Matthew and Luke), if not in the 60s (Mark), would have been problematic? It was the argument of Albert Schweitzer⁶ that Jesus believed that the end was nigh and that this is what gave the urgency to his preaching (repent while there is still time). The fact that it did not happen is a tremendous testimony to the accuracy of the scribes, who transmitted these sayings even though they knew they had not come true.

Scholars such as John Dominic Crossan argue differently. They believe that it was the furore surrounding the claim that Jesus had come back to life that led the early Church into thinking that the world was about to end. We know from texts like 1 Thessalonians 4.13–18 and 1 Corinthians 7.25–31 that this was Paul’s belief in the early 50s, and so by the time Mark came to be written (late 60s) it was commonly thought that Jesus must have prophesied such things. Crossan thinks it is possible to reconstruct an early layer of wisdom traditions (mainly from Q but also the *Gospel of Thomas*) that represent Jesus’ original teaching, with the apocalyptic layer coming later. We will discuss the complexities of this theory in Chapter 5, but it should now be clear why I call it ‘minimalist’. Crossan believes that only a small proportion of the Gospel sayings go back

Table I.2

<i>Matthew 24.29–31, 34</i>	<i>Mark 13.24–27, 30</i>	<i>Luke 21.25–28, 32</i>
Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other . . . <i>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.</i>	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 . . . <i>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.</i>	There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near . . . <i>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.</i>

to Jesus, and interestingly for our purpose, this rarely involves Jesus’ use of Scripture. Others would counter that a Jewish teacher such as Jesus almost certainly discussed and debated the meaning of Scripture, hence Crossan’s portrait is fundamentally flawed.

Plan of the book

We will thus begin our study with a chapter on how Mark portrays Jesus' use of Scripture, followed by chapters on Matthew and Luke. We will be particularly interested in the sayings found in Matthew and Luke that the majority of scholars assign to Q, since this hypothetical source is usually dated a decade or so earlier than Mark. Our chapter on John is of interest in that John represents a very different tradition from the Synoptic Gospels, but only those of a maximalist position will use it to reconstruct Jesus' own use of Scripture. That is not to say that it is devoid of any historical traditions, as scholars such as John Robinson and Charles Dodd have shown, but they are generally embedded in discourses that reflect the theology of a later period.⁷

Having surveyed the material contained in the four Gospels, we then turn our attention to how this can be used to reconstruct Jesus' own use of Scripture. Since there is no consensus on how this should be done, we will group a number of scholars together under the three headings – minimalist, moderate and maximalist – mentioned above. This has the advantage of showing how the evidence can be construed when adopting different presuppositions, which will help readers decide for themselves which reconstruction they find the most convincing.

The question of Q

The main reason that scholars think Matthew and Luke used Q to expand the narrative outline of Mark is that there is often close agreement in the wording of a saying, even though it appears in a different context. This suggests that they were both copying from a text – the agreements sometimes involve unusual words or expressions – but each used it in his own way. Q would thus need to have existed for some time for it to be regarded as authoritative by both Matthew and Luke; hence a date in the 50s is proposed. It should be pointed out, however, that some scholars do not accept the existence of Q and believe that Matthew used a variety of sources and traditions to expand Mark, and that Luke obtained this material directly from Matthew. If this is the case, then Matthew is our only independent witness to this material, which means it could date from anytime between the 50s and 70s.⁸

1

Jesus and Scripture according to Mark's Gospel

Introduction

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels (16 chapters), and moves rapidly from a ministry of teaching, healing and exorcism in Galilee (Mark 1—10) to the final week (the Passion) in Jerusalem (Mark 11—16). According to the best manuscripts, the Gospel ends with the story of the empty tomb (Mark 16.1–8) and does not record any resurrection stories. It used to be thought that Mark's original ending had been lost and that later scribes did their best to fill the gap (see the shorter and longer endings printed separately in the NRSV). But most scholars today believe that Mark deliberately ended his Gospel in an abrupt manner in order to stress the importance of the crucifixion. It corresponds with the abrupt beginning, where the story begins with Jesus' baptism and temptation and records the threat to his life as early as Mark 3.6.

There are about 25 quotations from the Old Testament in Mark's Gospel, of which some 22 are on the lips of Jesus. They are drawn from the law (10), the prophets (7) and the psalms (5). Since Mark is writing in Greek to a Greek-speaking audience, it is to be expected that the quotations would follow the LXX, which is generally the case. It is possible that Mark is responsible for this, but most scholars think that the translation of Jesus' sayings from Aramaic to Greek had happened long before Mark wrote his Gospel. The Gospel is usually dated between 65 and 69 CE, largely because Mark 13.14–23 seems to envisage a period just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies (c. 70 CE). We will begin with Mark's view of Jesus' attitude to the law.

Jesus and the law

In the debate about hand washing in Mark 7 ('Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled

hands?' – v. 5), Jesus criticizes their adherence to tradition because it involves 'abandoning' (v. 8) or 'rejecting' (v. 9) the commandment of God. He then cites the example of 'Corban', a law whereby a portion of one's goods can be dedicated to God and is therefore no longer available for mundane use, even if that means hardship for one's parents. This time Jesus accuses them of 'making void the word of God through your tradition' (v. 13), specifically citing the commandment to 'Honour your father and your mother' (v. 10). Thus Jesus is clearly portrayed as one who upholds the law and is hostile to 'traditions' (*halaka*) that undermine it.

This episode is followed by a discussion of what defiles a person, where Jesus says that 'there is nothing outside of a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile' (v. 18). It is elaborated in verse 20 that the things in question are 'evil intentions' and that they come from the heart. There then follows a list of sins – drawn from the commandments (theft, murder, adultery) and other traditions (fornication, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly) – that come from the heart and defile. Thus in this episode Jesus upholds the law in the face of the human inclination to transgress it.

However, it is Mark's comment in the middle of this episode that has attracted attention. In verse 18, Jesus offers a rationale for why one is not defiled by what is outside: 'it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer'. This is then followed by a comment from Mark that literally translated means 'cleansing all foods' (NRSV: 'Thus he declared all foods clean'). It is not presented as words of Jesus, rather Mark's deduction from the aphorism. Thus we have a major difficulty with Mark's understanding of Jesus and the law. On the one hand, the episodes of Mark 7 strongly assert that Jesus upholds the law against Pharisaic tradition and the inclinations of the human heart. On the other hand, Mark thinks that Jesus' aphorism that 'there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile' implies that all foods are clean, effectively abrogating a major section of the law and the principle – the distinction between clean and unclean – on which it is based.

A similar ambiguity occurs with the way Mark presents Jesus' view of the Sabbath. On the one hand, it is evidently Jesus' custom to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 3.1; 6.2), and he undoubtedly upholds the Ten Commandments (Mark 10.19), even though the

Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned in his summary. But Mark 2.1—3.6 collect together a series of controversy stories, two of which focus on what can or cannot be done on the Sabbath. In Mark 2.23–28 the Pharisees object that Jesus' disciples are plucking grain as they make their way through the grain fields. Jesus replies by citing a story from 1 Samuel 21.1–6, where David entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, along with his companions. Jesus acknowledges that what David did was 'unlawful' but ends with the saying: 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath' (Mark 2.28). This is open to at least three interpretations:

- 1 Jesus has the authority to *break* the Sabbath, as his royal predecessor did.
- 2 Jesus has the authority to temporarily *suspend* the Sabbath because of the disciples' hunger, as with David and his companions.
- 3 Jesus has the authority to *declare* that the disciples' actions do not constitute a break with the Sabbath, contrary to Pharisaic tradition that regarded 'plucking grain' as a form of work (see Appendix 2).

Before trying to answer this we will consider the second controversy story (Mark 3.1–6) – the healing of the man with the withered hand. It is a Sabbath, and Jesus is in the synagogue along with the sick man. In this instance there is no verbal accusation by the Pharisees, but Mark tells us that Jesus knew they were watching him, 'to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him' (v. 2). Jesus takes the argument to them by asking: 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' (v. 4). Since he then proceeds to heal the man, it is clear that Jesus does not regard his healing activity as breaking the Sabbath, contrary to the view of the Pharisees. Indeed, Mark tells us that the Pharisees immediately went out to conspire with the Herodians to have Jesus put to death (v. 6). Mark clearly intends this to be ironic: the Pharisees complain that Jesus is breaking the commandments while they themselves are engaged in a plot to have someone murdered.

Thus it would appear that Mark does not regard Jesus as breaking the Sabbath, although his interpretation of it is clearly at loggerheads with Pharisaic tradition. Whether Mark is correct in this will be discussed in Chapters 5–7, but two points are worth mentioning here.

First, if this healing corresponds to what actually happened, the Pharisees would surely have pointed out that the man's life was not at risk. If Jesus truly respected the Sabbath, why did he not wait until the following day to heal him? Second, if Jesus defended the disciples' plucking of grain on the Sabbath by reference to David eating the consecrated bread, they would surely have pointed out that in that story there is no mention of it being on a Sabbath (1 Sam. 21.1–6). What is clear is that *Mark* thinks that Jesus upheld the spirit of the Sabbath against Pharisaic traditions.

We thus return to the question of the food laws. Is it likely that Mark thinks that Jesus castigated the Pharisees for 'abandoning', 'rejecting' or 'making void' God's commandments for the sake of their traditions, only to abrogate the food laws on the basis of an aphorism about what defiles a person? If we remember that the discussion began over the issue of Pharisaic hand-washing rituals (Mark 7.1–5), it could be argued that Mark's conclusion – 'cleansing all foods' – has nothing to do with the law's distinction between clean and unclean food. It is simply asserting that food does not become defiled by breaking the detailed hand-washing rituals of the Pharisees. The status of food that the law regards as unclean is simply not in view. Indeed, although Jesus is accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2.16), he is never accused of eating anything unclean, which concurs with Peter's protestation in Acts 10.14 that never in his life – thus including his time with Jesus – has he ever eaten anything unclean. Therefore while the question of Mark's attitude to the law continues to be a matter of debate,¹ most scholars think that Jesus kept the Jewish food laws and at no time spoke against them.

This appears to be confirmed by a number of other texts where Jesus is seen to uphold the authority of the law. For example, having healed the man suffering from leprosy in Mark 1.42, he tells him to 'go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them' (Mark 1.44). When the young ruler asks what he has to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus directs him to the commandments (Mark 10.19). The fact that Jesus adds the requirement to sell his possessions and give to the poor is hardly a criticism of the commandments. When the Sadducees seek to trap him with a concocted story about a woman forced to marry seven brothers after each dies (based on the levirate law of Deuteronomy

25.5), he replies: 'Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?' (Mark 12.24). He then argues from the book of Exodus that because God said 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exod. 3.15), the dead must be raised. One might have expected a quotation from one of the texts in the Old Testament that speak of resurrection, such as Daniel 12.1–2, but this is probably to be explained by the fact that the Sadducees regarded the prophets as secondary to the law. According to John Meier, the logic of Jesus' reply is this:

- 1 Throughout Scripture, God refers to himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- 2 Scripture also says that God is a God of the living, not the defiling, unclean dead.
- 3 Therefore Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must be 'alive' with God (now or in the future).²

However, there are two further stories that might challenge this view. The first is the discussion about divorce in Mark 10.2–9. The Pharisees ask Jesus whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jewish sources suggest that this was a hotly debated subject, some arguing that divorce was possible for almost any reason (the school of Hillel), others taking a more rigorous line and insisting that the reason had to be something serious, such as adultery (the school of Shammai). Jesus responds by asking them what Moses commanded, and they reply by quoting words from Deuteronomy 24.1–4 ('Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her'), the only passage in the law to mention divorce. However, this is evidently not Jesus' position, for he says that this was written 'because of your hardness of heart', and goes on to quote Genesis 1.27 and 2.24, that marriage is about two people becoming one flesh. Although these texts do not mention divorce, Jesus deduces that 'one flesh' implies 'no divorce', and so goes beyond even the rigorous position of Shammai: 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery' (Mark 10.11–12).

Although one could argue that Jesus is not contradicting the law (Deuteronomy 24 permits divorce but does not command it), he is clearly giving the Genesis texts priority over the Deuteronomy text. Indeed, John Meier says that Jesus' position on divorce is nothing

short of astounding: 'Jesus presumes to teach that what the Law permits and regulates is actually the sin of adultery.'³ In other words, the Jewish man who conscientiously follows the Torah's rules for divorce and remarriage is in fact guilty of breaking one of the Ten Commandments. According to Meier, this is much more than entering the debate about permissible grounds for divorce. On the other hand, Jesus is not the first to give priority to the Genesis text. We find the same argument in a text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, though it is unclear whether it is condemning polygamy or divorce:⁴

The 'builders of the wall' [possibly Pharisees] . . . who have followed after 'Precept' – 'Precept' . . . shall be caught in fornication twice by taking a second wife while the first is alive, whereas the principle of creation is, *Male and female created He them* . . . (CD 4.20–21)

Our second example is where Jesus is asked, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' (Mark 12.28). He replies by affirming the traditional confession (known as the *Shema*): 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Mark 12.29–30). However, he then goes beyond the scribe's question by asserting: 'The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"' (Mark 12.31), adding that there is 'no other commandment [singular] greater than these'.

Combining the commandments to love God and neighbour was not unique to Jesus. In a work entitled *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, we read in the *Testament of Issachar*, 'love the Lord and your neighbour' (*T. Iss.* 5.2), and in the *Testament of Dan*, 'love the Lord and one another with a true heart' (*T. Dan* 5.3). However, there do not appear to be any parallels to citing them as the first and second commandments, although Philo and Josephus both think of the Ten Commandments as pertaining to God (first five) and neighbour (second five). It would appear to cohere with Mark's view that Jesus upheld the law but was antagonistic towards Pharisaic traditions that (in his view) diverted it from its humanitarian intentions. Thus Jesus is against using the 'permission' to divorce in Deuteronomy 24 as a path to adultery, or the dedication of goods to God (*Corban*) to avoid obligation to one's parents. In Jesus' view (as portrayed by Mark), such traditions do not 'uphold' the law, as the Pharisees claim, but undermine its true intent.

However, there are two further features of this story that require comment. The first is technical, and it is that Jesus cites four faculties (heart, soul, mind, strength), whereas Deuteronomy 6.5 only has three (heart, soul, might). It is inconceivable that Mark was not aware of this and indeed he has the scribe repeat Jesus' answer with just three ("You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength"). We might compare this with Jesus' citation of the Ten Commandments in Mark 10.19, where honouring parents comes *after* murder, adultery, theft and false witness, and instead of the command not to covet we have the command not to defraud. It was evidently not Mark's purpose to show that upholding the law is dependent on citing its precise wording.

Second, Mark has the scribe make a deduction from Jesus' reply ('this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices'), which gains Jesus' approval ('When Jesus saw that he answered wisely'). As with his parenthetical comment about 'cleansing all foods', this looks like Mark's comment to make the point that moral laws are more important than ritual laws. It does not necessarily represent Jesus' view and as we shall see in the next chapter, it does not appear in Matthew's version of the story. Bill Loader thinks that Mark is deliberately contrasting 'heart religion' with 'cultic observance' for the benefit of his Gentile readers.⁵ This might be so, though it is worth noting that the scribe speaks of 'more important' (*perisotteron*) rather than replacement, and in this he is no different from many of Israel's prophets (Isa. 1.11; Hos. 6.6). In conclusion, Mark presents Jesus as a law-abiding Jew who was at odds with any who would use 'tradition', or even the law itself, as a means of avoiding what he considered to be the true intent of the law.

Jesus and the prophets

Mark opens his Gospel with either a statement or title ("The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"), followed by a composite quotation of Malachi 3.1/Exodus 23.20 ("See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way") and Isaiah 40.3 ('the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"'). According to the best

manuscripts, the composite quotation is introduced by the words 'As it is written in the prophet Isaiah', which later manuscripts changed to 'in the prophets' (so κJV) to conform to the composite quotation. However, many scholars believe that the specific reference to Isaiah is significant, indicating not only that the messenger (John the Baptist) was prophesied in Scripture but that the 'beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ' was written in Isaiah. We will thus begin this section with an examination of Jesus' use of Isaiah.

The first clear reference to Isaiah comes in Mark 4.12, where Jesus answers the disciples' question about the meaning of parables by saying: '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*.'" The reference is somewhat controversial since it appears to be saying that Jesus deliberately spoke in parables so that outsiders would not be able to comprehend and be forgiven. The words come from Isaiah's call-vision, where he is not only told that Israel will reject his message but that this rejection is part of God's purposes:

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)

Joachim Jeremias famously argued that the difficulty arose through mistranslation. The Greek word *parabole* translates the Hebrew *mashal*, which can mean riddle, puzzle, dark saying or oracle. He concluded that what Jesus meant was 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'. Mark then added to the confusion by placing it in the middle of his parables chapter, suggesting that the purpose of the parables was to hide rather than to reveal. Jeremias thought that this explanation was confirmed by the fact that elsewhere in Mark, the parables are clearly intended to be understood by the hearers (Mark 12.12).⁶

Bill Telford disagrees. He does not think this is a case of Mark misunderstanding the saying but of deliberate reinterpretation. Whatever Jesus may have meant by comparing the dull response to

his teaching with Isaiah's commission, Mark thinks that '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.'⁷ As we shall see in the following chapter, Matthew uses a different Greek word to connect the Isaiah citation with Jesus' saying, with the effect that the blindness is a 'result' (*hoste*) of the parables, but not their purpose (*hina*).

It is of interest that later in Mark, the accusation of blindness, based on Isaiah 6.9–10, is also aimed at the disciples. They are on a boat journey with Jesus and realize that they have forgotten to bring enough bread (Mark 8.14). Thus when Jesus warns them against the 'yeast of the Pharisees', they assume that he is having a dig at them for forgetting the bread. This calls forth the following accusation: 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?' Taken on its own, this could be an allusion to Jeremiah 5.21 or even Ezekiel 12.2, but it is almost certain that Mark intends his readers to connect this with the parable purpose of Mark 4.12. If outsiders cannot understand the kingdom because they have eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, then the same is true of the disciples, raising a key question for Mark's Gospel: Did anyone believe in his message?

The second explicit reference to Isaiah is found in the controversy over hand washing (Mark 7.1–23), Jesus' response (before the aphorism about what defiles – see p. 14) is to say that 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites' and then to quote words from Isaiah 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.' This is then illustrated by the law of Corban, where they are said to put their 'traditions', which are therefore being equated with the 'human precepts' of the quotation, before the commandment of God. Mark follows the LXX in referring to 'teaching human precepts as doctrines', whereas the Hebrew text is more specific, stating that it is their *worship* which is governed by human precepts. Since the LXX rendering undoubtedly facilitates the application to the Pharisees, who are accused of using their traditions to avoid upholding the commandments, many scholars are sceptical that this goes back to Jesus. But it is clearly Mark's view that Jesus applied Isaiah 29.13 to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees

One of the reasons that some scholars challenge the reliability of Mark's Gospel is that its picture of the Pharisees is so different from what is found in Jewish sources. Thus, contrary to the Sadducees, who focused on the priesthood, and the Qumran community, who focused on monastic observance, the Pharisees believed that the law could be fulfilled in daily life. This sometimes meant adopting 'traditions' that went beyond the law, but there is no evidence that they were hostile to less observant Jews. Neither is there evidence that they would have opposed healing on the Sabbath or would have disagreed with Jesus that the commandment to honour parents takes priority over the tradition of Corban. Noting that Jewish debate often used hyperbole (exaggeration) and rhetoric (caricature), Sanders concludes that none of the disputes found in the Gospels falls outside the parameters of ordinary Jewish debate (see Appendix 2).⁸

The third explicit reference comes in the so-called cleansing of the temple incident, where Jesus issues the following accusation on God's behalf: 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers' (Mark 11.17). The words come from Isaiah 56.7, with the phrase 'den of robbers' from Jeremiah 7.11. The precise nature of the accusation is not clear. If Mark has the context of Isaiah 56.7 in mind, then the emphasis is on inclusion ('for the nations'). Jesus is condemning the commercial activity of the temple courts because it excludes Gentiles. It is of interest that the way Isaiah 56.7 expresses this is to say of the 'foreigners' and 'eunuchs' that 'their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar' – further evidence that Mark does not think that Jesus was against ritual in itself. On the other hand, Mark has combined Isaiah 56.7 with words from Jeremiah 7.11 ('den of robbers'), which might suggest that *corruption* rather than exclusion is the focus of his protest. If this is the case, then the emphasis of the Isaiah quotation falls on the words 'house of prayer', in contrast to the 'den of robbers' that it has become.

Most scholars recognize a fourth reference to Isaiah in the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12.1–11). Some scholars think that this parable began life as a protest against absentee landlords, but in Mark's version

it is clearly intended to be a reference to the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5. This is seen by the following parallels:

- 1 the construction details specifically mention digging a wine vat and erecting a watchtower (Isa. 5.2/Mark 12.1);
- 2 the vineyard fails to return fruit to its owner (Isa. 5.4/Mark 12.3);
- 3 the people of the vineyard turn to murderous behaviour (Isa. 5.7/Mark 12.5);
- 4 they incur destruction by the owner (Isa. 5.5/Mark 12.9).

What is different about Jesus' parable is that a series of emissaries are sent by the owner/landlord before the vineyard is destroyed. This is almost certainly a reference to the prophets (2 Kings 9.7; Jer. 7.25; Ezek. 38.17), so Jesus is portrayed as *extending* the allegory to cover the whole period of Israel's relationship with God.

What stands out from these four explicit references to Isaiah discussed in the foregoing paragraphs is that they are all concerned with Jesus' opponents: Isaiah 6.9–10 is applied to their blindness; Isaiah 29.13 to their hypocrisy; Isaiah 56.7 to either their exclusivity or corruption; and Isaiah 5 to their unfruitfulness and violence. As we shall see in Chapters 5–7, one of the major questions facing the reconstruction of Jesus' use of Scripture is whether such quotations reflect later disputes between Church and Synagogue rather than between Jesus and his fellow Jews. What is clear is that Mark portrays Jesus as seeing in Isaiah a series of prophecies concerning those who are opposing him. This raises the question of how he viewed himself, the recipient of this opposition, and the most likely answer is that he viewed himself as the one who suffers in Isaiah 40–55.

The strongest evidence for this comes in Mark 10.45, where Jesus (under the epithet of 'the Son of Man') says that he 'came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many'. When this is combined with the words spoken at the last supper in Mark 14.24 ('This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many'), there is an obvious parallel with Isaiah 53.11–12:

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.

(Isa. 53.11–12)

Morna Hooker famously objected to such an identification, pointing out that Mark has managed to use a different Greek word from what is in the LXX for all of the key terms: 'service/servant'; 'ransom'; 'poured out'.⁹ Although it could be argued that Jesus originally spoke these sayings in Aramaic, so that differences from the LXX are irrelevant, it does raise the question of how Mark thought his readers, who are unlikely to have known much Aramaic, would have made the identification. Put another way, if Mark intended his readers to grasp the fact that Jesus saw himself as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, why did he not make this more explicit, either with an explicit quotation or at least some use of the key vocabulary from that chapter?

Those who believe that Mark does intend such an identification point to the opening quotation, which could suggest that the events that are to follow are not just in accord with Isaiah 40.3 but also the material that it introduces, namely Isaiah 40–55. There is also the suggestion that the words at Jesus' baptism in Mark 1.11 ('You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased') reflect the language of the servant in Isaiah 42.1a ('Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights'), while the descent of the Spirit accords with Isaiah 42.1b ('I have put my spirit upon him'). In response, one could say that if Mark intended the quotation of Isaiah 40.3 to indicate that Jesus fulfils the role of the servant in Isaiah 40–55, why does he complicate this by making it a composite quotation, with words from Malachi 3.1/Exodus 23.20 coming first? And if Mark intends the words at the baptism to suggest the servant of Isaiah 42.1, why does he point his readers to Psalm 2.7 ('You are my son'), where the king is being addressed? At best, one would have to say that Mark's presentation leaves the issue of whether Jesus thought of himself as the servant of Isaiah 40–55 ambiguous.

After the last supper, Jesus leads the disciples to the Mount of Olives and predicts their desertion (Mark 14.27), quoting words from Zechariah 13.7 in the form: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'. In the original, a sword is addressed ('Awake, O sword, against my shepherd . . . Strike the shepherd'), but Mark ignores this and assumes that it is God who does the striking. It does

not seem a very appropriate reference since God appears to be angry with both the shepherd and the sheep, but the clue might come in what follows. Zechariah says that two-thirds of the people will perish but a third will be refined by fire so that they will 'call on my name, and I will answer them' (Zech. 13.9). Some have argued that this is the point of the quotation – it predicts the desertion and return to faith of the disciples, and we know from the rest of the New Testament that this is in fact what happened (except for Judas). However, this is not the part of Zechariah that is quoted, so it must be assumed that Mark's readers would readily know what comes next. As with our discussion of Jesus and the Servant, it does not appear to be Mark's purpose to make the identification with Zechariah's stricken shepherd explicit.

Finally, we will consider the apocalyptic language that occurs in Mark 13. The chapter begins with the disciples' admiration of the temple and Jesus' response that it will be destroyed ('Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down'). He then utters a prophecy, similar in style to the Old Testament prophets, which begins with earthly woes (wars, earthquakes, famines) and leads on to what appears to be the end of the world:

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)

As is common in the apocalyptic style, phrases from different Scriptures are fused together to give a powerful and evocative warning of future judgement. The reference to sun and moon draws on Isaiah 13.10 and Joel 2.10 (also 3.4; 4.15). Stars falling from heaven echoes Isaiah 34.4, while the gathering of the elect suggests Zechariah 2.6. But most attention has focused on the reference to 'the Son of Man coming in clouds', which reflects the figure in Daniel's dream: 'I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him' (Dan. 7.13 RSV). Most of the discussion has centred on the authenticity of the saying, since the words translated

'son of man' would simply mean 'human' or 'mortal' when spoken in Aramaic (hence the NRSV translation, 'I saw one like a human being'); they would not have been understood as a title ('*the* Son of Man'). This is an important issue, also affecting whether Jesus' reply in Mark 2.28 means that 'humanity' is lord of the Sabbath (because the Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath) or specifically that Jesus, as *the* Son of Man, is lord of the Sabbath. At present, we will confine ourselves to Mark's probable meaning.

Daniel is referring to a human-like figure (as opposed to the four beasts of Dan. 7.1–8) who comes to God and receives 'dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed' (Dan. 7.14). As this stands, it sounds like a prophecy of the messiah's reign, but when Daniel asks about the meaning of the visions, he is told that the four beasts represent four kings (usually understood to be Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome), while it is the 'holy ones of the Most High' who will receive the everlasting kingdom. Either the 'son of man' is a symbol for God's people or it combines both individual and corporate traits (as perhaps Isaiah's 'servant' does). How then does Mark understand Jesus' words?

The traditional view is that Mark thinks that Jesus is referring to his second coming, that is, his return to earth in judgement (Acts 1.11; 1 Thess. 4.14). The difficulty with this view is that Mark 13 says nothing about Jesus coming *to the earth*, and if the allusion to Daniel 7.13 is deliberate, then it evokes the image of a figure going *to God*, not coming *from God*. Consequently, other views have been suggested that take the allusion to Dan. 7.13 in a less literal sense. Daniel is referring to the replacement of evil kingdoms with God's perfect everlasting kingdom, and that is what the allusion is intended to evoke. Thus in answer to the disciples' question concerning the fate of the temple, Jesus responds by saying (in symbolic language) that the temple will be destroyed and replaced by an everlasting kingdom, that of the messiah and his people. If it is replied that the cosmic language of sun and moon not giving their light and stars falling from heaven is rather excessive for a description of the destruction of the temple, it has been argued that the texts referred to earthly calamities in their original contexts. Richard France puts it like this:

the apocalyptic language of these verses, drawn almost entirely from identifiable OT texts, relates, as did those texts in their own contexts, not to the collapse of the physical universe and the end of the world but to imminent and far-reaching political change, in the context of the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. On this view the 'coming of the Son of Man' is language not about an eschatological descent of Jesus to the earth but, as in the vision of Daniel from which it derives, about the vindication and enthronement of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, to receive and exercise supreme authority.¹⁰

There is a further allusion to Daniel 7.13 in Jesus' reply to the high priest at his trial (Mark 14.62). The high priest asks Jesus, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' For the first time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus openly accepts the titles and replies: 'I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power", and "coming with the clouds of heaven."' The reference to being seated at God's right hand is probably an allusion to Psalm 110.1 ('Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'), especially as this text is explicitly quoted in Mark 12.35–37. With typical Jewish reverence, the high priest avoids pronouncing the name of God by using a circumlocution ('Blessed One'), and Jesus does likewise ('the Power'). But what Jesus says next is offensive to the high priest and results in a charge of 'blasphemy' (Mark 14.64).

It begins with a prediction that they (the 'you' is plural) will see something, which later Christian theology has understood to be Jesus' second coming. This depends on taking the two phrases as sequential, so that Jesus 'sits' at God's right hand (for a time) and then 'comes' on the clouds (at the end of time). However, since the 'sitting' is clearly metaphorical and is not something that can be (visibly) seen, it is worth enquiring as to whether this is also true of the 'coming.' We have already noted that Daniel 7.13 is not referring to a 'coming' to earth but a 'coming' to God in order to receive a kingdom. Thus like Psalm 110.1, Daniel 7.13 is an enthronement oracle, where the recipient does not 'go' anywhere in a literal sense but receives power and authority.

Is this how Mark understood it? The high priest thinks that Jesus is worthy of death, but there will come a time when he (and those with him) will 'see' that God does not agree; far from it – they will 'see' that God has given Jesus a kingdom of power and authority. Mark may have thought this was fulfilled in the resurrection (Mark 9.1), the coming of the Spirit (Mark 13.11) or the destruction of the temple

(Mark 13.2). As we shall see later, this raises an interesting conundrum in terms of what Jesus might have meant. On the one hand, if Jesus was referring to one of these 'earthly' events, was the Church wrong to develop its view of a second coming of Jesus? On the other hand, if Jesus was thinking of a second coming (and the end of the world), then the high priest did not live to see it and Jesus was wrong.

Finally, although no explicit quotations are involved, there is an intriguing discussion that takes place after the story of Jesus' transfiguration. In that story Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain with Jesus (Mark 9.5), which prompts the disciple's question, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' (Mark 9.11). This is puzzling, since they have just seen Elijah, and Jesus' reply is equally puzzling:

Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.

(Mark 9.12–13)

Three things are difficult about Jesus' reply. First, he appears to endorse the scribal belief that Elijah is coming to restore all things (based on the reference to Elijah in Malachi 4.5 and the LXX's use of the word 'restore' in the next verse), but then states that Elijah has already come. The 'restoration' envisaged in Malachi 4.6 is the healing of relationships within Israel ('He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents'), but this has hardly been fulfilled. Second, the fate of the Son of Man and the fate of Elijah are said to be in accord with what is written, a formula that elsewhere means 'written in Scripture' (Mark 1.2; 7.6; 11.17). There is debate as to whether texts such as Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 are in the background for the fate of the Son of Man (the actual phrase does not occur), but there are no texts or Jewish traditions that speak about a suffering Elijah. Third, the statement about the 'Son of Man' intrudes between the two Elijah sayings, making it difficult to see the underlying logic. That these are genuine difficulties rather than our modern desire for coherence can be seen by the fact that Matthew places the 'Son of Man' saying after the two Elijah sayings, and omits any reference to Scripture (Matt. 17.10–12).

Joel Marcus suggests that some of these difficulties are solved if we understand Jesus' first remark as, effectively, a question ('Does

Elijah restore all things?'), as the Greek would allow.¹¹ He believes it is an example of a common Jewish exegetical practice whereby difficulties in Scripture are resolved. In this case, the scribes think that Elijah's restoration will be something glorious, just as they think that the Messiah will come in power. Jesus responds by saying that Scripture (also) says that the 'Son of Man' will suffer, and deduces from this that the same must be true of his forerunner. Thus the second reference to what is written is not referring to a specific text but the exegetical procedure that has just been written by Mark.¹²

France finds this somewhat fanciful and suggests that Mark is not so much thinking about a specific verse but the Elijah stories in general, where he was 'driven by his faithfulness to God's commission into potentially fatal conflict with the royal house (1 Ki. 19:2-3, 10, 14).'¹³ The difference is that Herodias succeeded where Jezebel failed (equating Elijah with John the Baptist, Mark 6.17-29), which confirms to Jesus that this will be his fate also. Jesus is not therefore claiming that the restoration of Malachi 4.5 has been fulfilled, but directs the scribes to the stories about Elijah's conflict with the king. France calls this a 'typological' reading, meaning that certain people or events in Scripture parallel certain people and events in a later period.

Jesus and the writings

If the opening quotation from Isaiah 40.3 (and Malachi 3.1/Exodus 23.20) indicates the importance of Isaiah for understanding Mark's account of Jesus, the words at the baptism play a similar role for the psalms. According to Mark's account (Mark 1.10-11), the heavens are torn apart (*schizo*), the Spirit descends on him like a dove and a voice from heaven says to him 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' This richly allusive phrase may draw on Genesis 22.2 (Isaac is called a 'beloved son'), Jeremiah 31.20 (Ephraim is called a 'beloved son') and Isaiah 42.1 (the servant in whom God delights), but it is Psalm 2.7 that is the principal text. This royal psalm addresses David as God's anointed ('You are my son; today I have begotten you'), and promises to make the nations his heritage and the ends of the earth his possession (Ps. 2.8). The words are repeated in the transfiguration story, where this time it is the disciples who are addressed: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' (Mark 9.7). The psalm was important in the early Church for establishing the

'sonship' of Jesus (Acts 13.33; Heb. 1.5; Rev. 12.5), and Mark no doubt expects his readers to remember it when they encounter the 'beloved son' in the parable of the vineyard.

However, contrary to the exalted claims of Psalm 2.8–9 (that the 'beloved son' will reign over the earth), the son in the parable is killed by the tenants (Mark 12.7). But this is not the end of the story, for Jesus goes on to quote words from Psalm 118.22–23: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.' While some scholars believe this is a rather clumsy attempt to 'resurrect' the son in line with Christian doctrine, others point to the wordplay that exists between the Hebrew words for 'son' (*ben*) and 'stone' (*eben*) as a suitable rationale for the connection (which does not work in Greek as the words are *huios* and *lithos*). The quotation makes two points. First, the death/rejection of the son/stone becomes the cornerstone for a new building, which Mark undoubtedly understands as the Church. Second, the phrase 'this was the Lord's doing' confirms a point made in the Passion predictions (Mark 8.31; 9.31; 10.33) that Jesus' crucifixion was part of God's plan. How much of this goes back to Jesus will be discussed in Chapters 5–7.

Most of the disputes in Mark's Gospel begin with a challenge to Jesus, but in Mark 12.35–37 Jesus is portrayed as taking the initiative. While teaching in the temple he 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 (by the Holy Spirit) 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"')? The Hebrew text makes it clear that the first 'Lord' is God (YHWH), and in the light of the promise (subjection of enemies), God is speaking to his Messiah, whom David addresses as 'my Lord' (*adonai*). Later Christian thought will argue that the LXX – which uses *kyrios* for both YHWH and *adonai* here – refers to God the Father speaking to God the Son, but is this Mark's meaning? Joel Marcus thinks that Mark is wrestling with an ambiguity:

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.¹⁴

It has been a puzzle and sometimes a theological embarrassment that God's Messiah ends his life in Mark's Gospel with the cry 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15.34). These are the opening words (after the title) of Psalm 22, 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 . . . future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it' (Ps. 22.24, 30–31). Certainly Mark appears to have the wider psalm in mind, for 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 Psalm 22.7 ('All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads'). However, these allusions merely confirm that Mark's focus is on the suffering of the psalmist, not the psalm's more positive conclusion. As France says, 'to read into these few tortured words an exegesis of the whole psalm is to turn upside down the effect which Mark has created by this powerful and enigmatic cry of agony'.¹⁵ It thus appears that Mark understood Psalm 22.1 as a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering, just as he has portrayed Jesus' suffering as God's will throughout his Gospel.¹⁶

The criterion of embarrassment

In this chapter we have seen several examples of where Jesus' words are not easy to reconcile with later Christian beliefs and practices. For example, Mark 4.10–12 states that Jesus spoke in parables so that his hearers could not perceive his meaning. This is very different from the idea that Jesus spoke in parables in order to communicate to a wide audience. In the story of the man enquiring about eternal life Jesus says 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' (Mark 10.18). In Mark 10.11 Jesus forbids divorce on any grounds, a teaching that Paul finds difficult to apply in the case of a Christian married to a non-Christian (1 Cor. 7.12–16). And as we have just discussed,

it is surprising that God's faithful servant ends his life by crying out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15.32), especially as the first Christian martyr (Stephen) seems far more composed (Acts 7.54–56). *The criterion of embarrassment* states that it is very unlikely that the early Church would invent sayings that contradict or otherwise differ from its own beliefs and practices. It is more likely that they have been included because the Gospel writers (or their sources) knew that Jesus had said them, even though they present the Church with certain difficulties.

Conclusion

Mark's Gospel is often thought of as the 'enigmatic Gospel', and this also applies to his portrayal of Jesus' use of Scripture. Thus he presents Jesus as strongly upholding the law against Pharisaic 'traditions', while almost going out of his way to provoke them concerning what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath. He refers to the Scriptures as the 'word of God' but suggests that the 'one flesh' view of marriage in Genesis 2 takes priority over the permission to divorce in Deuteronomy 24, which is said to be a concession by Moses. Isaiah is clearly an important text to Jesus, but the explicit quotations are not used to elucidate who he is and what he has come to do, rather to accuse his opponents of blindness, hypocrisy and self-interest. The psalms are also important to Jesus, and Mark probably thinks that the voice at the baptism and transfiguration ('You are my son') were significant for Jesus' own self-understanding. However, contrary to the victory message of Psalm 2, the son in the parable of the vineyard is killed and Jesus ends his life by identifying with David's suffering in Psalm 22, which if understood as prophecy becomes the suffering of the Messiah. The only explicit quotation that makes the point that suffering will not have the final word is Psalm 118.23, quoted at the end of the parable of the vineyard. The son in the parable is killed but the psalm envisages the son/stone becoming the cornerstone of a new building, which Mark undoubtedly understands as the Church. It remains a matter of debate as to why the allusions to Isaiah 53 are so tentative when quotations from this chapter would have brought some coherence to Mark's 'victory through suffering' theme. Perhaps coherence, in the sense of rational explanation, was not what Mark was trying to achieve.¹⁷