



THE PROLOGUE (MARK 1:1–13)

Already in antiquity, certain conventions were established for beginning a story.¹ It has therefore long been recognized that “placing an item at the beginning or at the end may radically change the process of reading as well as the final product.”² This is clearly the case for the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Each has a “beginning” that stands apart from the body of the Gospel because of its form and content: a birth narrative (Matt 1–2; Luke 1–2) or a hymn summarizing the christological proclamation of the Gospel that follows (John 1:1–18). The Gospel of Mark’s account of the activity of John the Baptist also serves as a genuine prologue to the narrative that will follow.³ Before reading the Markan prologue we need first to be aware of the debate over where the section ends (v. 13 or v. 15) and how the argument of the first page unfolds.

The Limits and the Shape of the Markan Prologue

The verbal links between 1:1 and 1:14–15, especially the presence of the expression εὐαγγέλιον in both v. 1 and v. 15, have led some scholars to claim that the Markan prologue runs from vv. 1–15. Jesus’ words in vv. 14–15 contain a summary of the Gospel that will serve as a program for Jesus’ ministry, a bridge into the story that follows. But they also look back to the first words of the narrator in v. 1.⁴ There are good reasons for the association of vv. 14–15 with vv. 1–13 to form a prologue. But the rhetoric and literary structure of the first half of the Gospel of Mark (1:1–8:30) depend upon vv. 14–15 as the summary

¹ See the survey in D. E. Smith, “Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory,” *Sem* 52 (1991): 1–9. See also R. E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (WUNT 2. Reihe 88; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), 54–55.

² S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New Accents; London: Methuen, 1983), 120.

³ On this, see F. J. Moloney, *Beginning the Good News: A Narrative Approach* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 43–71; M. D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys That Open the Gospels* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1998), 1–21; M. E. Boring, “Mark 1:1–15 and the Beginning of the Gospel,” *Sem* 52 (1991): 43–81; F. Matera, “The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark’s Gospel,” *JSNT* 34 (1988): 3–20.

⁴ The most influential figure in this debate has been L. Keck, “The Introduction to Mark’s Gospel,” *NTS* 12 (1965–1966): 352–70. Since then see, among many, R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (2d ed.; HTKNT 2.1–2; 2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1976–1977), 1:71–74; J. Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet-Verlag, 1981), 31; D. Lührmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 32–33; Boring, “Mark 1:1–15,” 55–59; J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 137–39; Watts, *New Exodus*, 91–95. For a comprehensive list of studies of the Markan Prologue, see J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (3 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001), 2:85–86 n. 112.

introducing 1:14–3:6. In my discussion of the plot of the Gospel of Mark I suggested that, after the prologue (1:1–13), a section that asks the question “Who is Jesus?” follows (1:14–8:30), composed of three major subsections, all structured in the same fashion. They begin with a summary statement (see 1:14–15; 3:7–12; 6:6a) immediately followed by material dealing with the disciples (see 1:16–20; 3:13–19; 6:6b–30). After the identical opening of each subsection there is an extended narrative of Jesus’ words and deeds during his Galilean ministry. Each subsection concludes with a decision for or against Jesus (3:6: the Herodians and Pharisees combine to eliminate him; 6:1–6a: his townsfolk will not believe in him; 8:29: Peter confesses that Jesus is “the Christ”).

Against this broader pattern of summary, disciples, narrative, and decision, I would claim 1:14–3:6 as a deliberately contrived literary unit. A closer look at the cohesion of vv. 1–13 strengthens this view. Typical Markan *links* exists across vv. 1–13. After the ἀρχή of v. 1 follow ἐγένετο (v. 4), καί (v. 6), καί (v. 7), καὶ ἐγένετο (v. 9), καὶ εὐθὺς (v. 10), καὶ (v. 11), καὶ εὐθὺς (v. 12), and καί (v. 13). This steady rhythm of Markan parataxis is *broken* in v. 14 with an expression that leads the reader to another time and place: μετὰ δέ.⁵ It is true that Jesus begins his ministry without reference to a *specific* time and place, but there is a shift of interest as his first words proclaim the coming of the kingdom and call for repentance and belief (1:14–15). He immediately associates disciples with this mission, calling them to follow him into a ministry of their own, fishing for people (1:16–20). A series of incidents follow in Capernaum and throughout Galilee, leading to questions about his authority and his person (see 1:27; 2:7, 12, 24). His saving and healing activity among the people (1:21–28, 29–31, 32–34, 41–45; 2:1–12; 3:1–6) prompt the leaders of two otherwise irreconcilable groups, the Pharisees and the Herodians, to “conspire . . . how to destroy him.” (3:6). However much 1:14–15 restate in narrative form what was said in v. 1—and I am not denying that this is the case⁶—these programmatic words of Jesus serve to introduce the narrative proper of the Gospel. The same literary feature is found in 3:7–12 and 6:6b. Thus 1:1–13 (and not 1:1–15) is to be taken as the prologue to the Gospel of Mark.⁷

Most commentators see 1:1–13 as made up of a superscription from the hand of the author (v. 1), a description of the person and activity of John the Baptist (vv. 2–8), the baptism of Jesus (vv. 9–11), and his temptation (vv. 12–13).⁸ This division of the text respects

⁵ On the Markan use of parataxis, see R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 134–40. On 1:14–15 is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, see Hooker, *Beginnings*, 8, C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (SNTSMS 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36–43; J. B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26–29. On the unity of vv. 9–13, see pp. 26–32. For further remarks on the use of ἔρημος across the prologue (vv. 3, 4, 12, 13) as an indication of the unity of vv. 1–13, see below, note 24.

⁶ See the succinct statement of the place of vv. 14–15 (and vv. 16–20) in J. Painter, *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in Conflict* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997), 23. Among others, J. Dewey (“Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53 [1991]: 225–26) points out that vv. 14–15 form a bridge, closing the prologue and opening the ministry. See also Matera, “The Prologue,” 4–6. In a rather singular study, W. Feneberg (*Der Markusprolog: Studien zur Formbestimmung des Evangeliums* [SANT 36; Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1974]) argues that 1:1–11 forms a prologue presenting baptism as the entry of the Gentile world into a Jewish Christian community.

⁷ See the detailed study, supporting this position, of S. Kuthirakkattel, *The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry according to Mark's Gospel (1,14–3,6): A Redaction Critical Study* (AnBib 123; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1990), 3–22.

⁸ See, for example, V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1966), 151–64; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (6th ed.; THKNT 2; Berlin: Evan-

the intense presentation of both Jesus and the Baptist. It is determined by the characters in the narrative, but other criteria could be used. If one pays attention to changes in character and action, time and place, and especially to the “focalization” of the narrative,⁹ five elements emerge.

- 1:1–3 The voice of the narrator opens the story, but what he announces reflects an omniscience that associates his words with the design of God. The narrator speaks with a “godly authority” which the reader cannot question.¹⁰ With the exception of Mark 13:14, the narrator does not enter the story actively, and God speaks only rarely (see 1:2–3, 11; 9:7), but God determines it and the narrator shapes it. A story of “good news” is at its “beginning” (ἀρχή), and the news is that a man called Jesus is Christ, Son of God.¹¹ Only a narrator at one with God’s omniscience can tell the story of the “Son of God.” The words that follow (vv. 2–3) are “Words of God.” They are taken from Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3, with some help from Exod 23:20, and God speaks in the first person. The narrator and the voice of God utter a divine message, announcing the beginning of the good news that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that God is sending a messenger to prepare the way of “the Lord.” The divine message is the focus of the opening verses, announcing that the good news that follows will have to do with Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Lord.
- 1:4–6 The narrator takes over and tells of the partial fulfillment of God’s promise. Although he performs no actions, the one who will prepare the way (vv. 2–3) appears and is described.

gelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 25–35; H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1976), 65–83; Ernst, *Markus*, 31–54 (vv. 1–8, 9–11, 12–13, 14–15); Lührmann, *Markusevangelium*, 32–33; M. D. Hooker, *The Message of Mark* (London: Epworth Press, 1983), 7–8; Matera, “The Prologue,” 6–9.

⁹Focalization pays attention to the eyes through which the reported events are seen. On this, see G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 189–221, and idem, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 72–78. See also Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 71–85.

¹⁰On this feature of biblical narrative, see M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Literary Biblical Series; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 23–35, 176–79.

¹¹Many ancient manuscripts do not contain the words “son of God” (υἱοῦ θεοῦ). I am tentatively accepting it. For a full discussion, coming to the same conclusion, see C. R. Kazmierski, *Jesus, the Son of God: A Study of the Marcan Tradition and Its Redaction by the Evangelist* (FB 33; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1979), 1–9. See, among others, Marcus (*Mark*, 141) and Painter (*Mark’s Gospel*, 25), who suggest that it must be a scribal addition; it is so appropriate that it would never have been omitted. In the light of the use of “Son” and “Son of God” through the Gospel, Painter, along with most who regard it as secondary, admits, “The title is entirely appropriate” (p. 25). Whether or not “Son of God” should be read as authentic in 1:1 is not crucial. The use of the expression “my beloved Son” in the description of Jesus in the prologue (v. 11) leaves the reader with no doubt that Jesus is “the Christ” (v. 1) and “the Son of God” (v. 1?; v. 11). C. A. Evans (“Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 [2000]: 67–81) argues that the anarthrous υἱοῦ θεοῦ is original, setting the theme of Jesus as “the Son of God” across the Gospel, climaxing in the anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ in 15:39. This theme places Jesus above all the claims for divine emperors in a time of dramatic disturbance in the Rome of 68–69 C.E. A number of contemporary scholars (e.g., A. Y. Collins, W. Cotter, T. H. Kim [see bibliography]) suggest that an originally Jewish text appeals in this way to a Greco-Roman readership, especially converts to Christianity, who are familiar with the concept of the emperor as *divi filius*.

- 1:7–8 The focalization shifts to the Baptist. He is no longer described but speaks in the first person, announcing the coming of “the stronger one,” one before whom he is unworthy, who “will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” The Baptist is preparing the way for “the Lord.”
- 1:9–11 As with the introduction to the Baptist, the narrator again takes over and presents Jesus. Jesus does nothing, but things happen to him. He is baptized by John, the Spirit descends upon him, and a voice from heaven describes him. What Jesus might think of this is not told. God makes things happen to Jesus.
- 1:12–13 This final section, described by an omniscient narrator, is dominated by Jesus. Although as God’s design continues to unfold things still happen to him (the Spirit drives him into the desert, Satan tempts him, angels minister to him), for the first time in the narrative, Jesus becomes the active agent: “He was with the wild beasts” (v. 13).¹²

God dominates this prologue, mentioned by name in 1:1 and present in direct speech in vv. 2–3. In vv. 4–5 and 6–8 the Baptist is the subject of most of the verbs, but his activity fulfills what God had promised in vv. 2–3. The Baptist points away from himself and eventually fades from the scene as Jesus of Nazareth is introduced as a third-person figure. God and the Spirit are the main actors in Jesus’ initial experiences until, at the close of vv. 1–13, Jesus is *with* the wild beasts and served by the angels. This prologue establishes an important truth for the reader: *the chief agent in the action that follows is God*. The Gospel of Mark may read like the story of “Jesus of Nazareth” (see 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6), but its prologue suggests that an omniscient narrator tells the story of how God acts among us through the death and resurrection of the Messiah and Son.¹³ This is a strange way for a God to deal with his Son, but the reader is made aware from the first page of the story that the events of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth are determined by the pleasure of God (v. 11: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am pleased”).¹⁴

The Prologue (1:1–13)

The authority of God (1:1–3)

The first word echoes the opening of Genesis—“the beginning” (ἀρχή)—but it also simply indicates the beginning of a long story. Both meanings are involved. The Gospel of

¹²Gibson (*Temptations*, 9–13) makes a strong case for the unity of vv. 9–13 as the Markan presentation of the nature of Jesus’ temptation. However, Jesus as receiver (vv. 9–11) and Jesus as agent (vv. 12–13) keep them separate.

¹³On the centrality of God in the Gospel of Mark, see J. R. Donahue, “A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 563–94, and K. Scholtissek, “‘Er ist nicht ein Gott der Toten, sondern der Lebenden’ (Mk 12,27): Grundzüge der markanische Theologie,” in *Der lebendige Gott: Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Festschrift für Wilhelm Thüsing zum 75. Geburtstag* (ed. T. Södig; NTAbh. NF 31; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 71–100.

¹⁴Marcus (*Mark*, 139–40) draws a close relationship between the prologue and Deutero-Isaiah. He associates this background with the apocalyptic expectations of the Markan community, expectations to be finally resolved by a king “who leads God’s people to victory against the foe” (p. 140). That king is the beloved Son. Along similar lines, see Watts, *New Exodus*, 96–121.

Mark “begins” with an echo of God’s original creative design.¹⁵ But here “the gospel” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) begins, not the creation. The link with creation is left on hold as the person of Jesus is introduced. The expression “the good news” was used in the Septuagint and the Greco-Roman world. Second Isaiah used it to proclaim the “good news” of God’s rule, salvation or vindication (see LXX Isa 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1). The Greek writers used it to announce a military victory, a royal birth, or a political triumph.¹⁶ What is new in Mark 1:1 is the use of the noun to describe the story of a human being. The good news is: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The evangelist Mark introduced a new literary form into world literature: a narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that did not pretend to recount the brute facts of history. It was written to proclaim that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He called this narrative form “the good news” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον).

The two expressions “Jesus” and “Christ” had become the proper name “Jesus Christ” before Mark wrote his gospel,¹⁷ but the rapid succession of the human name “Jesus” and the further descriptions “Christ, the Son of God” constitutes proclamation. The good news is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God—provisionally accepting the reading “Son of God.”¹⁸ Jesus’ being the Son of God will become increasingly important as the narrative unfolds (see 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61; 15:39). The notion will develop a character of its own that will stretch the traditional understanding of the expression. However, as the Gospel opens the reader is informed that, like the ideal king of Israel (see 2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7; 89:26–29) and the chosen people of Israel (see Exod 4:22; Isa 63:16; Hos 11:1), Jesus can be regarded as son of God, and thus as Messiah because of his relationship with God. This relationship will have some strange twists as the story unfolds, and much still lies ahead of the reader before the full significance of “Christ, Son of God” is finally unveiled.¹⁹

¹⁵See Anderson, *Mark*, 66. M. D. Hooker (*St. Mark*, 33) also points to the parallel between Mark 1:1 and Hos 1:2, which reads, “The beginning (LXX: ἀρχή) of the word of the Lord through Hosea.” Instead of the word of God through a prophet, however, we have the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On the importance of the ἀρχή as the beginning of the whole utterance, see Boring, “Mark 1:1–15,” 47–53; Marcus, *Mark*, 145–46.

¹⁶Both in the LXX and in the Greco-Roman documents, the verbal form εὐαγγελίζομαι is most frequent. Paul uses the noun εὐαγγέλιον to announce his “gospel” message of God’s victory won in the death and resurrection of Jesus. For summaries, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 35–36; Guelich, *Mark*, 13–14. For C. Myers (*Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990], 122–24) the association of “Jesus” with the imperial εὐαγγέλιον subverts the Roman cultural code, but this pays too little attention to the LXX and even the Pauline use of the expression.

¹⁷Already in Paul “Jesus Christ” is used as a proper name. See W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (trans. B. Hardy; SBT 50; London: SCM, 1966), 203–14.

¹⁸See note 11 above.

¹⁹Against, for example, E. Lohmeyer (*Das Evangelium des Markus* [17th ed.; Meyers Kommentar 1/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967], 4) and W. L. Lane (*Mark*, 44–45), who see “son of God” already in v. 1 as “altogether supernatural” (Lane, *Mark*, 44 n. 23). See the use of 2 Sam 7 in 4QFlor 1:10–13, and the association of Ps 2 with the end time in the same fragment (1:18–2:4). See the excellent comments of E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (trans. D. H. Madvig; London: SPCK, 1971), 40–41 (on v. 11), B. Blackburn, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretative Background to the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (WUNT 2. Reihe 40; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 98–109, and especially the full-scale study of the question in B. J. Byrne, “Sons of God—Seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of All Christians in Paul against the Jewish Background (AnBib 83;

God enters the narrative, by means of the words of his prophet,²⁰ and two further elements are added to the story: there will be a God-appointed forerunner, and the one who is to come is called “the Lord” (1:2–3). In v. 1 the narrator spoke with divine omniscience, but in vv. 2–3 God speaks directly. This is made clear by the use of the passive: “as it has been written” and the voice of God speaking in the first person through the words of the prophet. The author is God and the voice is God’s. God speaks as “I” to “you”: “I send *my* messenger before *your* face.” God announces that a messenger will precede the coming of the one addressed. The conflation of prophetic passages reports words of God to someone who is addressed. The one addressed is to make a journey down his “way.” The theme of “the way” will have its place later in the story, but for the moment it is introduced as part of God’s design for the coming one.²¹ The one addressed as “you” (“before *your* face”) in v. 2b becomes “the Lord” in v. 3b. A messenger will cry out in the wilderness: “prepare the way of the Lord (τοῦ κυρίου).” The “you” addressed by God in v. 2 is “the Lord” in v. 3. The prophecies from Malachi, Exodus, and Isaiah, combined to provide the words of God that begin the narrative, witness to the coming one as ὁ κύριος. This expression is used systematically in the Septuagint to translate YHWH, the sacred name for God.²² God names a figure, yet to appear actively in the story, *by God’s own name*. But a third person is involved in these words of God: a messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord. God has set the agenda. Jesus Christ, Son of God has not only been announced in v. 1, but the word of God has described him as “the Lord” who must go down a God-directed way, prepared by another character yet to appear.²³

Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 9–78. On the recent discussion of the further “Son of God” text from Qumran, see J. A. Fitzmyer, “4Q246: The ‘Son of God’ Document in Qumran,” *Bib* 74 (1993): 153–74. Fitzmyer denies that the expression has messianic connotations. For a messianic interpretation of the text, see J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 154–69.

²⁰The narrator only mentions Isaiah, but the text of vv. 2–3 is a conflation of Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1 (v. 2), and Isa 40:3 (v. 3). As Hooker (*Message*, 4) comments: “This is the only place in the Gospel where Mark himself (as distinct from the characters in the story) appeals to the Old Testament, and he manages to get his reference wrong.” This has led to copyists changing “in Isaiah the prophet” (v. 2), to “in the prophets.” The reference to Isaiah, for both internal and external reasons (*lectio difficilior*) is original. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 62. For a detailed study of the citations, see Watts, *New Exodus*, 57–84.

²¹For a rich understanding of “the way” in the Gospel, and the possible allusion to this meaning for the Markan community in 1:3, see J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 29–47.

²²See G. Quell, “κύριος κτλ” *TDNT* 3:1058–81; Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 39–40. Marcus (*Mark*, 147–48) rightly warns against identification between God and Jesus. He correctly suggests: “where Jesus is acting, there God is acting” (p. 148). See further idem, *The Way of the Lord*, 37–41. For a balanced assessment of the Markan presentation of Jesus as “Lord,” see E. K. Broadhead, *Naming Jesus: Titular Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 134–44. However, Broadhead does not consider 1:7.

²³On the possible prehistory of the combination of these Old Testament texts, see Watts, *New Exodus*, 85–87; Marcus, *Mark*, 143–45. Marcus (148–49) suggests, probably correctly, that the attribution of the text to Isaiah in v. 2a is not a mistake. It reflects Mark’s desire to focus upon Isaiah. However, when Marcus links the use of Isa 40 as paradoxical rereading of that passage’s message on a holy war with the setting of the Jewish revolt, he reads too much into the passage. Watts (*New Exodus*, 86–90) also insists upon the centrality of the Isaian citation, acting as a deliberate Markan frame (v. 1a and v. 3) around the Exodus/Malachi texts (vv. 1b, 2).

The coming of the forerunner (1:4–6)

The first figure announced by the voice of God is described in vv. 4–6. What had been promised in v. 3a, “a voice crying *in the wilderness*,” happens in v. 4a: John the Baptist “appeared *in the wilderness*.”²⁴ This is the messenger God sends before the face of the one addressed in v. 2b, whose divinely ordered task was to prepare the way of “the Lord” (v. 3b). What God says will happen does happen. Thus it will be throughout the entire story. The Baptist’s preaching of repentance has its roots in the prophetic call for a wholehearted return to YHWH (see, for example, Jer 18:11; Isa 55:7; Zech 1:4) through a “turning back” toward Israel’s unique God.²⁵ The brief description of the Baptist’s appearance and diet enhance his association with similar prophetic figures. Jesus will later identify John with Elijah (see 9:11–13) and there is a similarity in dress and lifestyle between Elijah and the Baptist (see 2 Kgs 1:8). Yet the description of his dress is nothing more than “the nomadic attire of the wilderness in general and . . . the prophetic dress in particular.”²⁶ He lives as an ascetic, neither eating meat nor drinking wine. Such behavior is typical of late Jewish prophets.²⁷ Whether or not John the Baptist is the expected Elijah *redivivus* (see Mal 4:5–6) is a matter that will be determined later in the story. For the moment, John the Baptist appears as one sent by God to announce a message of God.

The practice of a baptism for the forgiveness of sins is more difficult to locate within the religious culture and practice of the time. In historical terms, John’s name, “the Baptizer” (βαπτιστής; “the plunger,” or “the immerser”) reflected a memorable aspect of his ministry,²⁸ and Mark describes him as ὁ βαπτίζων.²⁹ However familiar the Christian tradition is with this practice, it was rare in the pre-Christian period. There is a newness about the baptismal activity of John, linked with the Baptist’s preparing for the eschatological event of the one who is to come.³⁰ Evidence exists for a use of baptism for proselytes by the

²⁴The expression “wilderness” (ἐρημος) appears four times in the prologue, twice at the beginning (vv. 3 and 4) and twice at the end (vv. 12–13). It is another indication that the prologue is limited to vv. 1–13, between the inclusion generated by the “wilderness” of vv. 3–4 and the further use of the expression in vv. 12–13. After the omniscient and all-determining words of the narrator and God which close with God’s words on the voice “in the wilderness” (vv. 1–3; see v. 3), the action is circumscribed by events that take place “in the wilderness” (v. 4 [the Baptist] and v. 13 [Jesus]). Many who argue for vv. 1–15 as the prologue point to the inclusion created by the use of εὐαγγέλιον in v. 1 and v. 14. It is better to understand the repeated use of this important expression as marking the beginnings of two discrete literary sections: vv. 1–13 (the prologue—with εὐαγγέλιον in v. 1) and 1:14–3:6 (Jesus and Israel—with εὐαγγέλιον in v. 14).

²⁵The Greek μετανοεῖν translates the Hebrew *shûb*, which means to “turn back” or to “return.” It implies a complete turning back from one’s present direction. See Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 43–46; Schweizer, *Mark*, 32–33; Marcus, *Mark*, 150.

²⁶Guelich, *Mark*, 21. Marcus (*Mark*, 157) links the Baptist’s clothing and food with “a certain primal back-to-the-earth quality, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden narrative and the Jewish elaborations thereof.” He cites LXX Gen 3:21, *Joseph and Asenath* 16:14, and claims that it looks forward to the Edenic nature of Jesus’ being with the wild beasts in v. 13.

²⁷See, for example, Dan 1:18; *The Lives of the Prophets* 4:14; *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2:10–11. For the nonbiblical texts, see *OTP* 2:390, 158. This description finds its parallel in other synoptic descriptions of the Baptist as one who comes neither eating nor drinking (see Matt 11:18//Luke 7:33). See the survey of Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:46–49.

²⁸See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:50–51.

²⁹This is the title given to him in v. 4 (see also 6:14), although some manuscripts omit the definite article. See the discussion in Hooker, *St. Mark*, 36–37.

³⁰See the extensive treatment of Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:49–56.

Pharisees, and it was part of the rituals performed at Qumran.³¹ Both groups regarded it as an external sign of a serious commitment to “turning back” to God (βάπτισμα μετανοίας), but the Baptist’s activity appears closer to proselyte baptism than to the rites practiced at Qumran.³² The effectiveness of John’s preaching is enhanced by the rhetorical statement that “all the country of Judea and all the country of Jerusalem” went out to him at the Jordan river.³³ This is hardly likely, but the author makes his point: John the Baptist made a great impression,³⁴ and “the fact that everything was astir indicated that the special salvation-time had begun in which the gospel would reach out to the whole world (13:10).”³⁵ Many submit themselves to John’s baptism to acknowledge their sins and turn back to God, but the reader is aware that this is not the main event. God’s words have pointed forward to the coming of “the Lord” (v. 3), but someone would prepare this “coming” (vv. 2–3). The storyteller is ultimately interested in the action of God. The Baptist belongs to a long line of God’s prophets. Although only the one sent before the face . . . to prepare the way of the Lord (vv. 2–3), his person (v. 6) and activities (vv. 4–5) are determined by God and look forward to the coming of “the Stronger One” (see v. 7).

The voice of the Baptist (1:7–8)

The direct speech of John the Baptist’s proclamation changes the focus of the prologue at v. 7. While vv. 4–6 reported a description of the Baptist, he announces his message in vv. 7–8. A prophet of Israel traditionally recalled YHWH’s *past* saving intervention, but the Baptist fulfills God’s *future* promise of v. 3. He points *forward* to the future coming of ὁ ἰσχυρότερος. This expression may not summon up directly messianic claims, but God has regularly been called “the Mighty One” in the Septuagint (see Deut 10:17; Judg 6:12; 2 Sam 2:32–33, 48; Jer 27:24; 32:18; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:15; 9:31–32; 2 Sam 22:31; 23:5; Ps 7:12; see also Isa 9:6). In the book of Job, the term ὁ ἰσχυρός must regularly be translated by “God” (see Job 22:13; 33:29; 36:22, 26; 37:5). The words of the Baptist shift the focus from himself (see vv. 4–6) to the mightier one who will come after him (vv. 7–8).³⁶ As in v. 3b, where God spoke of the coming one as ὁ κύριος, the forerunner uses another expression associated in the Septuagint with God. Before Jesus has appeared in the narrative, the reader has already been told of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God (v. 1), the Lord (v. 3), the mightier one (v. 7).

³¹ See W. Michaelis, “Zum jüdischen Hintergrund der Johannestaufe,” *Jud* 7 (1951): 81–120; J. Gnllka, “Die essenischen Tauchbäder und die Johannestaufe,” *RevQ* 3 (1961): 185–207; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:49–56.

³² See Hooker, *St. Mark*, 39–43; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:50–52.

³³ For more detailed study of the ministry of the Baptist, see Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:19–233. See also J. Murphy-O’Connor, “John the Baptist and Jesus: History and Hypotheses,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 359–74; J. Ernst, “Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth in historischer Sicht,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 161–83; F. J. Moloney, “The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History,” *NTS* 46 (2000): 45–49.

³⁴ The rhetorical nature of the description of huge crowds is made clear by v. 9, where a solitary Galilean receives John’s baptism. See Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 20.

³⁵ Schweizer, *Mark*, 33.

³⁶ The Baptist’s assertion that “the Mightier One” is coming ὀπίσω μου could have a local or a temporal sense. See BDAG, 716, s.v. ὀπίσω. If the former, it could indicate that Jesus came from among his disciples (which was probably the case, historically). See Lane, *Mark*, 52; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:82. While not discounting this more diachronic reading of the expression, vv. 7–8 form an important prolepsis, making promises to the reader that are yet to be fulfilled (see 3:27). The temporal meaning of “after me” is therefore the more important. See S. Seesemann, “ὀπίσω κτλ” *TDNT* 5:290.

The use of κύριος and ἰσχυρότερος even suggest to the reader that claims made only for the God of Israel—Lord and Mighty One—are being shifted to the one who is to come.³⁷

For all the greatness of the Baptist,³⁸ the messenger of God sent to prepare the way of “the Lord,” a gulf lies between the messenger and the one he announces. Untying the master’s sandals was the one demeaning task never required of a Hebrew servant (*Mek.* 21:1; *b. Ketub.* 96a). “To be unworthy of such a task would be to lower oneself below the status of a slave.”³⁹ The Baptist’s final words in the Gospel of Mark look back to his baptism: “I have baptized (ἐβάπτισα: aorist tense) you with water,” and forward to the future activity of Jesus: “He will baptize (βαπτίσει: future tense) you with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8). The narrator has already described John’s baptism in vv. 4–5, and the idea of a baptism with the spirit is not entirely new. The prophet Ezekiel had promised, in the name of YHWH:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (*Ezek* 36:25–27)

The Qumran sectarians and later Judaism spoke of a spirit baptism in which the Spirit was a gift of God to the faithful, and his promises for them would be realized through this gift.⁴⁰ It is not so much the idea of a gift of a “holy spirit” that is new but the proclamation that the coming one would dispense this gift. Not only are the names of God (“Lord” and “Mighty One”) taken over by the coming one, but also one of God’s functions as the giver of the Spirit.

The baptism of Jesus (1:9–11)

To this point in the prologue, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God (1:1) has not appeared in the narrative. God has been the main actor, through his word (vv. 1–3) and the partial fulfillment of that word (vv. 4–8). Jesus’ entry is solemnly announced in a Greek version of a heavily Semitic introduction (see *Exod* 2:11; *Judg* 19:1; *1 Sam* 28:1) of an important

³⁷See Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 18 n. 1. Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, 2:32–42) regards the Baptist’s words on “the stronger one” as ambiguous, and probably coming from the historical John the Baptist. John used the expression not of a replacement for YHWH but of an imminent eschatological figure whom he expected but did not fully understand. The shift from the Baptist’s use of the expression to its present role in the presentation of Jesus in the Markan prologue allows our author to suggest a man who acts as God acts. For Marcus (*Mark*, 157–58) there are no such links. It is an indication of the relative “powers” of the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus is “stronger” than the Baptist. See, along the same lines, Broadhead, *Naming Jesus*, 61–62.

³⁸It is often claimed that the Baptist material in the Gospels arose within a conflict in the early church. There was a need to place John the Baptist in a subordinate position, and to stress his inferiority to Jesus. The figure of John the Baptist was obviously important in those days (see especially *Acts* 18:24–19:7), but a problem with the catechesis of the ex-disciples of the Baptist rather than a polemic between Jesus’ followers and the Baptist’s followers may have generated the present form of the Baptist material in the Gospels. See Moloney, “The Fourth Gospel,” 49.

³⁹Guelich, *Mark*, 24.

⁴⁰See *1QS* 3:7–9; 4:20–21; *1QH* 16:11–12; *T. Levi* 18:6–7 (*OTP* 1:795). See Guelich, *Mark*, 24–26. For Meier (*A Marginal Jew*, 2:53–56), Mark distinguishes between the baptism “for the forgiveness of sins,” which is preparatory, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which marks the arrival of the eschatological age.

character into a story: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας. John the Baptist had been introduced with the simple ἐγένετο, but Jesus' active involvement has a more solemn biblical introduction: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις. The formula "in those days" also highlights the eschatological nature of Jesus' "coming" (see Jer 31:33; Joel 3:1; Zech 8:23).⁴¹ The significant claims made for Jesus earlier in the prologue are coming to resolution but are momentarily left aside as the reader is told that he comes from a little-known village, Nazareth, which calls for further identification: "of Galilee."⁴² John the Baptist baptizes Jesus by immersing him in the river Jordan.⁴³ But as Jesus *comes up* (v. 10a: ἀναβαίνων) from the water, divine signs *come down* (v. 10b: καταβαίνον). Jesus has a vision: "He saw heaven opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove."⁴⁴ The tearing open of the heavens marks the beginning of a new era. "God has ripped the heavens apart irrevocably at Jesus' baptism, never to shut them again. Through this gracious gash in the universe, he has poured forth his Spirit into the earthly realm."⁴⁵

In a world where God abides above the firmament and the human story takes place below, the opening of the heavens promises a communication from above to below (see Gen 7:11; Isa 24:18; 64:1; Ezek 1:1; Rev 4:1; 11:19).⁴⁶ The messenger has performed his God-given task: going before the face and preparing the way for the Lord. We read of Jesus' experiences in 1:9–11, but God's action is reported. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, a hint of the older promise of the gift of the Spirit in the new creation, especially as it had been announced by the prophet Isaiah (see especially Isa 42:1–5, but also 11:1–3; 61:1; 63:10–14). It is as one gifted with the Spirit (v. 10) that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit (v. 8). The appearance of creation themes recalls the adumbration of the creation story by means of the word ἀρχή in v. 1 (see Gen 1:1). In Gen 1:3 the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, and in Mark 1:10 the Spirit of God descends upon Jesus "like a dove."⁴⁷ Despite the widespread use of the symbol of the dove in ancient literature,⁴⁸ there is no precedent for the Markan link between the Spirit and the dove.⁴⁹ The use of the symbol is to be taken at its face value. The Spirit of God, who cannot be *seen*, gently descends upon Jesus like a

⁴¹ See Marcus, *Mark*, 163.

⁴² Myers (*Binding the Strong Man*, 128) comments: "tantamount to announcing him as 'Jesus from Nowheresville.'"

⁴³ Modern scholars sometimes ask how Jesus could need John's baptism and argue whether or not it marks Jesus' conversion or his seeking forgiveness of sin. Mark's brief report of an event that no doubt took place in the life of the historical Jesus cannot bear the weight of such speculation. See, for example, Myers (*Binding the Strong Man*, 127–30), who sees it as a genuine act of repentance, a symbolic renunciation of the old order—too much is "read into" the text.

⁴⁴ The absence of proper names in v. 10 makes it difficult to be sure who "saw." Grammatically, however, it must be the subject of v. 9 (Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized) and the one addressed in v. 11 ("You are my beloved Son"). It is Jesus who saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending. For "John" as the subject (with reference to John 1:31–34) see Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 30.

⁴⁵ Marcus, *Mark*, 165.

⁴⁶ See Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 53; Hooker, *Message*, 11.

⁴⁷ For this, and further links with creation ideas and symbolism, see Marcus, *Mark*, 165–66.

⁴⁸ See especially F.-L. Lentzen-Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern: Literarkritische und Gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (FTS 4; Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1970), 170–83.

⁴⁹ Because of my suspicion that a number of creation and new creation themes are developed toward the end of the prologue, I am tempted by the suggestions of Lane (*Mark*, 56–57) and Hooker (*Message*, 11–12), who trace a link between the Spirit of God in Gen 1:3 and a dove in Jewish literature (especially *b. Hag* 15a). See also Marcus, *Mark*, 159–60. The evidence, however, is slight and

dove, which he can see.⁵⁰ Jesus, Christ and Son of God (v. 1), the Lord (v. 3), and the Stronger One (v. 7) who will dispense the Holy Spirit (v. 8), has now been gifted with the Spirit (v. 10).⁵¹

Jesus' vision of the gift of the Holy Spirit, through the medium of the gently descending dove, is paired with an aural experience: he *hears* a voice from heaven. The rabbis often spoke about a voice from above that indicated God's mind (the *bat qol*), but this was merely a sound, and it was sometimes little more than a shadowy hint. What Jesus hears is a voice (φωνή) coming from heaven. What has already been made clear in the prologue is authoritatively restated by the voice of God: "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." The claim made by the omniscient narrator (1:1) is confirmed by the voice of God (v. 11). The words from heaven are close to words of God reported in Ps 2:7: "You are my Son" (LXX: υἱός μου εἶ σύ). But the Markan voice of God insists further on the uniqueness of the Son. The voice from heaven places the pronoun first (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου), and further enhances the dignity of the Son by describing him as "the beloved" (ὁ ἀγαπητός). The same expression was used to describe the special relationship that existed between Abraham and Isaac, his "beloved son" (see LXX Gen 22:2, 12, 16; *T. Levi* 18).⁵² Perhaps this suggestion of the love between Abraham and Isaac, whom he was asked to sacrifice as a sign of his unconditional allegiance to YHWH, is a first subtle hint of Jesus' destiny.⁵³ The final words of God indicate the quality of the relationship between the Father and the Son: "with you I am well pleased." The Gospel will show, as the Son encounters the forces that oppose God and God's original design for humankind, that God's pleasure works itself out in surprising ways.

The subsequent actions of Jesus (1:12–13)

Thus far Jesus has come from Nazareth (v. 9), risen from the water (v. 10a), and seen the dove (v. 10b). These actions, however, have put him in the right place so that others (the Baptist and God) might do things *to* him and *for* him. The final section of the prologue continues Jesus' fundamentally passive role: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (v. 12). The prolepses of earlier parts of the prologue continue to be fulfilled. The Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize with a holy spirit (v. 8), the heavens have opened and the Spirit has descended upon him (v. 10). The Spirit has taken

perhaps too late to be useful. There may be a more general link with the use of a dove by Noah in Gen 8:8–12. See H. C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 70.

⁵⁰ Even this approach has its difficulties. For some (e.g., L. E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *NTS* 17 [1970–1971]: 41–67), ὡς περισσεῶν καταβαῖνον is to be read adverbially: "The Spirit, coming down, as a dove does." Others (e.g., Taylor, *St. Mark*, 160–61; Grundmann, *Markus*, 42; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 19) read it as an adjectival phrase: "like a dove." In the end, there is little between these positions. They both rightly claim that the dove is not important in itself. It is used to describe the gentle descent of the Spirit of God.

⁵¹ On the possibility that the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus marks the moment of his becoming Messiah and Son of God, see Marcus, *Mark*, 160.

⁵² See Kazmierski, *Son of God*, 54–55; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 93. Marcus (*Mark*, 166) suggests that "the good pleasure" of God, hints at the theme of "and it was good" in Genesis (see Gen 1:31), and is a further hint of the new creation. For Watts (*New Exodus*, 108–18) as well as Ps 2, the Isaianic Servant of Isa 42:1 also forms part of the background. See also Kazmierski, *Son of God*, 37–61; Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 48–56.

⁵³ See Hooker, *Beginnings*, 15–16; Marcus, *Mark*, 162. For Gibson (*Temptations*, 70–78), vv. 10–11 designate Jesus as the king of Israel, the Suffering Servant and sacrificial victim.

possession of Jesus, and is now the driving force of his actions. A strong verb (ἐκβάλλει) associated with the famous Markan use of “immediately” (εὐθὺς) illustrates the divine urgency which determines the actions of Jesus.⁵⁴ Jesus is still the subject of the actions of God, driven out into the desert as God’s words had earlier predicted (vv. 2–3). The desert wilderness has a number of meanings in the Old Testament, Judaism, and early Christianity. Above all, however, it is a place of ambiguity. This ambivalence has its origins in the experience of the Hebrew people after their liberation from Egypt and their crossing of the Reed Sea. The desert was for Israel a place of refuge against aggression, a place of privileged encounter with God, but also a place of physical and moral trials, of temptation and sin. The theme continues into the experiences of many Old Testament personalities (for example, Abraham, Elijah, and David).⁵⁵ Against this background the authors of Genesis present the fallen state of humankind divided against itself, expelled from a garden where creation was in harmony, into a place where the land and its animal inhabitants rebel against a man and a woman, who are themselves in conflict (see Gen 2:15–25; 3:14–21).⁵⁶

Moses was forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai without bread or water (see Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18), and Elijah fled through the desert for forty days without food (1 Kgs 19:4–8). Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days (1:13a). Like Moses and Elijah, he experiences the ambiguity of the desert, and in this ambiguity he is exposed to the experience of the man and woman in Eden, tempted by Satan (v. 13b).⁵⁷ But here the parallel falters. Adam was tempted by Satan, fell, and was driven out of the garden (LXX Gen 3:24: “He [YHWH] drove out [ἐξέβαλεν] Adam”). Jesus, filled with the Spirit (v. 10), is driven (ἐκβάλλει) by that Spirit into the wilderness (v. 12). We are not told explicitly of Jesus’ fall or victory (unlike Matt 4:1–11 // Luke 4:1–13). Jesus is tempted by Satan, and “he was with

⁵⁴Mark uses this adverb more times in his 664 verses (forty-seven times) than the rest of the New Testament put together. The count depends upon one’s acceptance or refusal of the later scribal tendency to change the Markan εὐθὺς to the more elegant εὐθέως. It is often omitted in translation, but the rhythmic appearance of this word is deliberate. It indicates the urgency of what God is doing in and through Jesus.

⁵⁵On this theme, see Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:43–46; E. Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (trans. and ed. F. J. Moloney; GNS 5; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 216–18; Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 41–42. The ambiguous nature of the desert wilderness continues into the early church. See Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* (trans. R. C. Gregg; Classics of Western Spirituality; London: SPCK, 1980), 33–65; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), 213–40.

⁵⁶With this paragraph I am suggesting that the use of “the desert” in Mark 1:12–13 (prepared in 1:2–3) is linked with the fall in Genesis rather than with the exodus. This does not exclude the possibility of the presence of exodus themes here. For that position, see U. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness* (SBT 39; London: SCM, 1963), 77–102. See especially Gibson (*Temptations*, 60–64), who insists that “the desert” is the place of Israel’s post-exodus wandering; the place where Jesus must prove his devotion to God. Recently Watts (*New Exodus*, 96–121) has argued against both suggestions, claiming that major themes of the new exodus in Isa 40–55 emerge across the prologue, and set the agenda for the whole of the Gospel. For Painter (*Mark’s Gospel*, 32), the situation in the desert introduces the reader to the Gospel’s apocalyptic theme of goodness triumphing over satanic power. It was, of course, the ambiguity of the exodus that provided Israel with the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the biblical narrative, including Gen 1–11. On the primacy of the story of Adam (and Jewish reflection upon Adam) in vv. 12–13, see Marcus, *Mark*, 169–70.

⁵⁷For Gibson (*Temptations*, 58–60), Satan is the agent who tests Jesus’ faithfulness to God. Marcus (*Mark*, 169) looks to *L.A.E.* 6 for the theme of forty years in traditions surrounding the Fall. For an overview of the development of the notion of “Satan,” and his role in Jewish traditions, see S. R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 32–35.

the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him” (v. 13b). For the first time in the narrative Jesus is alone, and takes the initiative: “he was with the wild beasts.” This may appear irrelevant, or something that one expects if one spends too much time in the wilderness (!), or even a note linking this gospel to the experience of the Roman Christians thrown to the wild beasts during the Neronian persecution.⁵⁸ Yet, “[t]his phrase, distinctive to Mark’s account, holds the key to his temptation narrative.”⁵⁹ In the Genesis story Satan’s victory over Adam led to hostility and fear in creation (see Gen 3:14–21; Ps 91:11–13). In the Markan story that situation is reversed: he is *with* the wild beasts (ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων). Prophetic tradition surrounding the new creation has been fulfilled (see Isa 11:6–9; see also 35:3–10; Ezek 34:23–31; *T. Benj.* 5:2; *T. Iss.* 7:7). One of the dreams of first-century Judaism has been realized in the coming of Jesus: what was in the beginning has been restored.⁶⁰ This link with the creation myths is further enhanced by the final remark of the narrator: “and the angels waited on him” (δηκόνουσιν αὐτῷ). Once again exodus, Elijah, and creation motifs are present in this lapidary statement. Repeatedly throughout the desert experience of Israel angels help and guide the wandering people (see Exod 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). During Elijah’s experience of despair and hunger in the wilderness, he is served by the angels (1 Kgs 19:5–7). Although not present in the biblical account, Jewish documents speculate that Adam and Eve were fed by the angels in the Garden of Eden (see *T. Naph.* 8:3–4; *b. Sanh.* 59b).⁶¹

Only toward the end of the prologue does a hint of the link with the original creation, provided by the ἀρχή of 1:1, return. Jesus is “with the wild beasts” and “waited on” by the angels. His coming has repeated the experience of the original people of God in the desert, but above all, it has restored the original order of God’s creation. The promise of “the beginning” in v. 1 (see Gen 1:1) and the coming of the creating presence of the Spirit of God in v. 10 (see Gen 1:3) indicate that the prologue to the Gospel of Mark is linked to the prologue to the human story, as it was told in Gen 1–11. God has been the most active figure in vv. 1–13. Although present toward the end of the prologue, Jesus has been *presented* to the

⁵⁸ See, for example, Lane, *St. Mark*, 38. For Myers (*Binding the Strong Man*, 130), the “wild beasts” recall the animal representations of human kingdoms in Dan 7:3, 7.

⁵⁹ Guelich, *Mark*, 38.

⁶⁰ See also Waetjen, *Reordering*, 74–77. On Jewish hopes for the restoration of the Adamic situation, see R. Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966); W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1998), 1:356–57. In his major study of Mark 1:12–13, E. Best (*The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* [2d ed.; SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], xv–xxiii, 3–60) makes little of creation themes (see pp. xvi–xviii, 6–7). He claims that Satan is definitively defeated in 1:12–13. For the opposite argument, see J. M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (SBT 21; London: SCM, 1957), 21–53. See the summary of this discussion in Hooker, *St. Mark*, 51. J. W. van Henten (“The First Testing of Jesus. A Rereading of Mark 1:12–13,” *NTS* 45 [1999]: 349–66) questions this interpretation. He points to the loose links with Genesis, to the need to look elsewhere for the forty days, and suggests that the background is “an allusion to Israel’s period in the wilderness, with the focus upon Jesus as the people’s leader” (p. 361). See also Gibson (*Temptations*, 65–69) for the rejection of any link with the Adam story. Via texts from *T. 12 Patr.*, Gibson claims that the image of being with the wild beasts indicated the testing of Jesus’ faithfulness to God’s covenanted obligations. Gibson’s study of vv. 9–13 can also be found in idem, “Jesus’ Wilderness Temptation according to Mark,” *JSNT* 53 (1994): 3–34. Garrett (*The Temptations*, 55–60) also explains vv. 12–13 as a Markan indication that Jesus is not victorious over Satan, but must go on making decisions as the righteous servant of God.

⁶¹ See J. Jeremias, “Ἀδάμ,” *TDNT* 1:141. For the *L.A.E.*, see *OTP* 2:258. For extensive further documentation in support of this position, see Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1:356–57.

reader. He is the Christ, the Son of God (v. 1), the Lord (v. 3), the Stronger One (v. 7), one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (v. 8).⁶² God's voice has assured the reader that he is the beloved Son of God, and that God is well pleased with him (v. 11). He is filled with the Spirit (v. 10), and driven into the desert to reverse the tragedy of the Adam and Eve story, to reestablish God's original design (vv. 12–13).⁶³

Conclusion

The storyteller has provided a dense prologue for the reader/listener. There should be no doubt in the reader's mind about *who Jesus is*. However, there have been hints throughout the prologue that pointed to a ministry, if he is to baptize with a holy spirit (1:8). There is perhaps even a hint that as God's "beloved" (v. 11) he will accept total and unconditional self-sacrifice. The reader comes to the end of the prologue well informed about *who Jesus is*, but as yet unaware of *how Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord, the Stronger One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and how in his person God's original creative design has been restored*. The readers of this gospel know that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, and they may well wonder how such an end could be pleasing to God (see v. 11).⁶⁴ The prologue to the Gospel lays down this challenge. Now the reader knows *who Jesus is* and must be prepared to read through a story which will show *how Jesus pleases his Father*.

Only the reader or listener is aware of what has been said in the prologue. The various characters in the story—the Pharisees, the crowds, the Romans, and *especially* the disciples—have not read the prologue. This gospel was not written to provide information about Jesus' story or the foundation of the Christian community, to which its original and most subsequent readers belong. By informing the reader—on the very first page of the story—of *who Jesus is*, the author issues a challenge. The readers know that his story ended on a cross. They therefore ask: *in what way* does Jesus, the Son, respond to God's understanding of him? *How* does he live a life, preach a message, and die a death which restore God's original design and make the Father delight in him (1:11)?⁶⁵ Answers to these questions can be found only by reading or listening to what Jesus does, what he says, what others do to him, and how he responds to the things done to him in the story that follows.⁶⁶

⁶²Waetjen (*Reordering*, 22) speaks of Jesus in the prologue as "God's surrogate."

⁶³See also Ernst, *Markus*, 46–47; Lührmann, *Markusevangelium*, 39.

⁶⁴It is sometimes claimed that Mark 1:1–13 tells the reader everything that needs to be known. See, for example, Hooker, *Message*, 5–7; idem, *St. Mark*, 52; idem, *Beginnings*, 16–22. This is not the case, as the reader still has a great deal to learn and experience via the story of Jesus. On this, see Matera, "The Prologue," 9–15, and idem, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 6–10. On the role of "telling" and "showing" in narrative, see W. C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3–20; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 106–8. See the good description of "the initiated reader" in B. M. F. van Iersel, *Reading Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 42.

⁶⁵See Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 75–77.

⁶⁶J. Drury ("Mark," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* [ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode; London: Collins, 1987], 405) puts it well: "Between the understanding given us in its first verse and the radical insecurity and incomprehension of the subsequent tale, Mark's book gets its energy." See also Boring, "Mark 1:1–15," 63–67. For Watts (*New Exodus*, 53–136), it is the citation in vv. 2–3 which determines the shape and message of the Gospel as a whole. Watts's study is most helpful on a number of issues, especially the highlighting of the widespread presence of Second Isaiah in Mark, but the overall project is something of a *tour de force*.

For most of the narrative of the Gospel of Mark little attention will be explicitly directed to the reader (see, however, 13:14),⁶⁷ who has been the unique focus of the words of 1:1–13. However, at the end of the story (16:1–8) the author will return to the readers. They will be asked where they stand as they hear: “And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (16:8). The Gospel of Mark has both a prologue and an epilogue during which the author focuses intensely upon the reader of the intervening narrative of 1:14–15:47.

⁶⁷This rare but important comment from the narrator, “Let the reader understand” (Mark 13:14), is an indication that, despite the fact that the narrator does not regularly address the reader through the narrative, the reader is the focus of the narrator’s storytelling.