

***Mark's Provocative Use
of Scripture in Narration
"He Was with the Wild Animals
and Angels Ministered to Him"***

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The style of Mark's Gospel is to use the Hebrew Bible in a cryptic, enigmatic, and allusive manner that provokes the reader's imagination to uncover intertextual connections with those scriptures. It is a style that effectively draws the reader into Mark's narrative, but it also brings one to recognize that Mark has skillfully woven into his narrative many allusive words and phrases that subtly link the Jesus of his story with the Coming One of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, Mark's description of Jesus in the wilderness ("he was with the wild animals and angels ministered to him," 1:13) provokes the reader's imagination to discover that there is a strong verbal collocation of "the way," "the wilderness," and "the wild beasts" which focuses upon Isa 35:8-10 (in contrast to the study by R. Bauckham, who focuses upon Isa 11:6-9). Yet, the Isaiah text functions as a prism through which Ps 91:9-13 refracts. This psalm seems to be the principal text that informs Mark's narrative concerning Jesus' being with the wild animals while angels tended to him. It is significant that both of the other Synoptic Gospels explicitly bring Psalm 91 to the foreground in their temptation narratives (see Matt 4:6ff.; Luke 4:9ff.).

Key Words: allusive, angels, cryptic, fulfillment, intertextual, prismatic, wild animals

INTRODUCTION

As Mark's Gospel unfolds its literary portrait of Jesus the Messiah, it does so in a more cryptic and allusive manner than that of the other Synoptic Gospels or John's. Mark's narrative suppresses overt explanations of Jesus' actions and words, thus giving birth to the idea of his

"messianic secret."¹ So far from inventing the idea of the "messianic secret" to cover for Jesus' disciples' failure to recognize him as Messiah, Mark captures well the manner of Jesus' self-disclosure in literary form. Rather than cover for the disciples' lapses, Mark's narrative underscores the spiritual blindness and deafness of the Twelve disciples.² True as it is that Mark identifies Jesus as God's Son (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ) at the outset of his story, Mark's narrative itself leaves symbols, parabolic acts and sayings, and scriptural allusions unexplained, while the other Synoptics and John offer more assistance to the reader.

Why does Mark adopt this enigmatic narrative style? The tendency is to answer that Mark "writes for a particular audience, with particular knowledge and competencies."³ It is common to assume that Mark writes for church members who have the means to understand his signs, dark sayings, and allusive use of scripture throughout his Gospel.⁴ However, this takes something away from Mark's genius to reproduce for his readers the mystery played out for the Twelve, who endeavored to grasp Jesus' identity unveiled by means of parabolic actions and sayings.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that Mark's allusive use of scripture contributes significantly to the plot of his narrative. Mark, the narrator, uses the Hebrew Bible much as Jesus, in the narrative, uses parables, miracles, and symbolic acts. His use is principally allusive rather than explicit quotation, so that only those who know the Hebrew Scriptures recognize either the biblical references or their significance within the present context. If Mark's readers are to have ears that hear and eyes that see who Jesus truly is, they must exercise their spiritual senses, especially with reference to the Hebrew Scriptures. Proper understanding of Mark's symbols and scriptural allusions

1. Wilhelm Wrede's (*Das messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 1901; *The Messianic Secret*, 1971) theory concerning Mark's "messianic secret" has not survived in its original form, that is to say that the author of Mark's Gospel adeptly created the idea of the "messianic secret" to make it appear that the reason the disciples failed to realize that Jesus was the Messiah until after the resurrection was because Jesus himself had concealed the fact from them.

2. See, e.g., J. B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," *JBL* 80 (1961) 261-28; David J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," *JBL* 91 (1972) 490-500. See also Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977) 403, who states that "the disciples' story has come to a disastrous conclusion and the author has spared nothing in emphasizing the disaster." Cf. Mary R. Thompson, *The Role of Disbelief in Mark* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 104-35.

3. See, e.g., Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 38.

4. See, e.g., John Sergeant, *Lion Let Loose: The Structure and Meaning of St. Mark's Gospel* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1918; repr. 1992) 21-22.

does not lie on the surface any more than the explanation of Jesus' parables and miracles does. Mark's technique of telling the story imitates the method of Jesus. As Jesus discloses who he is by way of parables, whether in his teachings or actions, so Mark writes in parables. On the basis of his narrative technique, Mark expects his readers to be able to answer correctly Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29).

The paper focuses upon the statement, "he was with the wild animals and angels ministered to him" (Mark 1:13) as an illustration of Mark's cryptic and enigmatic use of scripture to provoke the reader's imagination to draw linkages between the Hebrew Bible and the story of Jesus. Mark's summary description of Jesus' wilderness temptation with the collocation of "wild animals" and "angels" begs the reader to identify intertextual connections and sources in the Hebrew Bible. At a deeper-level reading of the Gospel, one begins to realize that Mark has skillfully woven into his narrative many allusive words and phrases that subtly but adeptly link the Jesus of his story back to the "Coming One" of the Hebrew Bible.

MARK'S USE OF SCRIPTURE: AN OVERVIEW

A Prismatic Use of Isaiah

Immediately following his programmatic announcement—"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, God's Son" (Ἐπισημασία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ)—Mark forms the transition to his narrative by noting that the story he is about to tell happened "just as it was written by Isaiah the prophet," a conflation from Exodus, Isaiah, and Malachi (Mark 1:2).⁵ Joel Marcus convincingly demonstrates that the whole of Mark's narrative is to be read against the setting of Isaiah's themes, not just Mark 1:1-15 as Guelich had argued.⁶ One may reasonably conclude from the early mention of Isaiah and from observable patterns throughout the Gospel that Mark's use of the Hebrew Scriptures is refracted through the prophet Isaiah, and especially through Isa 40:3. For example, early in the narrative intertextual linkage with Isaiah may be found in Mark's

5. On the transitional use of καθὼς γέγραπται to indicate that the citation of scripture in Mark 1:2b-3 is intended as a comment on the superscription in 1:1; see Robert A. Guelich, "'The Beginning of the Gospel': Mark 1:1-15," *BR* 27 (1982) 6.

6. See, e.g., Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 20; see also Guelich, "The Beginning," 5-12; and Richard Schneek, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark, I-VIII* (Vallejo, Calif.: BIB.AL, 1994). See also Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament," *JSNT* 8 (1980) 24-45.

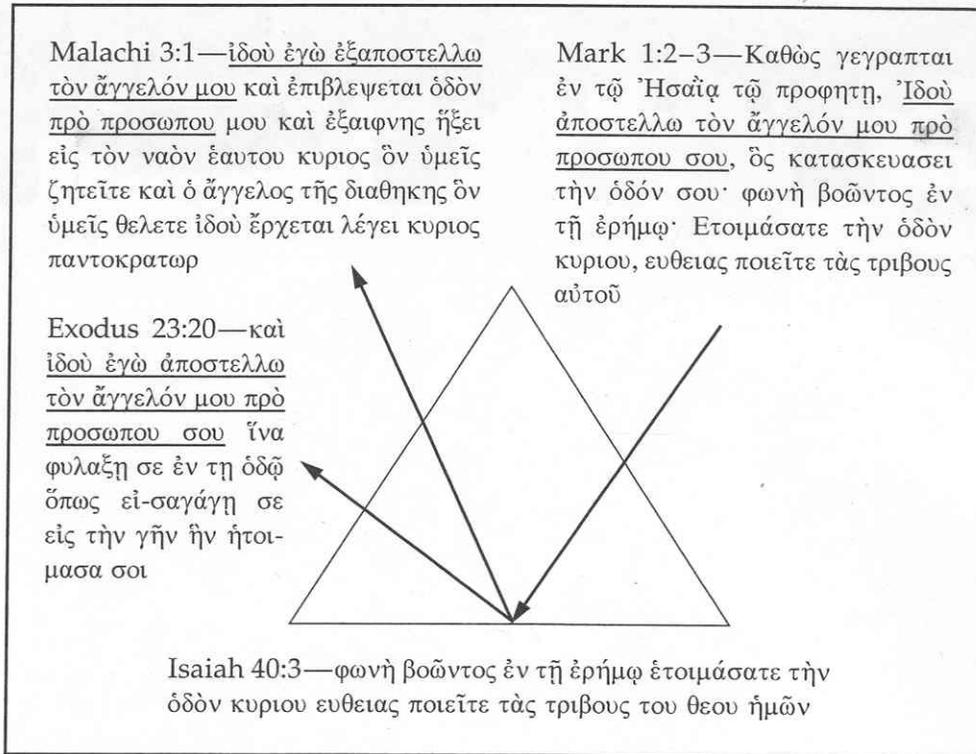


FIGURE 1. Mark's Prismatic Use of Isaiah 40:3

mention of the wilderness (1:4, 7-8, 12-13; Isa 40:3 and several other references); the tearing of the heavens (1:10; Isa 64:1); the approving words of the heavenly voice (1:11; Isa 42:1); and dwelling peacefully with the wild animals (1:13b; Isa 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25). Yet, Mark's scriptural allusions do not terminate upon Isaiah. Rather, his allusions are shafts of light that illuminate Isaiah's prism and diffuse throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. This prismatic use of Isaiah is illustrated in figure 1 above. The last of those themes indicated above, namely Jesus with the wild animals in the wilderness, will become the focus of this paper as we take a closer look at Mark's use of Isaiah's theme of Messiah, wild animals, and wilderness.

Mark's Restrictive Use of "Fulfillment" Language

The UBS⁴ text identifies twenty-seven direct quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in Mark's Gospel? Among these, only two explic-

7. For studies of Mark's use of the OT, see Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted: The Formation of Some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts of the Eschatological Discourse Mark 13 Par* (ConBNT 1; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1966); Howard C. Kee, "The Function of Scriptural Quotations and Allusions in Mark 11-16," in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. E. E. Ellis and E. Grasser; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 165-88; Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion*

itly state that scripture is "fulfilled" (πληρόω) in contrast to Matthew and Luke. Both occurrences are placed on the lips of Jesus, as are most of Mark's scripture citations.⁸ At the inauguration of his mission Jesus announces, "The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15; πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρός). When he is arrested he says, "Day after day I was with you teaching and you did not arrest me. But in order that the scriptures might be fulfilled . . ." (Mark 14:49; πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαί). Mark, the narrator, resists offering explicit commentary to explain Jesus' actions or words as fulfillment of scripture. Instead, the narrator tells his story in such a manner that most of the direct quotations of scripture are spoken by Jesus, the principal character.

In Mark's narrative Jesus fulfills scripture, but explicit mention of fulfillment is suppressed. Nonetheless, Mark's juxtaposition of scriptural allusions and citations with the actions and words of Jesus within his Gospel pericopes indicates that he is convinced that Jesus fulfills the full array of scriptures used in his narrative. It is apparent that Mark understands that Jesus fulfills Isa 6:9-10, for Jesus tells parables to his contemporaries "in order that" (ἵνα) Isaiah's words might be true about them, namely, that "they may be always looking but never seeing, and always listening but never hearing, lest they repent and he forgive them" (Mark 4:12). Likewise, in Mark 7:6 the narrative has Jesus say, "Isaiah correctly prophesied concerning you hypocrites, as he wrote, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' " (Isa 29:13). Furthermore, for those who question him, Jesus suitably challenges them concerning what scripture means (e.g., Mark 7:9-13; 10:1-12; 12:18-27, 28-34, 35-37). Also, Jesus confronts both opponents (11:17; 12:10-11) and his disciples (8:18; see Jer 5:21 for the allusion) with scripture.

Mark's method of using scripture places the burden of interpretation upon the reader. It is not as if Mark leaves the explanation of scripture open-ended. Rather, he has carefully placed the biblical citations within contexts of his narrative with an expectation that his readers will properly recognize that Jesus fulfills the Scriptures; he is the one to whom they point.

Mark's Allusive Use of Biblical Words and Phrases

More to the concern of this paper, Mark's entire story of Jesus is full of biblical allusions. Even his first citation is not a simple quotation but a conflation of three passages, including Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1; and

Narratives (Sheffield: Almond, 1983). See also Morna D. Hooker, "Mark," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 220-30.

8. See R. G. Bratcher, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Helps for Translators Series; 2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1984) 12-17.

Isa 40:3. Mark's allusions and echoes of scripture are not readily apparent upon a first or second reading. Even when one is quite familiar with the text of Mark and with the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, it is no small task to determine what is and what is not an allusion to an earlier text. Morna Hooker properly notes that some

may be accidental, and not the result of influence at all; others may be unconscious, and not due to any deliberate association with the OT on Mark's part, but they could nevertheless be important in betraying what is going on in his subconscious mind; others may well indicate that a link with the OT has been seen, either by Mark or by someone else before him, and that this link is important for the interpretation of the particular passage.⁹

To illustrate Hooker's point, one needs to read only a few verses into Mark's story. The margin of NA²⁷ indicates that the description of John the Baptist in 1:6 alludes to three different portions of the Hebrew Bible. One can readily find allusions in each of the three earlier texts.

Mark 1:6—καὶ ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐσθίων ἀκρίδας καὶ μέλι ἄγριον

2 Kings 1:8—καὶ ἔπον πρὸς αὐτόν ἀνὴρ δασύς καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περιεζωσμένος τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν Ἡλίου ὁ Θεοβίτης οὗτος

Zechariah 13:4—καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ καταισχυνηθήσονται οἱ προφήται ἕκαστος ἐκ τῆς ὀράσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ προφητεύειν αὐτόν καὶ ἐνδύσονται δέρριν τριχίνην ἀνθ' ὧν ἐψεύσαντο.

Leviticus 11:22 LXX—καὶ ταῦτα φάγεσθε ἀπ' αὐτῶν τὸν βροῦχου καὶ τὰ ὅμοια αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν ἀττάκην καὶ τὰ ὅμοια αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἀκρίδα καὶ τὰ ὅμοια αὐτῇ καὶ τὸν ὀφιομάχην καὶ τὰ ὅμοια αὐτῷ.

Are all three allusions intentional? Is the allusion to Zech 13:4 a deliberate association? What about connection with Lev 11:22? Allusive reference to Zech 13:4 is significant to note that John stands in the tradition of Israel's prophets who wore the rough garment of camel's hair. Connection with Lev 11:21-22 serves to indicate that John's meager diet of locusts and wild honey, though typical for wilderness sojourners, is also in keeping with the Mosaic custom, for the law permits eating of locusts. So John is a prophet who stands in line with Moses.

The linkage of Mark 1:6 with 2 Kgs 1:8 can hardly be accidental, because Mark's description of John wearing "a leather belt around his waist" (ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφύν αὐτοῦ) reproduces almost

9. Hooker, "Mark," 224.

exactly the description by which the prophet Elijah was identified in 2 Kgs 1:8 (ζώνην δερματίνην περι[εζωσμένος] τὴν ὄσφυν αὐτοῦ). Furthermore, the details concerning John's clothing reinforce what Mark has already inferred by his use of Isaiah and Malachi in his initial use of scripture. The observant reader recognizes that John is being identified as the eschatological Elijah whom Malachi foretold would come "to prepare the way" of the Lord (Mal 3:1-2; 4:5-6). The allusive references to Elijah's prophetic garb confirms that Mark sees John to be the latter day Elijah.

Passing over other possible allusions, not indicated by NA²⁷, such as reference to Isa 9:1 (8:23 LXX) in Mark 1:9 ("Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee," ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην) or a hint at Isa 64:1 in Mark 1:10 ("the heavens were torn open," σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς), one finds echoes of three biblical texts in the words spoken by the heavenly voice. Mark's phraseology (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα, 1:11) recalls Ps 2:7 ("you are my son," υἱὸς μου εἶ συ) and perhaps Isa 42:1 ("my chosen one, in him my soul delights, upon him I have placed my Spirit," ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν). Allusion to a third biblical text seems likely in the phrase υἱὸς ἀγαπητός used in the LXX in Gen 22:2, 12, and 16 concerning Abraham's only son, Isaac. In Mark's Gospel the phrase is heard again from the heavenly voice in 9:7 and in Jesus' parable of the vineyard in 12:6.

Mark intends for his readers to recognize that his story about Jesus is already written in Isaiah, in the Psalms, and in Genesis. Yet his story is no mere restatement of what is written. His story of Jesus fulfills scripture; it is part of the final chapter in the divine story. The heavenly voice that speaks at Jesus' baptism talks once more about Jesus on the mountain, in the presence of Moses, Elijah, and three disciples. As Mark 1:11 alludes to both Ps 2:7 and Gen 22:2, 12, and 16, so also does Mark 9:7 with the words Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός. However, an echo of another biblical text is heard also, for the divine voice commands, "Hear him!" (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ). The significance of this command can hardly be missed, for Moses, who wrote those words long ago in Deut 18:15, is there on the mountain. Both the representative of the law and Elijah, the representative of the prophets, yield to the new Moses who fulfills the prophets.

Diverse and discreet allusions to the Hebrew Bible occur throughout Mark's Gospel. The collocation of several scriptural allusions in the pericope of the five loaves present Jesus as the fulfillment of prophetic expectations. Mark draws attention to the dominant motif with three mentions of the "wilderness" (Mark 6:31, 32, 35) which links this pericope with the opening narrative concerning John the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness and Jesus' being tempted in the wilderness. Jesus is the new Moses who has compassion upon people who

"were like sheep without a shepherd," a clear allusion to Num 27:17 but also to 1 Kgs 22:17 and to Ezek 34:5 (cf. also Isa 53:6), with a hint at David typology (see Ezek 34:23). One who traces this allusion is richly rewarded, for the Mosaic context confirms that it foreshadows the greater Moses who is also the greater Joshua. Mark's allusive reference echoes Moses' appeal to the Lord for one to lead his people so that they "will not be like sheep without a shepherd." The Lord answers, "Take Joshua" (27:18). This dual typology converges in Jesus. But Mark's scriptural allusions are not yet exhausted in this pericope. Arrangement of the people in ranks of "hundreds and fifties" echoes Exod 18:21. Mark's mention of "reclining" upon the "green grass" (unique among the Synoptic parallels), in conjunction with the shepherd motif of Num 27:17 picks up the hint at David typology with a rather apparent allusion to Ps 23:2.¹⁰ Jesus' mention of "rest" in Mark 6:31 also points to him as the one who brings to fulfillment the Sabbath rest. Mark's subsequent reference (6:52; 8:17-21) to the failure of the Twelve to understand this miraculous feeding underscores both the importance of proper interpretation of this miracle for understanding his narrative as well as the fact that its significance resides in what it symbolizes. That is to say, Jesus fulfills scripture as the one to whom Moses, but also Joshua and David, pointed long ago.

Further examples of Mark's scriptural allusions that provoke the reader's imagination may be drawn from virtually anywhere in the Gospel. Mark's reference to Zechariah's prophecy concerning Messiah riding the unbroken donkey (9:9) and the ascription of "Hosanna!" (Psalm 118) to Jesus upon his entry into Jerusalem is done in an allusive manner, without any overt indication that scripture is fulfilled. Yet, it becomes apparent to the attentive reader that Mark is quite aware of scripture's fulfillment in Jesus' entry to the city. Likewise, the passion narrative is studded with allusive use of scripture, governed by Jesus' use of Isa 53:10 in Mark 10:45. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the pericope of Jesus' death is punctuated with scripture allusions; none is explicitly identified. The soldiers' casting of lots for Jesus' clothing alludes to Ps 22:18. The wine mixed with myrrh fulfills Ps 69:21, yet with nothing more than Mark's mention of it, leaving it to the reader to draw the connection. Similarly, Mark resists the temptation to which a later scribe yielded, namely to force the reader to realize that his mention of the two robbers with whom Jesus was crucified fulfills Isa 53:12.¹¹ Also, Mark does not

10. On the exodus in Psalm 23, see Pamela Milne, "Psalm 23: Echoes of the Exodus," *SR* 4 (1974-75) 237-47.

11. Some manuscripts, perhaps influenced by Luke 22:37, add καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφὴ ἢ λέγουσα· καὶ μετὰ ἀνόμων ἐλογίσθη.

explain that the words "they hurled insults at him, shaking their heads" (Mark 15:29) fulfill or even echo Ps 22:7 (cf. Ps 109:25). He expects his readers to recognize that Jesus' words "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" quote Ps 22:1. But he does assist his Gentile readers by translating the Aramaic so that they can readily make the connection.

These examples of Mark's use of scripture must suffice to demonstrate that there is much work that needs to be done in this area.¹² Mark's allusions throughout his Gospel have not been fully identified. In particular, his biblical allusions in the wilderness temptation pericope need closer attention. To this subject the paper now turns.

MARK'S ALLUSIVE USE OF SCRIPTURE: "HE WAS WITH THE WILD ANIMALS AND ANGELS MINISTERED TO HIM"

Recent Interpretations of Mark 1:13

Recently Richard Bauckham published an essay entitled: "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age."¹³ He explores Mark's theological intention, but his focus is merely upon the four words ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων. He points out that there are basically three lines of interpretation endeavoring to explain the implication or relevance of Mark's curious words.

First, the wild animals are simply indigenous to the wilderness and bear no significance in themselves. Mark mentions them merely to stress the solitary nature of Jesus' retreat into the wilderness.¹⁴ However, for Mark to devote a whole clause to Jesus' being with the wild beasts casts doubt upon this view.¹⁵ Furthermore, within this context which is so rich with theological symbolism, it is doubtful that Mark merely intends the wild beasts to be so understood.¹⁶

Second, Mark intends to associate the wild beasts with demonic forces; they are to be understood as Satan's allies against Jesus. One variation of this interpretation sees the wilderness as an eschatological battleground where Jesus wins an initial and decisive victory.¹⁷

12. I am under contract with Mellen Press, Lewiston, N.Y., to write an intertextual commentary on Mark's Gospel, aimed at teasing out every allusion and quotation of biblical texts.

13. 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, Mich.: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994) 3-21.

14. See, e.g., Werner Foerster, "θηρίον," *TDNT* 3.134.

15. Cf. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993) 56.

16. Cf. Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 5.

17. E. Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 57.

A feature of Mark's text that must be explained by this interpretation is the fact that Mark does not indicate that "the wild beasts were with Satan" but that Jesus "was with the wild beasts." Bauckham further notes that ἔϊναι μετὰ τίνος, in this context, most likely conveys a positive sense of association, not a hostile confrontation between Jesus and the wild beasts.¹⁸

Third, Mark presents Jesus "with the wild beasts" to signify the restoration of paradise. Jesus among the wild animals signifies that the eschatological Adam has resisted Satan; he did not yield to temptation as Adam did. Thus, Jesus restores paradise, for he is at peace with the animals.¹⁹ Bauckham modifies this interpretation when he argues that Jesus' being with the wild beasts has "independent significance on its own."²⁰ He states, "For us, Jesus' companionable presence with the wild animals affirms their independent value for themselves and for God. He does not adopt them into the human world, but lets them be themselves in peace, leaving them their wilderness, affirming them as creatures who share the world with us in the community of God's creation."²¹ Bauckham traces Mark's mention of "wild animals" (θηρία) to Isa 11:6-9 and 65:25. He also contends that David, more than Adam, is the controlling figure in Mark's narrative, for the prophecy concerning the Davidic Messiah (Isa 11:1-5) linked with Isaiah's vision of messianic peace (11:6-9) is brought to the surface by Mark with his allusion to Ps 2:7, "You are my son."²²

Interpreting the Temptation Narrative: Mark 1:13

Dominating Mark 1:1-13 is the wilderness motif.²³ In fact, Mark's story frequently returns to the wilderness as the stage where important messianic episodes unfold.²⁴ Marcus convincingly argues that

18. Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 5.

19. See J. Jeremias, "Ἄδάμ," *TDNT* 1.141. See also Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) 69-70. Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 38-39.

20. Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 7.

21. *Ibid.*, 20.

22. *Ibid.*

23. On the wilderness theme, see Ulrich W. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness* (SBT 59; Chatham: Mackay / Naperville: Anderson, 1963) 77-101.

24. Mauser properly accents the significance of the wilderness for Mark's Gospel and the two miraculous feeding episodes in the wilderness. However, Joel Marcus rightly corrects Mauser, who sees the exodus under Moses as the principal type, even to the point of claiming that Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1 in Mark 1:2 "really melt into one in which Exod 23:20 is the predominant part" (Mauser, *Wilderness*, 81). Marcus correctly states, "The verbal similarity to Mal. 3:1, however is actually greater than that to Ex. 23:20, since the later contains no counterpart to Mark 1:2c. The attribution of the conflated text to 'Isaiah the prophet' in 1:2a, moreover, suggests that Mark means it to be understood in a prophetic rather than a Pentateuchal context" (Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 25).

"The way of the Lord" (Mark 1:3) is a dominant theme around which Mark has structured his Gospel. For Mark tells of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning God's new action: "who will make his victorious way through the wilderness and lead his people back to the promised land in a saving act of holy war. Mark identifies this act with Jesus' way, his progress through the world, his movement up to death and resurrection in Jerusalem."²⁵ Each detail of the temptation narrative "is rooted in the wilderness tradition of the Old Testament and serves to clarify the significance of the desert."²⁶ We turn, now, to examining the details of Mark's text in 1:13.

Thrust out into the Wilderness by the Spirit

It is apparent from Mark's double mention of the "wilderness" (ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον 1:12; ἦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ 1:13) that the emphasized detail serves an important function in his narrative. It is the same Spirit that descended upon Jesus in the baptismal waters that drives him "out into the wilderness."²⁷ Mark's detail compels one to recognize that the temptation is inextricably united with the baptism.²⁸ Mark binds together several motifs: the Spirit, the wilderness, temptation, the forty days, wild animals, and angels. The placement of these motifs side by side recalls several texts from Mark's OT Scriptures. Of particular significance is Isa 63:8-10, where Israel's wilderness experience is recalled.

He [the LORD] said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who

25. Ibid., 46. Marcus states, "It would be no exaggeration, then, to say that 'the way of Jesus/the way of the Lord' is not only the double theme of Mark's Gospel but also the controlling paradigm for his interpretation of the life of his community" (p. 47).

26. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 98.

27. The irony of Mark's narrative should not escape the reader. The statement εὐθύς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει is ironic, for after Jesus is cast out into the wilderness to be tested by Satan, he becomes the actor who casts out others, such as demons (1:34, 39), the leprous man (1:43), and the merchants in the Temple (11:15).

28. Note Mark's use of καὶ εὐθύς. Cf. Jeffrey B. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation according to Mark," *JSNT* 53 (1994) 6-9.

divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, who led them through the depths?²⁹

The concurrence of the Spirit with Israel's wilderness trek in Isaiah 63 serves as a model or type which points to the reality of fulfillment narrated by Mark. As Israel, God's son (Exod 4:22-23; Hos 11:1), received God's approval (Isa 63:8) yet became unfaithful and grieved the Holy Spirit, so Jesus, God's son who is beloved and pleasing to God (Mark 1:11) is thrust, by the same Spirit which he has received, into the wilderness to be put to the test, being tempted by Satan. Mark's allusive use of Isaiah 63 suggests that the story of Israel's wilderness testing richly informs Jesus' wilderness temptation.

Mark's use of the participle *πειραζόμενος* indicates that Jesus was "undergoing an experience in which his character or fidelity was being 'put to the proof.'"³⁰ Mark adds to the participle the words *ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ*, making it quite clear that Jesus' trial was a test of his fidelity to the one whose voice had just said, "With you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

Tempted in the Wilderness Forty Days

Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness for forty days recalls Moses' stay on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:18) and Elijah's wanderings through the wilderness to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8, 15). However, it appears likely that it is Israel's wilderness testing that serves as the dominant reference for Mark. There is an echo of Israel's wilderness experience of wandering for forty years (Exod 34:28). As Israel, God's son (Exod 4:22) was in the wilderness being tested by God (Deut 8:2), so Jesus, God's Son, went into the wilderness for his testing. Some dispute such an allusion because "forty days and forty years are by no means the same thing."³¹ However, the calculation of the forty years—"one year for each of the forty days you explored the land" (Num 14:34)—dispels that problem. It is likely that Mark's principal allusive reference is Deut 8:2 refracted through Isa 63:8ff. For the text reads, "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands" (cf. Isa 63:8ff.). It is significant that two of Mark's phrases occur in this text: (1) "the way" (*πάσσαν τὴν ὁδόν*; cf. Mark 1:2, 3); and (2) "in the wilderness" (*ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ*; cf. Mark 1:13). Within Mark's narrative, the significance of the "forty days" resides in

29. Note the rich allusive references from Mark's Gospel to Isa 63:8-13: "sons"! "my son"; "sons who will not be false to me"/"my son . . . with whom I am well pleased"; "Holy Spirit"/"Spirit"; "angel of his presence"/"angels attended him"; "divided the waters" /"Jordan River"(?).

30. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 12.

31. Hooker, *Mark*, 49.

its scriptural allusions rather than in a limited period of temptation for Jesus, for Mark does not bring definitive closure to the temptation narrative. Both the "wilderness" and the "temptation" by Satan extend on through Mark's storyline.³² Yet, of course, this hardly means, as Gibson has demonstrated, that Mark says nothing about the nature, content, or outcome of Jesus' temptation.³³

It is quite apparent that Mark's use of "wilderness" (ἡ ἔρημος), twice in 1:12-13, not only links Jesus' testing with Israel's, but it also serves, in itself, as a kind of shorthand way for Mark to indicate that Jesus was driven out by the Spirit to a "place of 'testing', particularly the 'testing' of covenant loyalty, of one's dedication to be obedient to God."³⁴ At the time Mark wrote his Gospel, there was such an intense connection between the idea implied by "the wilderness" (ἡ ἔρημος) and that of "testing faithfulness," that it was customary to read being "in the wilderness" as synonymous with undergoing a "trial of loyalty."³⁵ One discovers that, within Mark's Gospel itself, Jesus' testing in the wilderness foreshadows the testing of his disciples' loyalty and faith to him when he brings them into "the wilderness" also (Mark 6:31ff.; 8:1ff.). Like Israel of old, the Twelve do not "understand," nor do they have "eyes that see or ears that hear" (Deut 29:4; Mark 8:17-18).

Thus, it seems quite apparent that Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus replicates Israel's experience in the wilderness, but he does so as God's "well-pleasing" Son. As Israel, the prototype of Jesus' wilderness temptation, endured God's testing to uncover what was "in your heart," so Jesus was tempted forty days to prove his character, faithful to his Father.

In the Wilderness with the Wild Beasts; and Angels Served Him

What is Mark's intention by noting in his story that Jesus "was with the wild beasts" (ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων)? Some scholars see nothing more in these words than Mark's attempt to sketch a scene of desolation, danger, and loneliness where Jesus encountered Satan.³⁶ Gundry contends that Mark simply intends that Jesus' being with the wild

32. Cf. William L. Lane, *Commentary on The Gospel according to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974) 60-61. Cf. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 100, who states, "Jesus in the wilderness is confronted with Satan and temptation. It is this clash itself which is important; it is going on in Jesus' whole ministry. That explains also why Mark does not have to say anything about the content of the temptation. The whole Gospel is an explanation of how Jesus was tempted."

33. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 3-34.

34. *Ibid.*, 15.

35. See W. R. Stegner, "Wilderness and Testing in the Scrolls and in Matthew 4:1-11," *BR 12* (1967) 22-23, 26. Cf. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 99.

36. See, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) 59.

beasts without harm "bears witness to his being God's Son."³⁷ However, in a segment so punctuated with symbolism, it seems incredible that Mark would resort to such a prosaic and unimaginative manner, especially with the wilderness motif being so significant, enriching the several scriptural hints.

Surprising though it maybe, the tendency among recent scholars is to focus upon an Adam/Christ typology in Mark's mention of the "wild beasts." Appeal to Isa 11:6-9 and 65:25 seems to provide biblical support for Mark's allusion. It is claimed that Mark's juxtaposition—"he was with the wild beasts, and angels served him"—is intended to present Jesus as the second Adam, through whom "Satan has been vanquished, the gate to paradise is again opened."³⁸ Two assumptions concerning Mark's text ground this viewpoint: first, the μετό ("with") in the phrase "with the wild beasts" designates a positive association between Jesus and the wild beasts, not a hostile confrontation;³⁹ and second, that the verb διακονέω ("serve") denotes "table-service."⁴⁰ Bauckham, who takes this view as he works out a modified restoration-of-paradise explanation of Mark's text, glides much too easily over the mention of "angels," as he says, "they minister to Jesus as they did to Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:5-8) and to Adam and Eve in paradise (*b. Sanh.* 59b)."⁴¹

However, Gibson properly disputes the ground of these two assumptions.⁴² Within the context of Mark 1:13, particularly the way Mark sets the "wild beasts" over against the "angels," it seems that μετό denotes subordination rather than "peacable companionship."⁴³ Furthermore, concerning Mark's use of διακονέω, it is highly doubtful that it designates "table-service." For nothing in the immediate context suggests this, nor even within Mark's Gospel.

On the contrary, there are some good reasons not to focus principally upon an Adam typology in Mark's verse. First, within Mark's context, it is likely that the function of "wild beasts" and "angels" is contrasted.⁴⁴ They stand over against one another, with the conjunc-

37. Gundry, *Mark*, 59.

38. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 70.

39. Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 5. Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 39. See also Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 69.

40. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 70, set the pattern for this interpretation.

41. Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 8.

42. See Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 20.

43. This is Bauckham's terminology, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 20.

44. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 20. He cites E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Ergänzungsheft 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963) 27. He also notes that both Goodspeed ("and he was among the wild animals; but the angels waited on him"; *The Bible: An American Translation*) and Moffat ("he was in the company of wild beasts, but angels ministered to him"; *The New Testament: A New Translation*) reflect this contrast. Cf. Foerster, "θηρίων," *TDNT* 3.134.

tion καὶ being translated "but." Second, at the time Mark wrote, θηρία ("wild beasts") characteristically designated "evil rather than good, fierceness and opposition rather than docility and co-operation."⁴⁵ Third, nowhere does the Adam typology play a role in Mark's Gospel, nor is Jesus portrayed as the second Adam. Gibson properly questions, "Why would Mark make this comparison in the first place if he never intended to employ or exploit it again?"⁴⁶ However, Israel typology does function in the foreground of Mark's narrative and christology, for Jesus continually works the categories of Israel's self-identity as he discloses himself. Fourth, if Mark is principally working a typological relationship between Adam and Jesus in Mark 1:13b, it is poorly and obscurely done, for while Adam was put to the test in the lush garden of paradise, Jesus was tested in the arid wilderness.⁴⁷ This is not to say that there is no echo of Adam in Mark's text, but it certainly is not dominant in the prologue, nor is it developed in the remainder of the Gospel. The juxtaposition of Mark's motifs points toward an Israel/Messiah typology, with particular use of Isaiah's themes.

Now for a proposed interpretation. Rather than either Isa 11:6-9 or 65:25 being Mark's reference points in Isaiah, it seems more likely that the light of his allusion to scripture strikes the prism of Isaiah's text where he actually uses θηρία ("wild beasts"), and he does so in 35:9 in conjunction with his mention of "the way" (ὁδὸς καθαρὰ καὶ ὁδὸς ἁγία, Isa 35:8 LXX; cf. Isa 11:16 LXX, δίοδος) "in the wilderness" (ἐν τῇ ἐρήῳ, 35:6 LXX). The text reads:

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isa 35:8-10)

One may argue that Isaiah 35 seems to be an odd text to which Mark alludes because the evangelist says that Jesus "was with the wild beasts [θηρία]" in the wilderness, but the prophet says, "nor will any ferocious beast [θηρία] get up on" "the way of holiness" in the wilderness. The verbal collocation of "the way," "the wilderness," and "the wild beasts" is too strong to ignore the connection. Furthermore, the point of the Isaiah text is to portray the absence of evil from the

45. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 20. Cf. E. C. Grant, *The Earliest Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1943) 77.

46. *Ibid.*

47. E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 8-9.

"way of holiness" using symbolism of the "lion" and "ferocious beast." Isaiah and Mark agree, "wild beasts" subjugated in the wilderness way symbolically represent the subjugation of evil when God's kingdom comes.

There is, however, another text to which Mark seems to have alluded. The light of Mark's allusion seems to strike Isa 35:9 and refract, illuminating Ps 91:9-13. The LXX text reads,

For you, LORD, are my hope,
 you have made the Most High your refuge.
 No evil will come to you,
 and a scourge will not come near your dwelling.
 For [God] shall charge his angels concerning you,
 to keep you in all your ways.
 They shall lift you up on their hands,
 lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.
 You shall tread upon the asp and basilisk:
 and you shall trample upon the lion and the dragon.⁴⁸

One can find similar language of the subjugation of "wild beasts" in the *Testaments of the Twelve*.⁴⁹ The three selections from the *Testaments* and Psalm 91 have four things in common with Mark 1:13. First, there is a collocation of wild beasts, angels, and the devil/demons in each. Second, in each of these, as in Mark's gospel, the angels stand over against the wild beasts. Third, in Psalm 91 and the *Testaments* along with Mark's Gospel, the ones who gain dominion over the wild beasts and with whom the angels take a stand are ones who are in obedient covenant relationship with the LORD God. Fourth, wild beasts are subjected and angels tend to the one who has made God one's hope precisely because God acknowledges such a one.⁵⁰ Figure 2 illustrates Mark's prismatic use of Isaiah to illuminate other biblical allusions concerning the Christ.

Among biblical texts, then, it does not appear that the Mark 1:13 allusion terminates upon Isa 11:6-9 or 65:25. Rather, Ps 91:9-13 seems to be the primary point of Mark's allusion refracted through Isa 35:9. Ps 91:9-13 provides both a conceptual and verbal background for Mark 1:13. Conceptually, the psalm, as does Mark 1:13, focuses upon

48. The LXX text: ὅτι σύ κύριε ἡ ἔλπίς μου τὸν ὕψιστον ἔθου καταφυγὴν σου οὐ προσελεύσεται πρὸς σέ κακά καὶ μάστιξ οὐκ ἐγγιῖ τῷ σκηνώματι ὅτι τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ διαφυλάξαι σε ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς σου ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀρουσῖν σε μήποτε προσκόψης πρὸς λίθον τοῦ πόδα σου ἐπ' ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκον ἐπιβήσκη καὶ καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δρακοντα

49. See *T. Iss.* 7.7; *T. Benj.* 5.2; *T. Naph.* 8.4. Cf. Gibson's discussion of these texts in "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 21-22. See also Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals," 12-13.

50. Cf. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 22.

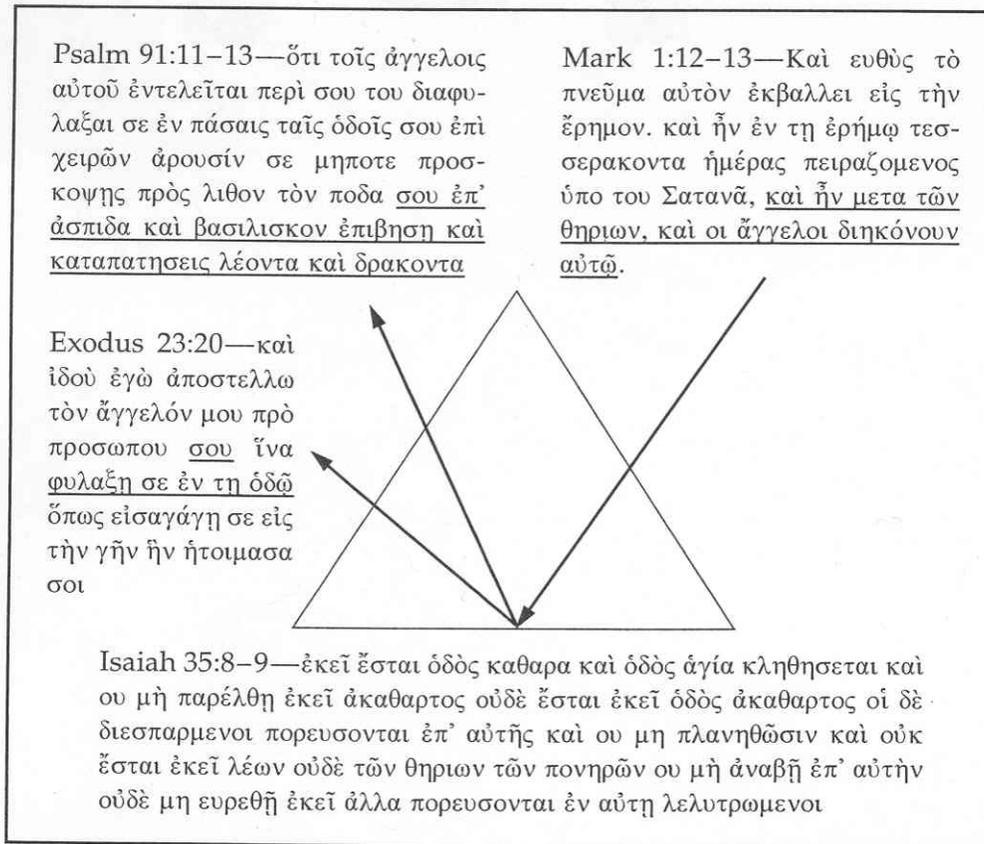


FIGURE 2. Mark's Prismatic Use of Isaiah 35:8-9

the idea of testing covenant loyalty. Verbally, the psalm juxtaposes "beasts" (asp, basilisk, lion, and dragon) with "angels" set in a context in which one receives divine approval, like Mark's baptismal-temptation narrative.

Ps 91:9-10 poses a dilemma, for there is a change of personal pronouns from the first person ("my refuge" MT) to the second ("your dwelling" MT), a riddle preserved by the LXX. The psalmist first addresses the LORD, calling him "my refuge" ("my hope" LXX). In the next verse the psalmist speaks to the LORD and says, "You have made the Most High your dwelling" ("refuge" LXX). This is not unlike Psalm 110. As Jesus amazed the people in the Temple with his questions concerning Ps 110:1 (Mark 12:35-37), it appears that Mark is reading Ps 91:9ff. similarly, that it speaks of the LORD who has made the Most High his refuge. The LORD of whom the psalmist speaks is none other than the Jesus whom John baptizes and who is thrust out into the wilderness, where he is tempted by Satan and is with the "wild beasts." Gibson is likely correct to contend that the καί which begins Mark 1:13b, linking it with "being tempted by Satan," is consecutive

("and so") rather than coordinating (BDF, §442).⁵¹ Thus, Jesus' being "with the wild beasts" and having "angels serve him" is the result of, rather than concurrent with, his temptation by Satan. This agrees with Matthew's reading of Mark (see Matt 4:11).

Matthew and Luke expand greatly upon Mark's account of the temptation, for they elaborate upon individual temptations that Satan set before Jesus. Especially significant in both Matthew and Luke is the fact that they apparently hear the echo of Psalm 91 in Mark's account. In both, Psalm 91 figures prominently as Satan uses a segment of the psalm (vv. 11-12) in his attempt to entice Jesus to leap from the high point of the Temple (Matt 4:5ff.; Luke 4:9). Whereas Mark allusively uses Psalm 91, Matthew and Luke explicitly quote the psalm.

CONCLUSION

Mark's allusive use of scripture in the temptation narrative illustrates his primary use of scripture. He is provocative in his use of the Hebrew Bible for, by his allusive manner, Mark draws his readers into the very experience of the Twelve. For if one is to read Mark properly, one must be keenly observant. One must always be wary lest one "sees but fails to take notice, and hears but fails to listen" to recognize that Jesus discloses himself as the one who fulfills the messianic hope of all the prophets. Mark's allusive and provocative use of scripture accents the fact that there is a "mystery" element about the "kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11). His resistance to provide explicit interpretation of Jesus' parables, miracles, teachings, and symbolic-prophetic actions as well as the numerous biblical allusions contributes significantly to the plot of Mark's narrative. In order to understand Mark's Gospel one must look beyond the "things of men" and see "the things of God" (Mark 8:33). One must know Mark's Bible well in order to grasp Mark's story beyond the superficial level and apprehend its theological depth. Likewise, there is a reward for anyone who takes up Mark's challenge, for his Gospel opens up the Hebrew Scriptures to anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear. However, neither the significance of Jesus' actions and words nor his fulfillment of the Scriptures lies on the surface of the narrative. Mark's reader must realize that he has written his Gospel to replicate Jesus' method of self-disclosure. To all who have eyes and ears Jesus unveils himself by way of parabolic teachings and parabolic acts. Mark writes in parables, and especially when he uses the Hebrew Scriptures. He evidently understands Prov 25:2—"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out" (NRSV).

51. Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation," 31-32.