The Demonic in Mark and its Eschatological Significance

Dane Ortlund

Crossway, Wheaton, IL

The purpose of this essay is to consider the demonic in the Gospel of Mark and to reflect on the eschatological significance of Jesus' authority over the demonic. Despite being the shortest Gospel, Mark has more references to the demonic realm than the other Gospels. So it is clear that 'one of the most significant ways that Mark portrays Jesus is as an exorcist.'[1] What requires greater elucidation, however, is the significance of this emphasis on the demonic for Mark's portrayal of the eschatological import of Jesus' coming. Specifically, this essay will suggest that Mark's focus on the demonic is part of Mark's broader focus on Jesus as the bringer of the eschatological *new creation*.

We will set the stage by surveying the Greek terms that denote the demonic in Mark. We will then reflect on the eschatological significance of the demonic in Mark in three steps. First, we will explore two early references in Mark to Satan. Second, we will reflect more broadly on the demonic with four observations. All this will lead, third, into an extended conclusion to this study regarding the demonic in Mark and its eschatological significance.

The thesis this essay explores is the way the demonic motif in Mark uniquely portrays Jesus as the bringer of the latter-day new creation longed for in the Old Testament and especially the prophets. In this way, Mark quietly presents Jesus not simply as the object of eschatological hope but the one through whom God begins creation over again with a second Adam. While Markan scholarship has identified the eschatological significance of the demonic in Mark, the more fundamental new creation dimension has not been adequately explored.

1. SURVEY OF REFERENCES TO THE DEMONIC IN MARK

Four terms are associated with the demonic in Mark: σατανᾶς, δαιμόνιον, δαιμονίζομαι, and πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον. We take them briefly in this order for the sake of general orientation.

---

[1] Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (WUNT 2/245; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), p. 111.

Mark is the only Gospel account that does not use the word διάβολος, which Matthew uses six times, Luke five times, and John three times. The majority of these instances in Matthew and Luke come in the pericope narrating the temptation of Jesus. In Matthew, Luke, and John διάβολος normally refers to the devil, though at one point the word is used in a more general way when Jesus refers to Judas being 'a devil' (John 6:70).[2] Mark's preferred term for the devil is σατάν, which he uses six times (Mark 1:13; 3:23 [2x], 26; 4:15; 8:33), more than Matthew (four), Luke (five), and John (one).

Demons are referenced by the noun δαιμόνιον and the verb δαιμονίζομαι. In Mark we find a total of fifteen uses of these two words. Of these eleven are δαιμόνιον (Mark 1:34 [2x], 39; 3:15; 3:22 [2x]; 6:13; 7:26, 29, 30; 9:38), four are δαιμονίζομαι (1:32; 5:15, 16, 18).[3] Matthew has a total of nineteen references to demons/demon-possession (one of which is the *hapax legomenon* δαίμων in Matt. 8:31), Luke has twenty-four, and John has seven. Mark evidently uses δαιμονίζομαι to designate the state of those under the control of a demon or demons, due to the way he interleaves the two terms in Mark 1:32 (τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους) and 1:34 (δαιμόνια). Thus δαιμονίζομαι and δαιμόνιον function in parallel and can be considered together as the verbal and nominal expressions of the same notion (of demon possession).

The Gospels speak not only of demons but also 'unclean spirits.' We will consider the relationship between a δαιμόνιον and a πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον below. Here we note that Mark uses the language of 'unclean spirit' fourteen times (1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:17, 20, 25 [2x]), including references simply to 'spirit' where 'unclean spirit' is clearly implied. Matthew has four such references, Luke twelve, and John none. Of all the references to πνεῦμα in each Gospel, Mark has a much higher proportion of references to an *unclean* spirit. The word πνεῦμα is used nineteen times total in Matthew, thirty-six times in Luke, and twenty-four times in John. Thus 61% of Markan uses of πνεῦμα refer to an unclean spirit, as opposed to 21% for Matthew, 33% for Luke, and 0% for John.

Taking the references to unclean spirits together with the references to demons/demon-possession would signify that Mark has proportionately a greater emphasis on the demonic than any other Gospel. But before considering this point and its significance, we must clarify the relationship between demons and unclean spirits in Mark. They are used with approx-

[2] Quotations of the Bible are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[3] I exclude Mark 16:9–20 from this data, where two more references to demons exist.

imately equal frequency (fifteen references to the demonic, fourteen references to unclean spirits). Do these all refer to the same reality? If not, how are they different? A comparison of Mark's references to demons with those of unclean spirits indicates that he speaks of demons and unclean spirits interchangeably. Demons and unclean spirits are both referred to singularly (7:26; 3:30) and in the plural (1:34; 1:27); demons and unclean spirits are both cast out of people (1:39; 5:13); demons and unclean spirits both afflict young and old alike (7:26; 1:39; 9:25; 1:26); Jesus has authority over both demons (1:34) and unclean spirits (5:13). Most important of all, at times the two terms are used interchangeably *within the same pericope* and refer to the same spirit. For example, in the episode of the Syrophoenician woman and her afflicted daughter, we are initially told that the daughter has a πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (7:25), but the next two times the spirit is called a δαιμόνιον (7:26, 29). This interchangeability happens also in the episode of the man among the tombs and the drowned pigs, using πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (5:8, 13) and δαιμόνιον (5:15, 16, 18) to refer to the same group of demons. Moreover, both Jesus and other characters in the Gospel refer to both 'demons' and 'unclean spirits' so one cannot consistently posit preference for one term over the other based on who is speaking or on Mark's own narrative preferences.

2. ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

What is the significance of the many episodes involving the demonic in Mark? They could be approached from various angles. We see, for instance, the compassion of Jesus at play as he mercifully frees the oppressed from the demons that afflict them (cf. Mark 9:22). One could also draw the conclusion from Jesus' exorcisms that he was a man of unusual power.[4] Another way to approach the exorcisms would be to consider their political significance against the backdrop of Jewish leadership and the Roman empire.[5]

What this essay explores, however, is the Markan significance of Jesus' interactions with Satan and the demonic for understanding Jesus as launching the latter-day new creation. This aspect of Jesus' work is anticipated throughout the Old Testament while given its fundamental categories in Genesis 1 to 3. Thus we are considering the demonic from an eschatological perspective. Others have considered the eschatological dimension of the exorcisms, but not in terms of Jesus launching *the*

[4] This is the emphasis of Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, pp. 111–12.

[5] This is the approach of Amanda Witmer, *Jesus, The Galilean Exorcist: His Exorcisms in Social and Political Context* (LNTS 459; London: T&T Clark, 2012).

eschatological new creation. Morna Hooker explores various OT connections with the demonic in Mark but does not develop these in terms of the eschatological significance of the demonic in Mark.[6] Adela Yarbro Collins mentions at times the last days being inaugurated by Jesus in Mark and the significance of the demonic to that end but her focus is Mark's apocalyptic perspective on history—that 'earthly events are controlled by heavenly powers.'[7] Richard Hays has applied his approach for detecting OT allusions to Mark and the other Gospels, though again a specifically new creational aspect to his exegesis is not apparent.[8]

Joel Marcus more than anyone is notable for his focus on the eschatological significance of Jesus' interactions with the demonic.[9] At times, moreover, he refers to the new creational aspect of this subject. His focus, however, is the apocalypticism of Mark, by which he means that Mark's Gospel 'is from start to finish set within the context of the approaching end of the world.'[10] This approach informs Marcus's understanding of what people are saved from in Mark. 'For Mark as for other Jewish apocalypticists, this salvation is above all a liberation of humanity from the cosmic powers that oppress it; Jesus' main mission is to clear the earth of demons.'[11] Marcus maintains this salutary focus on the demonic throughout Mark and our study will at times intersect with his work. The key difference, however, is that Marcus' apocalyptic approach focuses on what is coming to an end, while our study suggests that the focus on the demonic is a matter primarily of what is beginning—namely, the final eschatological new creation.[12]

---

6 Morna Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (BNTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991).

7 A. Y. Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probings of Mark in Context* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 34; idem., *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), *passim*.

8 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 15–103. While Hays is strong on OT backgrounds to Mark 1:9–15, he says nothing about the eschatological import of 1:12–13 in particular.

9 Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); idem., *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

10 Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, p. 71.

11 Ibid., p. 72.

12 Other differences between Marcus' approach and mine could be mentioned, such as his more skeptical stance toward what can be received as historically reliable (ibid., *passim*), or his dating of Mark in the early 70s (ibid., pp. 37–39)

We will focus on two texts toward the beginning of Mark's Gospel to explore this before making some summative statements about the rest of the episodes involving the demonic. The two texts come in the first three chapters of Mark's Gospel, a section that sets the stage in a prospective way for the rest of the narrative.

Mark 1:13

We begin with Mark 1:13, where we are told that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan. What we must recognize is that this text is part of an opening to Mark's Gospel rich in biblical-theological significance. Mark opens his Gospel, as Rikki Watts has shown at length, by drawing together several Old Testament texts to introduce Jesus as the one who brings the new and final exodus as prophesied especially in Isaiah.[13] Just as Jesus appears on the scene to launch the new age, John appears on the scene to draw to a close the old age (Mark 1:4–8; cf. Matt. 11:10–11).

In verse 9 Jesus is baptized by John and the accompanying phenomena signal to the reader the eschatological significance of Jesus' entrance into history. Mark tells us that as Jesus comes up out of the water—perhaps itself a quiet allusion to the exodus and Israel, God's 'son' (Exod. 4:22), coming up out of the waters—the heavens are 'torn open' (v. 10). This draws on Isaiah 64:1, which speaks of Yahweh himself splitting the heavens and coming down.[14] The verb Mark uses here (σχίζω) is, strikingly, the same one he uses just one other place in his Gospel, at the very end as Jesus is crucified, when he describes the tearing open of the temple curtain (15:38). (Other elements supporting an *inclusio* to Mark's Gospel could be mentioned, such as the only two non-demonic assertions that Jesus is 'Son of God' at 1:1 and 15:39). In Mark 1, the heavens are torn open as the bringer of the new age launches his ministry; in Mark 15, the temple curtain is torn open and the final temple of the new age is inaugurated, access to God having broken open through the death of Jesus.[15]

---

and the associated suggested influence of Paul on Mark (ibid., pp. 73–75); but these matters are less directly germane to the present study.

13 Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 53–90.

14 See the discussion of Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, pp. 17–18.

15 G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), pp. 188–92; Marcus, Mark 8–16, pp. 1067–68, mentions the new age dawning in Mark 15:38–39, but focuses on the centurion being the first to confess Jesus' true identity and thus the inclusion of the Gentiles.

And what happens as Jesus rises out of the water and sees the heavens being torn open? As in Isaiah 64:1, God is coming down—though it is the Holy Spirit specifically. This is noteworthy as the Spirit is one of the key marks of the new age having dawned (cf. Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29; Luke 11:20; Acts 2:17).[16] The Spirit descends 'like a dove'—perhaps recalling the role of the dove throughout the Noah account as God brings a new creation out of the primordial chaos of the flood. In both Genesis 8 and Mark 1, the dove goes forth to signal a new day and a new start as God begins anew and brings his chosen servant through the waters to launch a new creation. We might note further that just as this is Jesus' baptism event specifically, Peter connects baptism with the Noahic floodwaters (1 Pet. 3:20–21). And just as God called Israel his own son (Ex. 4:22–23), so God now calls Jesus his Son (Mark 1:11).

In all these ways we are meant to understand Jesus as the launcher of the latter days. This literary undercurrent continues as we come to the text that speaks of Satan,[17] whom Hooker views as the focus of Mark's temptation narrative.[18] The Spirit drives Jesus out (τό πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει) into the wilderness (v. 12). The wilderness appears to be important to Mark, as he repeats in rapid succession the fact that Jesus is in the wilderness, once in verse 12 and again in verse 13—a point that R. T. France calls 'the most striking feature' of this passage.[19] The use of ἐκβάλλω here is especially striking, not only as it denotes the compulsory force with which Jesus is driven into the wilderness but also because this is the very verb used throughout the rest of Mark to denote the driving out of demons.[20]

---

16 See also Geerhardus Vos, 'The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit', in Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1980), pp. 91–125. Vos's essay is a treatment of the Pauline literature, but much of his argument is transposable more broadly onto the rest of the NT.

17 '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'; Elizabeth E. Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22–30* (BZNW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), p. 154. Cuvillier calls Mark 1:12–13 'un chef-d'oeuvre de concision'; Élian Cuvillier, *L'évangile de Marc* (Bible en face; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2002), p. 30.

18 Hooker, *Saint Mark*, p. 49.

19 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 83. Gnilka notes the presence of the wilderness theme starting as early as verse 3 in Mark 1; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Mk 1–8,26) (EKK 2/1; 5 aufl.; Zürich: Benziger, 1998), p. 57.

20 Noted by Étienne Trocmé, *L'Évangile selon Saint Marc* (CNT 2; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), p. 37; Gudrun Guttenberger, *Die Gottesvorstellung im Marku-*

Mark likely is welcoming an association by alert readers between these uses of ἐκβάλλω. Jesus was 'cast out' by the Spirit, and triumphed over Satan—so that he himself was subsequently able to 'cast out' Satan's own forces.[21] But Rudolf Pesch points out an even more ancient connection Mark may wish us to see.[22] In Genesis 3:24 *Adam and Eve* are driven out (LXX ἐκβάλλω) of Eden after failing Satan's temptation. In Mark 1:12–13 Jesus is driven out (ἐκβάλλω) into the wilderness where he too is tested by Satan but succeeds. Adam and Eve were sent out in disgrace; Jesus was sent out to reverse this disgrace.

Jesus is in the wilderness being tested by Satan for a period of forty days (v. 13). A reader attuned to the Old Testament cannot but associate this testing with the forty years wilderness wandering of the Israelites, the forty days Moses was on Mount Sinai, and the forty days Elijah took to travel to Horeb.[23] The difference with Jesus is that he emerges the victor in this period of testing, triumphant over Satan.[24] This is explicit in the longer recountings of Jesus' temptation in Matthew and Luke, but will become equally clear in Mark as this Gospel unfolds. (We will see this in particular when we turn to Mark 3.) While Jesus will appear to be conquered by Satan on the cross, the note that is struck here and throughout the early chapters of Mark is that Jesus is obedient to the Father—with him God is 'well pleased' (1:11). He is not subject to Satan the way others are throughout Mark's Gospel.

Finally, we note that Jesus was 'with the wild animals' in the wilderness (1:13)—an intriguing remark that is not replicated in the other Gospel accounts and stands out in light of Mark's terse, crisp writing style that wastes no words. It is possible that Mark has in mind the Roman context to which he writes and is alluding to the beasts of the Roman theatre; however, the reference to the wild beasts is cryptic enough that we

---

sevangelium (BZNW 123; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), p. 237.

21 Simon Légasse, *L'évangile de Marc* (LD 5; Paris: Cerf, 1997), p. 96 n. 3. It need not worry us that the text does not explicitly say that Jesus prevailed in this period of testing, as what has preceded (God being 'well-pleased' with his Son) and what follows (conquest over the demonic throughout Mark) require that he did indeed prevail.

22 Rudolf Pesch, 'Anfang des Evangeliums Jesu Christi: Eine Studie zum Prolog des Markusevangeliums (Mk 1,1–15)', in Günther Bornkamm and Karl Rahner, eds., *Die Zeit Jesu: Festschrift für Heinrich Schlier* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), p. 131.

23 See Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, p. 57.

24 Trocmé, *L'Évangile selon Saint Marc*, p. 138.

should not be dogmatic as to its meaning.[25] But in light of the surrounding context, rife with intercanonical connections and bristling with eschatological import,[26] it seems most natural to take this as an Edenic reference to the beasts among whom the first Adam dwelt.[27] Now the bringer of the new age, the last Adam likewise is among the beasts. And like the first Adam whose time with the beasts concluded with the presence of angels (Gen. 3:24), the last Adam likewise concludes with the presence of angels—though instead of blocking the way into Eden from God's servant, these angels minister to God's servant.[28]

It would not be out of order to bear in mind subsequent Old Testament references to wild beasts in the wilderness. For example, Moses speaks of the 'fiery serpents and scorpions' that the Israelites faced in the wilderness (Deut. 8:15–16).[29] Psalm 91 says that the one who trusts in God 'will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot' (Ps. 91:13).[30] Intriguingly, this Psalm also speaks of God commanding his angels to protect the psalmist—a text that Satan himself quotes to Jesus in the temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke (Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:10), and is thus likely in the background of Mark's statement that 'the angels were ministering to' Jesus in Mark 1:13. The broader context of Deuteronomy 8, too, is quoted in the temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke (Deut. 6:16). We should also bear in mind Isaiah 43, an eschatologically charged passage that brings together the notions of the wilderness (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ [Isa. 43:19, identical to Mark 1:13]) and the wild beasts (τά θηρία [Isa. 43:20, the same word used in Mark 1:13]) in speaking of God 'doing a new thing' (Isa. 43:19).[31] And elsewhere in Isaiah harmonious relations among the animals is a sign of the dawning eschaton (e.g.,

---

25 Edwards inclines toward this interpretation; James Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) pp. 40–42.

26 On which see esp. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, pp. 15–103.

27 William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 61; Légasse, *L'Évangile de Marc*, p. 98.

28 Marcus sees Adam as the primary OT background figure to Mark 1:12–13 (*Mark 1–8*, pp. 169–70).

29 Jan Willem van Henten sees Deut. 8:15 as a key text forming the background of Mark 1:13; 'The First Testing of Jesus: A Rereading of Mark 1:12–13', *NTS* 45 (1999), pp. 352–56.

30 Caneday notes the significance of Psalm 91 as forming the background to Mark 1:13; Ardel B. Caneday, 'Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration: He Was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him', *BBR* 9 (1999), pp. 34–36.

31 G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), p. 419.

Isa. 11:6–9; 65:25). But it would probably be artificial to seek to identify any one of these OT texts as backgrounding Mark 1:13 over against the others.[32] More likely, Mark is drawing on a constellation of OT texts that all find their roots in Genesis 1–3 to depict Jesus as the last Adam, among the beasts—whether the prelapsarian harmonious relationship humanity shared with the beasts, or the postlapsarian hostile relationship humanity has shared with the beasts.

One text from Second Temple Judaism is especially striking in considering the eschatological import of the appearance of Satan in Mark 1:13. In *Testament of Naphtali*, likely an early post-apostolic Christian document, we read, 'Lo! My children, I have shown unto you the last times, however things shall come to pass in Israel' (*Test. Naph.* 8:1). The author then goes on to speak of what will happen to those who 'work that which is good' (8:4): 'The devil shall flee from you, and the wild beasts shall fear you, and the Lord shall love you, and the angels shall cleave to you' (8:4). The three elements of the devil (and his being vanquished), the wild beasts, and the ministry of angels provide a striking threefold parallel with Mark 1:13, and all in an explicitly eschatological context.[33] And the fourth element, 'and the Lord shall love you,' finds a parallel in Mark 1:11: 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'[34] This early Christian text provides evidence that Jesus' temptation was understood eschatologically in the early church.

---

[32] John Paul Heil ('Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13', *CBQ* 68 [2006] pp. 63–78) engages Richard Bauckham ('Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age', in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* [ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], pp. 3–21) on Mark 1:13, arguing that instead of Bauckham's focus on the Adamic background to Mark 1:13, this text should be read with Israel's wilderness testing in the background. But Israel's wilderness testing was itself a recapitulation of Adam's testing; both Adam and Israel were 'the son of God' who failed when tested (cf. Ex. 4:22–23; Luke 3:38). It is not necessary to pit these two backgrounds against each other.

[33] Gnilka notes the 'eschatologische Tierfriede' indicated in *Test. Naph.* 8:4; Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, p. 57.

[34] Hooker notes two other texts from the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs which speak of the subjugation of wild beasts (Test. Iss. 7:7; Test. Ben. 5:2), but neither of these contains the additional Markan elements that *Test. Naph.* 8 does; Hooker, *Saint Mark*, p. 50. We also read in 2 Maccabees of Judas Maccabeaus withdrawing εἰς τὴν ἔρημον θηρίων (2 Macc. 5:27 LXX), though there is no mention of angels there. Noted by P. M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc* (Études Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1947), p. 15.

All this underscores the thick eschatological significance of the immediate context of the first reference to Satan, setting the stage for Jesus' victory in the wilderness over Satan to be viewed as of eschatological and new creational import.[35] This point will be made more explicit in our survey of Mark 3. But we must see here at the outset of Mark's Gospel that as Jesus is tempted by Satan, with the beasts, and then ministered to by angels, this proleptic triumph over Satan[36] paves the way for eschatological conquest over the demonic throughout the rest of Mark. 'Back of the casting out of demons,' wrote Vos, 'lies the spiritual conquest of Satan by Jesus Himself in the temptation.'[37] To put the point in Pauline terms, this initial triumph over Satan is the 'firstfruits'—the initial reality linked to a broader fulfilment—of Christ's ministry.[38]

Mark 3:22–30

Paradigmatic for understanding Mark's connection between Satan/the demonic and inaugurated eschatology is this pericope in Mark 3 as Jesus interacts with the Jerusalem scribes who have accused him of being possessed by Beelzebul.[39] This is the second reference to Satan and follows naturally from the first, and probably is meant to be read in tandem with the first.[40] Both accounts involve Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Satan, the verb ἐκβάλλω, and either implied or explicit triumph of Jesus over Satan.[41] As we move to Mark 3 we are careful to read it in concert with Mark 1 and honour the author's efforts to craft a coherent and mutually illuminating narrative—as distinct from Marcus, who suggests that Jesus' thought

35 Cuvillier is particularly confident of the Adamic/eschatological background to Mark 1:12–13; *L'évangile de Marc*, p. 30.

36 Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, p. 421.

37 Geerhardus Vos, 'The Kingdom of God', in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 313.

38 Cf. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, pp. 170–71.

39 Shively (*Apocalyptic Imagination*) argues that Mark 3:22–30 is programmatic for understanding the whole of Mark's Gospel, a thesis with which the present essay would be in significant sympathy. Shively, however, reads this text as providing a symbolic world in which Mark uses figurative language to portray a world of cosmic conflict. This is not an illegitimate approach but this apocalyptic approach focuses on the spatial and cosmic dimensions of Mark's worldview whereas the present essay and its eschatological approach focuses on the temporal dimension of Mark's worldview.

40 Hooker, *Saint Mark*, p. 116.

41 Trocmé, *L'Évangile selon Saint Marc*, p. 38.

developed throughout Mark and that in Mark 1 he was simply an exorcist and healer who did not yet view himself as the final opponent of Satan.[42]

Before considering this passage itself, it is instructive to bear in mind the preceding context. After a few references to demons (1:34, 39) and unclean spirits (1:23, 26, 27) the next reference to the demonic is not until 3:11. Great crowds persist in thronging around Jesus in light of his many healings, and we are told the general statement that 'whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God"'. The unclean spirits thus clearly acknowledge Jesus' authority and power, ascribing him to be what Mark 1:1 has told us at the outset: 'the Son of God.' In the very next verses Jesus appoints the twelve apostles (3:13–19). Their stated purpose is 'to preach and have authority to cast out demons' (3:15). As these are the two activities that to this point in Mark's Gospel Jesus himself has been executing, this twofold calling is naturally taken as an extension of Jesus' own ministry through the twelve. Going home, Jesus is once again thronged about by the crowds, so that he and his disciples are not even able to eat—but his family believes him to be 'out of his mind' (3:20–21), an accusation that will be more openly picked up by his opponents.[43]

Immediately, then, after reading that whenever demons saw Jesus they fell down before him and that Jesus has delegated this authority over the demons to the twelve, we are given the ground for this authority:

> [22] And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.' [23] And he called them to him and said to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? [24] If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. [25] And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. [26] And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. [27] But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.
>
> [28] 'Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, [29] but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'—[30] for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

I take this to be the most significant text on the relationship between the demonic and inaugurated eschatology in Mark. Not only do we find all three referents to the demonic in this short passage (Satan, demons,

---

42 Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, p. 282.

43 Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, pp. 148–49.

unclean spirit) but, most importantly, we hear Jesus pronouncing his own binding of Satan (v. 27). Upon being accused by the scribes of casting out demons by Satan's own power, Jesus exposes the illogical reasoning behind such an accusation—why would Satan cast out Satan? Then, intriguingly, Jesus uses the category of *kingdom* (βασιλεία) to drive his point home. 'If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand' (v. 24). The reader's mind is immediately brought back to the only previous instance of βασιλεία thus far in Mark's Gospel, in the programmatic statement of Jesus' as he launches his public ministry that 'The time is at hand, and the kingdom [βασιλεία] of God is at hand' (1:15).[44]

And what is Jesus saying more fundamentally as he uses kingdom-language to expose the fallacious reasoning of the scribes? He is declaring that the kingdom has come: the longed for time of climactic fulfilment of all God's promises is unfolding there and then in Jesus' ministry. Immediately after saying that a kingdom cannot be divided against itself, Jesus says the same thing using the image of a house (οἰκία). 'And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand' (v. 25). Jesus is thus using the images of kingdom and house in parallel. This is significant because Jesus then goes on to speak of entering a strong man's house and binding him. Satan is the strong man who is bound by the yet stronger Jesus as Jesus enters Satan's house. Then, having bound him, Jesus is able to plunder Satan's house. Given the parallel between kingdom and house we could say that Jesus has entered Satan's kingdom, bound him, and is plundering his kingdom.[45]

The association between kingdom and house in Mark 3 is natural given Old Testament precedents.[46] This is especially notable in 2 Samuel 7. At the pinnacle of God's promise to David of a perennial throne and heir and thus in an eschatologically charged context, God says to David, 'Your house [οἶκος] and your kingdom [βασιλεία] are firm forever before me' (2 Sam. 7:16). Whether Jesus may have this text in mind when he speaks of a kingdom and a house not standing is a matter for further consideration beyond the bounds of this study. What is immediately pertinent for our purposes is the close connection between the two notions in the Old Testament, a connection that at times comes in richly eschatological and promissory contexts such as 2 Samuel 7.[47]

---

44 France, *Mark*, p. 172.

45 Vos, 'Kingdom of God', p. 312.

46 Contra Marcus, who views the Hellenistic world as the primary background for understanding the association between βασιλεία and οἶκος in Mark 3 (*Mark 1–8*, p. 281).

47 Gnilka sees Isa. 49:23–26 as the background for Jesus' statement, which is intriguing given the eschatological atmosphere of Isaiah 49 and its promise

Jesus is saying that he has arrived on the scene to bring to an end the power of Satan's kingdom. Jesus is inaugurating the final kingdom.[48] This note of inaugurated eschatology is more clearly seen when we pay close attention to the closing phrase of verse 26: 'if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, *but is coming to an end* [ἀλλὰ τέλος ἔχει].' The diversity of English translations reflects the difficulty of capturing the precise sense of the terse two-word Greek phrase τέλος ἔχει. A sampling of translations is given below in Table 1.

Table 1. Translations of τέλος ἔχει in Mark 3:26

NASB	he is finished!
KJV	hath an end
NKJV	has an end
NIV/NRSV	his end has come
NJB	it is the end of him
RSV/ESV	is coming to an end
CSB	is finished

The succinctness of the Greek makes it challenging to cleanly translate this phrase but the basic point comes through clearly: in the midst of speaking of why Satan cannot oppose his own demonic forces, Jesus speaks of the great end of demonic authority. While it is true that this comes in the context of saying why Satan cannot stand against himself, and thus is speaking in hypothetical terms, it is likely (given the context) that Jesus intends here a veiled indication that Satan's end has come. His power has been decisively undermined. This is reinforced by the fact that Jesus goes on immediately to speak of binding Satan. The τέλος here, then, is probably an eschatologically-oriented instance of this word, which would comport with the only other two uses of τέλος in Mark, which are used in eschatologically loaded contexts (13:7, 13).[49] The one whom Paul calls 'the prince of the power of the air' (Eph. 2:2) has had his power emptied.

Finally, Jesus goes on to speak of the so-called 'unpardonable sin': '"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the

of the end-time restoration of God's people; *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, p. 150.

48 Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, pp. 435–36. Cf. Vern S. Poythress, *The Miracles of Jesus: How the Savior's Mighty Acts Serve as Signs of Redemption* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2016), p. 140.

49 See Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, pp. 880, 888.

Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit"' (Mark 3:28–30). From the perspective of this paper, the reason blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven is not because God's mercy is limited in some way but because to blaspheme against the Spirit *is to reject the presence of the new age*. The presence of αἰών language here underscores this (twice in v. 29). Blasphemy against the Spirit is of aeonic significance, because one is saying no to the key identifier of the dawning eschaton: the gift of the Spirit. One is insisting on staying rooted in the old age, the age of death, identifying the Davidic heir on whom the Spirit rests (Mark 1:10) as instead being possessed by an unclean spirit (3:30).

These reflections on Mark 3:20–27 fit neatly into a hermeneutical lens that reads the New Testament as announcing the inauguration of the eschaton. Inaugurated eschatology is the notion that Christ launched the new age decisively. The old age continues to exist until Christ comes again and brings it to an end. Thus Satan's authority has been bound decisively but continues to exist until Christ comes again to put a final end to him.

Synthesizing Reflections

Though we do not have space to treat each demonic episode independently, four overarching remarks can be made in light of what we have seen regarding Satan and the demonic in Mark 1 and Mark 3.

First, of the four canonical Gospels Mark is particularly interested in emphasizing Jesus' conquest over the demonic. Summarizing information presented above, Table 2 provides the relevant data, identifying the number of references to the various words associated with the demonic in the Gospels.

Table 2. Summary of Demonic Language in Each Gospel

Data	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
διάβολος	6	0	5	3
σατάν	4	6	5	1
δαιμόνιον / δαίμων / δαιμονίζομαι	19	15	24	7
πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον	4	14	12	0
Total	33	35	46	11
Total Words	18,345	10,971	19,482	15,468
% of Words	0.18%	0.32%	0.24%	0.07%

Thus while the shortest Gospel, Mark has thirty-five references to Satan and the demonic throughout the 10,971 Greek words of this Gospel, which means that 0.32% of the words in Mark are one of the words associated with the demonic.[50] While these are small percentages it is notable that Mark has one-third more references to the demonic than any other gospel and over four times more than John's Gospel.

Second, this binding of Satan and the reclaiming of supreme power over him is not for Jesus alone to wield. His twelve disciples, most immediately, are positioned by Mark to be seen as extending this authority. This is clear from the way that the binding of Satan pericope (3:22–27) is immediately preceded by Jesus' ascribing authority to his disciples to cast out demons (3:15). This authority does not belong intrinsically to the twelve, but it is extended through the twelve. This is reinforced when Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs, 'and gave them authority over the unclean spirits' (Mark 6:7).

Third, the binding of Satan should be seen as organically linked with the binding of demons or unclean spirits. We have looked above at two key and closely related episodes about Satan, which Mark likely frontloads in his Gospel to help the reader make sense of the many subsequent exorcisms. Indeed, with the exception of Mark 8:33, where Jesus refers to Peter as 'Satan,' all other references to Satan occur in Mark 1–4. Satan is bound toward the beginning of Mark to pave the way for the casting out of many demons and unclean spirits throughout the rest of Mark. Perhaps we could say, putting together this point with the immediately preceding one, that just as Jesus in the new age has authority over Satan, his disciples in the new age have derivative authority over the demons.

And yet, fourth, Mark's Gospel does not evenly distribute the episodes involving the demonic. Not a single reference to Satan, demons, or unclean spirits occurs after chapter 9. This observation intersects meaningfully with the literary structure of Mark. The entire Gospel account swivels around 180 degrees in chapters 8–10 from embrace of Jesus to looming rejection of Jesus as he suddenly begins to announce (and announce repeatedly) his impending death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). The key turning point is Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (8:27–30). This is immediately preceded by the two-staged healing of the blind man (8:22–26) as a way of depicting that the disciples only see half of what Jesus has come to do. He has come as the Davidic heir to triumph over God's enemies and restore God's people (the first half of Mark, which the disciples see), but the way in which this will finally be

[50] I am considering πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον one word for the sake of ease of computing.

accomplished is through the ignominy of suffering, rejection, and death (the second half of Mark, which the disciples do not yet see, as evidenced in Peter's wrongheaded rebuke of Jesus in 8:31–33). Thus Peter's confession is immediately followed by the first of three announcements of his coming death and resurrection (8:31–34).

What is the significance of this structure of Mark for understanding the demonic in Mark? This binary structure in Mark, beginning with the gradual ascent up to Peter's confession and then turning to a gradual descent down to the cross, highlights the triumphs over the demonic in Mark 1–9 as part of the eschatological restoration of the people of God and the coming of the kingdom. In the second half of Mark, interactions between Jesus and the demonic fall from view because Jesus is now focused on his coming suffering and death. Mark must want the reader to see this given his inescapably deliberate placing of all thirty-five references to the demonic (σατάν, δαιμόνιον, δαιμονίζομαι, πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον) in the first nine chapters of his account.

At the same time, there is one final conflict between Jesus and the demonic in Mark. Though Satan is not mentioned explicitly, it is impossible to make sense of earlier statements in the Gospel, such as the binding of Satan by Jesus, without recourse to the cross and resurrection.[51] Later apostolic witness (e.g., Col. 2:14–15) will make clear what must be implicit in Mark: through the cross, though appearing to be defeated, Jesus was himself triumphing over the demonic, reclaiming authority over them.[52] In John's Gospel Jesus declares that 'now will the ruler of this world be cast out' (John 12:31) and then immediately speaks of his own impending death (12:32–33). Jesus' exorcisms earlier in the Gospel are proleptic signs that he is reclaiming this authority, but he only effectually secures it through the cross and resurrection.[53] Thus the one figure from the spiritual realm to appear in the wake of Jesus' resurrection is not a demon but an angel (Mark 16:5–7),[54] and on this note the Gospel ends.

---

51 Cf. Poythress, *Miracles*, p. 160.

52 Cf. Laura C. Sweat, *The Theological Role of Paradox in the Gospel of Mark* (LNTS 492; London: T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 133–58.

53 Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, 73) proposes a 'demonic interpretation of Jesus' death' in light of the crucifixion darkness at 15:33, since 'darkness suggests demonic powers elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Eph. 6:12)' but the most obvious and immediate explanatory literature for this darkness is the OT, where descending darkness represents most immediately judgment and de-creation, not the demonic. See G. K. Beale and Dane C. Ortlund, '"Darkness Over the Whole Land": A Biblical-Theological Reflection on Mark 15:33', *WTJ* 75 (2013), pp. 221–38.

54 See Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, p. 1080.

3. CONCLUSION

The conquest over Satan and casting out of demons/unclean spirits in Mark is fundamentally a signal that the new age is dawning. We have seen the eschatological connotations of some early Markan episodes involving Satan, and the connection between Satan and the demons. All this leads us to the key point of this essay. It is not primarily compassion that leads Jesus to exercise power over the demonic, nor a strategy to demonstrate his power, nor a desire to publicize his identity (quite the reverse: Mark 1:34). His authority over the demonic is essentially the announcement-by-deed that through Jesus God is bringing about the longed-for latter days, under the rule of the final Davidic heir, resulting in the restoration of God's people. The new creation is being quietly launched. Men and women are being given back their humanity. They are becoming more truly who they were created to be. When a demon possesses someone and renders them mute, they have taken away part of what it means to be human: the ability to speak. The same goes for blindness, sickness, lameness, and so on. The fact that Mark has a higher proportion of references to the demonic than any of the other Gospels thus underscores the latent eschatological atmosphere of Mark, despite the paucity of reflection in academic literature on the eschatological significance of Mark.

Jesus' authority over the demonic is clarified as eschatologically significant when its Old Testament background—which we have touched on throughout this essay—is remembered. Though not as explicitly as Luke 4:16–22, Mark's Gospel does see Jesus as implicitly fulfilling the prophetic hope of a coming Davidic heir who would restore God's people.[55] Mark's Gospel opens with a cluster of Old Testament texts to make the point that through Jesus God is securing their final exodus-like deliverance, and Isaiah figures most prominently throughout Mark as the background for this.[56] Thus when a reader familiar with the Old Testament is presented with the Markan Jesus and his authority over the demonic and his liberating of those oppressed by demons, such a reader would inescapably conclude that this Jesus is the longed-for one of Isaianic prophecy. As Isaiah has it:

> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

55 Thielman is especially attuned to this redemptive-historical undercurrent in Mark, though without reflection on the demonic element; Frank S. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 57–83.

56 Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*.

> to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God (Isa. 61:1–2).

Earlier in Isaiah we read a promise that God himself 'will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy' (Isa. 35:4–6).[57] Any reader familiar with such lavish promises of God's coming and restoring of the blind, lame, mute, and so on would be compelled to read Mark's account of Jesus' authority over the demonic as the decisive inaugural fulfilment of these promises.

This is especially the case when we remember just who it was who was promised to be restored in Isaiah. It was 'the brokenhearted,' 'the captives,' the 'bound.' It is the downtrodden of the world, those whom Matthew identifies as the forgotten recipients of divine blessing (Matt. 5:2–12). It is the outsiders, the neglected, the socially and religiously overlooked, who—both in Isaiah *and in Mark*—receive this blessed visitation from God. Consider what kinds of people were given back their humanity through gracious exorcism of demons: the daughter of a Gentile Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30), a man living among the tombs (Mark 5:1–13), a young boy (Mark 9:14–29). It was not the elite that Jesus healed and restored. It was the derelict. As Jesus says in Mark 2, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (v. 17).

Oppression remains. The demonic has not been exhaustively abolished. But its back has been broken. The strong man has been bound. The beginning of the end has dawned. Jesus' engagement with and authority over the demonic in Mark underscores this new-creational reality in this Gospel.

---

[57] This passage also refers to 'the burning sand' which is 'the haunt jackals' (Isa. 35:7) and promises that 'no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast [τῶν θηρίων]' (35:9)—intriguing, in light of what we have observed above regarding Jesus being with 'the wild animals [τῶν θηρίων]' in Mark 1:13.