

JESUS, THE TEMPLE

AND THE

COMING ROBERT H. STEIN SON OF MAN

A COMMENTARY ON MARK 13

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In appreciation to Bethel University, Bethel Seminary,
and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where I have had
the great privilege of teaching for over thirty-five years.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
ANTC	Abington New Testament Commentary
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BAR	<i>Biblical Archeology Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>b. B. Mes.</i>	The tractate <i>Babba Meši'a</i> in the Babylonian Talmud
<i>b. B. Qam.</i>	The tractate <i>Babba Qamma</i> in the Babylonian Talmud
<i>b. Ber.</i>	The tractate <i>Berakot</i> in the Babylonian Talmud
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicorum Lovaniensium
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BNTC	Black New Testament Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
D	The hypothetical material used in the composition of Deuteronomy
E	A group of passages in the Pentateuch in which God is called <i>Elohim</i>
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ESV	English Standard Version
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testament

HTKNT	Herder's theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HZNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
J	A group of passages in the Pentateuch in which God is called <i>Yahweh</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Josephus Jewish War</i>
KBANT	Kommentar und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
KJV	King James Version
L	Gospel material unique to Luke
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament)
M	Gospel material unique to Matthew
NAB	New American Bible
NAC	New American Commentary
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTL	New Testament Library
NTR	New Testament Readings
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
P	Material in the Pentateuch having special interest in priestly concerns
PGC	Pilgrim Gospel Commentaries
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
POxy	Oxyrhynchus papyrus

Q	Material common to Matthew and Luke not found in Mark
1QM	The War Scroll in the Dead Sea Scrolls
REB	Revised English Bible
RNT	Regensburger Neuen Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Napthali</i>
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Preface

My love affair with the Gospel of Mark began when I was a doctoral student at Princeton Theological Seminary and resulted in a dissertation, “The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Marcan Redaktionsgeschichte.” After graduation it led to the writing of various articles on Mark such as: “The ‘Redaktionsgeschichtlich’ Investigation of a Mark Seam (Mc 1^{21ff.}),” *ZNW* 61 (1970): 70-94; “The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Marcan Redaction History,” *NT* 13 (1971): 181-98; “A Short Note on Mark XIV.28 and XVI.7,” *NTS* 20 (1973): 445-52; “Is the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8) a Misplaced Resurrection-Account?” *JBL* 95 (1976): 79-96; “The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 482-502; “The Ending of Mark,” *BBR* 18 (2008): 79-88; “Duality in Mark,” in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem: Oxford Conference, April 2008*, ed. P. Foster et al., BETL 239 (2011): 253-80. This interest ultimately culminated in my commentary on Mark in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (2008). That my interest has not waned is evident by the publication of *Jesus, the Temple and the Coming Son of Man*.

For readers who want to know from the very start my thesis of how Mark 13 is best interpreted, I recommend they begin by reading chapter eight, “An Interpretative Translation of Mark 13.” For those, however, who would like to work systematically through the problem of how this chapter of Mark is best interpreted, I recommend reading the book beginning with chapter one and continuing consecutively through chapter eight. As in the reading of any mystery novel or thesis, much is lost by not following the progression of the logic and argumentation given.

I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Robert L. Plummer

of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. Benjamin L. Merkle of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for their careful analysis, suggestions and critique of this work. It was a privilege to have been their teacher and colleague in the study of the New Testament. I also want to thank my sons Keith R. and Stephen W. for their assessment and analysis of the book from the viewpoint of learned laity. Needless to say, whereas numerous positive contributions to this work have come from these men, the final product is my own responsibility. I also want to express my appreciation to Dan Reid and the staff of InterVarsity Press for their assistance in the final editing of this work. It has once again been a privilege to work with them in the publication of this book.

All scriptural quotations found in this book are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise specified.

Determining Our Goal

The goal of writing a commentary on Mark 13, sometimes called the “Little Apocalypse” or the “Olivet Discourse,” might seem at first glance to be quite obvious. Yet the history of research on this chapter of the Bible reveals that investigators have often had varied and diverse goals in their research. The chapter, the longest continuous series of teachings found in Mark, consists of thirty-nine sentences, compared to the next longest speech of Jesus (8:34-38), which consists of just six sentences.¹ The chapter has proven a rich source mined for numerous subject matters. Some of these are historical in nature and seek to uncover information about the historical Jesus lying behind the present text of Mark. Some are literary in nature and involve the search for hypothetical written and oral sources used in composing the present text. Some involve the investigation of the present, canonical text to discover its authorial meaning. It is clear from this that there is little agreement as to what the goal of writing a commentary on Mark 13 should be.

INVESTIGATING MARK 13 FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS²

Most people who read Mark 13 do so in order to learn about what Jesus of Nazareth taught concerning the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and his second coming. The questions of the disciples in Mark 13:4 (“Tell us, when will this [the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem referred to in 13:2] be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be ac-

¹Kenneth Grayston, “The Study of Mark XIII,” *BJRL* 56 (1974): 375.

²For anyone engaged in a serious study of Mark 13, George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) serves as a fundamental resource.

complished?”) focus the reader’s attention on Jesus’ answer to them in 13:5-37. The reader faces numerous questions in trying to understand Jesus’ answer. Some of these are:

- In 13:6 did Jesus mean that false teachers would come claiming to be him (i.e., Jesus of Nazareth, the risen Christ) or the Jewish messiah longed for by non-Christian Jews?
- Was the prophecy of 13:10 fulfilled already in apostolic times (cf. Paul’s statements in Rom 16:26; Col 1:6, 23 that the gospel had become known “to all nations” [RSV]), or does it still await its fulfillment?
- What does Jesus mean by the “abomination of desolation” (ESV) in 13:14, and does his/its appearance involve the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the future coming of the Son of Man?
- Is the language of 13:24-27 to be understood literally or figuratively? Is Jesus using this imagery in the same manner as the Old Testament prophets (cf. Is 13:9-11; Jer 4:23-28; Ezek 32:5-8; etc.)—that is, metaphorically?
- Does Jesus teach in 13:24 that his return as the Son of Man would occur immediately after the fall of Jerusalem in 13:14-23?
- What does Jesus mean by “this generation” in 13:30, and was he wrong in his prediction?
- How do Jesus’ other sayings on this subject, such as Mark 8:34-38 and Matthew 25:1-46, and the additional comments we find in the parallel accounts (Mt 24:1-51 and Lk 21:5-36) help us understand Jesus’ teaching in Mark 13?

A person seeking to ascertain the actual words of Jesus of Nazareth in Mark 13 will soon face an additional series of questions. Simply reading the red-letter words of Mark in an English translation of the Bible will not do, for Jesus did not teach in English! The English language only came into existence by the interaction of the Anglo-Saxon language (a Germanic language that developed among the Angles and Saxons who invaded *England* in the fourth and fifth centuries), French (when the Normans invaded England in the eleventh century) and Latin (due to the influence of the clergy and church). Even if we can read the Greek text of Mark 13, we still face the problem that while Jesus probably knew some first-century Greek

(the extent of his knowledge of Greek is debated), his mother tongue was Aramaic, as Mark 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:36; 15:34; Matthew 5:22, 29; 6:24 indicate. Consequently, the search to understand the specific teachings of the historical Jesus in Mark 13 must ultimately seek to understand the Aramaic words underlying the Greek text of this chapter! Thus the attempt to understand the teachings of Jesus in this chapter involves what has been called “the quest for the historical Jesus” and the pursuit of the *ipsissima verba* (the actual words of Jesus)—or at least his *ipsissima vox* (the voice of Jesus—a more general understanding of what Jesus actually taught)—that lie beneath the present Gospel text.

The quest for the historical Jesus.³ It is generally agreed that the quest for the historical Jesus began in 1774–1778 when the poet Lessing published Hermann Samuel Reimarus’s notes after his death.⁴ Originally titled “Fragments from an Unnamed Author,” they became known as *The Wolfenbüttel Fragments* because they were found in a library at Wolfenbüttel, Germany.⁵ In the *Fragments* Reimarus portrayed the “real” Jesus as one who made no christological claims, instituted no sacraments, and never predicted his death or rose from the dead. He furthermore argued that the Gospel portrayal of Jesus was a deliberate deception of the disciples. Reimarus’s work drew an enormous response. Regardless of whether one agreed or disagreed with his statement that “we are justified in drawing an absolute distinction between the teaching of the Apostles in their writings and what Jesus Himself in His own lifetime proclaimed and taught,”⁶ the issue of what the Jesus of history was really like and what he actually taught became the focus

³For a helpful survey of the “quests” for the historical Jesus, see Colin Brown, “Quest of the Historical Jesus,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, rev. ed., ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), pp. 718–56.

⁴Although earlier English deists (John Toland, 1670–1722, *Christianity Not Mysterious*; Thomas Woolston, 1669–1732, *Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour in View of the Present Controversy between Infidels and Apostates*; Matthew Tindal, 1655–1733, *Christianity as Old as the Creation, Or the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature*) began to doubt various miracles of Jesus in the Gospel accounts, it was Reimarus who first raised these questions and sought to deal with them by means of a historical conception of the life of Jesus.

⁵For an English translation of Reimarus’s *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, on which *The Wolfenbüttel Fragments* were based, see Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. R. S. Fraser, *Lives of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), pp. 59–269.

⁶As quoted in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 16.

of New Testament scholarly discussion. Thus the quest to discover the historical Jesus began, and this would be the focal point of Gospel studies for nearly a century and a half.

The earliest period of this quest involved rationalistic attempts to explain some of the miracles in the Gospels. This was followed by a period in which rationalistic explanations were sought for *all* of the miracles in the Gospels.⁷ As time progressed, there developed a gradual loss of confidence in rationalistic attempts to explain the miracle accounts of the life of Jesus found in the Gospels. Meanwhile the influence of David F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesus* (1835) became increasingly prominent.⁸ Strauss argued that one could not arrive at the historical Jesus by rationalizing the miracle accounts, because these accounts were myths and symbolic expressions of general religious truths, not historical sources for the life of Jesus of Nazareth. One should therefore not seek to find some historical kernel concerning the historical Jesus in these myths, but rather "demythologize" them and find the general religious truth contained in them. That religious truth, of course, would cohere with the evolutionary, liberal theology of the day.

This early quest for the historical Jesus had mixed results, to say the least. This is especially true with regard to Jesus' life and actions. Many "questers" brought with them into their investigation of the Gospels the presupposition of a closed universe in which miracles are not possible. The predetermined result was obvious—the Jesus of history worked no miracles and did not experience a resurrection from the dead. The teachings of Jesus fared somewhat better, but the teachings involving the prediction of his death and resurrection; his claims that he could forgive sins, that he had authority over the Old Testament law and that he was the Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God; and his eschatological teachings were denied authenticity. Often his teachings, especially those involving eschatology, were rejected as inauthentic because of the tastes and values of the researcher. Critical scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in general disliked Jesus' eschatological teachings and either radically reinterpreted them (the coming of

⁷A good example of this is Heinrich E. G. Paulus, *Das Leben Jesu als Grundlage einer reinen Geschichte des Urchristentums* (Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1828).

⁸The English translation of this work, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Chapman), appeared in 1846.

the Son of Man became a symbolic representation of the triumph of the kingdom of God in human hearts), rejected their authenticity (such half-insane imagination could not have come from such a great teacher as Jesus but represented corrupt Jewish religion), or saw them as the remnants of Jesus' primitive Jewish heritage. Such views were especially prominent among German scholars.⁹ Thus the authenticity or inauthenticity of the teachings of Jesus found in the Gospels were frequently judged by the beliefs and values of their researchers. Those that coincided with the ideals of progressive, liberal thinking or could be reinterpreted to teach them were deemed authentic; those that did not were considered primitive and unworthy of nineteenth-century, enlightenment thinking and thus were deemed inauthentic.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century several devastating criticisms of the quest for the historical Jesus arose that caused its "death." One of these was Martin Kähler's *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (1892).¹⁰ In this work Kähler demonstrated that it was not the so-called historical Jesus of the questers who had exercised an influence in history and with whom millions had communed in childlike faith, but the Christ who is proclaimed and found in the Gospels.¹¹ This realization both destroyed the motivation of the quest and indicated that theologically it was illegitimate, for the Jesus of the "quest" had no essential connection with the Christ of faith. Another work that had a crushing effect on the quest was William Wrede's *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901).¹² Wrede demonstrated that Mark, which was thought to be the earliest of the Gospels and therefore the most untainted by early Christian modification, was not in fact a neutral and objective report of the life of the his-

⁹Does the description of Jewish eschatological and messianic hopes as primitive, fanatic, corrupt, Jewish religion reflect anti-Semitism on the part of many of the questers in nineteenth-century Germany? Under the Nazis such anti-Semitism became blatant, as in the case of Walter Grundmann, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1940).

¹⁰The English translation of this work by Carl E. Braaten was published by Fortress Press in Philadelphia in 1964. The original German version is titled *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1892).

¹¹Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 66.

¹²This was published in Göttingen by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. The English translation, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke), surprisingly did not appear until 1971.

torical Jesus. On the contrary, it was written in faith for faith.¹³ The rise of form criticism at the end of World War I further demonstrated that before our Gospels were written the Gospel traditions were transmitted orally and that their preservation and shaping were determined by the religious concerns of the early church. This shattered the confidence of the questers as to whether it was possible to recover the real, historical Jesus, because of the religious commitment of the transmitters of the Jesus tradition. A third major blow to historical Jesus research was Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906).¹⁴ In this work Schweitzer demonstrated that the resultant "historical" Jesus of the quest was the creation of liberalism and made in the image of liberal researchers.¹⁵ The real Jesus, Schweitzer pointed out, was in reality an offense to liberalism. He was not a nineteenth-century, liberal prophet with the Enlightenment views and values of nineteenth-century questers but was instead a first-century Jewish prophet looking forward to and proclaiming an eschatological event—the coming of the kingdom of God and the arrival of the Son of Man from heaven.¹⁶ Schweitzer's criticism of the quest for the historical Jesus was convincing and devastating. Liberal questers quickly realized that the result of any real quest for the historical Jesus would result in an eschatological Jesus whose teachings and actions were an affront and offense to their theological liberalism. Schweitzer's work dealt a death blow to the quest and destroyed the motivation for it.

¹³Compare Günther Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. I. McLusky et al. (New York: Harper, 1960), the most famous "life of Jesus" produced by the later "new quest" of the historical Jesus: "We possess no single word of Jesus and no single story of Jesus, no matter how incontestably genuine they may be, which do not contain at the same time the confession of the believing congregation or at least are embedded therein. This makes the search after the bare facts of history difficult and to a large extent futile" (p. 14).

¹⁴The German title is *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1906). The English translation appeared in 1910.

¹⁵In his concluding chapter titled "Results," Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 398, states: "The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb." Cf. also George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (New York: Longmans, 1910), p. 44: "The Christ that Harnack [and other questers] see, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well."

¹⁶Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 398-99, states that the real Jesus "will not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present [the theological liberalism of the nineteenth century] can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. . . . The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma."

A fourth reason for the death of the quest of the historical Jesus was the recognition of the subjective element involved in historical research. The leading historian of the nineteenth century was Leopold von Ranke (1797–1886). Von Ranke sought to base historical investigation on genuine and original documents, in order to understand *wie es eigentlich gewesen*—that is, simply to know how it really was. He based his research on sources such as diaries, memoirs, firsthand eyewitness accounts, diplomatic dispatches and government documents (such as the Venetian archives), and so on. Thus he is rightly recognized as the founder of source-based historiography. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century historians began to recognize the subjective element involved in all historical research. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) in particular demonstrated that there was no such thing as objective, presuppositionless historiography. In his “critique on historical reason” he pointed out that all historical research is interpreted history, for historical facts do not simply speak for themselves. They must be interpreted. The historian must determine which “facts” of history should be investigated, and this choice involves their significance for the investigator.¹⁷ The recognition of the subjective element in historical research and the role of historians’ presuppositions in their research destroyed confidence in whether a truly, objective quest of the historical Jesus was possible. The result of these developments in New Testament studies was the death of the “old” quest for the historical Jesus.

The “new quest” for the historical Jesus.¹⁸ From 1918 to 1953 the quest for the historical Jesus lay for the most part dormant. This disinterest in the Jesus of history was especially true in Germany. Scriptural support for this was sought in Paul’s apparent disinterest in the historical Jesus in 2 Corinthians 5:16, where he says, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the

¹⁷Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4: “The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of [Christian] dogma.” Note also the conclusion of N. T. Wright in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 17: “The ‘Quest’ began as an explicitly anti-theological, anti-Christian, anti-dogmatic movement. Its initial agenda was *not* [his italics] to find a Jesus upon whom Christian faith might be based, but to show that the faith of the church (as it was then conceived) could not in fact be based on the real Jesus of Nazareth.”

¹⁸The title for this new stage in Jesus research came from James M. Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus and Other Essays*, SBT 15 (London: SCM Press, 1959).

flesh, we regard him thus no longer” (ESV).¹⁹ This attitude changed in 1953 when Ernst Käsemann delivered an address that was published the next year.²⁰ In it he pointed out that scholars could not simply ignore the Jesus of history, for to do so would be to fall into the error of docetism, an early Christian heresy which denied the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. He also pointed out that as true historians scholars had to acknowledge that they possessed in the Gospels authentic material concerning the life and teachings of the historical Jesus.²¹ He then described a tool or criterion to investigate the Gospel materials—if we find material in the Gospels that could not have been derived from Judaism or primitive Christianity, especially when Jewish Christianity has mitigated or modified it, it can confidently be assumed to be authentic.²² (See the discussion of the criteria of *dissimilarity* and *embarrassment* below.)

Käsemann’s appeal for a new quest and his suggested criterion received a receptive response. Scholars enthusiastically took up the challenge, and the “new quest for the historical Jesus” became a focus of much New Testament research. Whereas the original quest sought to demonstrate a discontinuity between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith found in the Gospels and thus separate the Christian kerygma from the historical Jesus, the new quest sought to demonstrate a continuity between the Christ of the

¹⁹The interpretation of this verse as indicating disinterest on the part of Paul concerning the Jesus of history is based on a misinterpretation. “According to the flesh” (*kata sarka*) is best understood as an adverbial clause modifying the verb *regarded* rather than as an adjectival clause modifying the noun *Christ*. Paul here rejects his former, pre-Christian understanding of Jesus that was “according to the flesh” (cf. Rom 7:7-25). He does not reject the Christ “according to the flesh,” i.e., the historical Jesus.

²⁰Käsemann’s original article was titled “Das Problem des Historischen Jesus” and appeared in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 51 (1954): 125-53. An English translation is found in Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague, SBT 41 (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 15-47.

²¹“We should . . . be overlooking the fact there are still pieces of the Synoptic tradition which the historian has to acknowledge as authentic if he wishes to remain an historian at all” (Käsemann, “Problem of the Historical Jesus,” p. 46). Cf. also Robinson, *New Quest*, p. 76: “A new quest must be built upon the fact that the sources *do* make possible a new kind of quest working in terms of the modern view of history and the self.”

²²Käsemann, “Problem of the Historical Jesus,” p. 37. Käsemann here is essentially repeating the tool suggested by his teacher. See Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 205: “We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety, and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features.”

kerygma and the historical Jesus. Because the new questers for the most part assumed the same naturalistic understanding of the universe as the old questers—that is, they denied the possibility of miracles—the continuity sought did not involve such issues as Jesus’ miracles, his resurrection from the dead or his future coming. Instead they sought to demonstrate continuity between the call to decision and existential encounter in the teachings of Jesus and the offer of authentic existence in the proclamation of the early church.²³ A problem soon became evident. The Gospels and the church proclaim that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God; that he died for the sins of the world, rose triumphantly from the dead and ascended into heaven; and that he will return one day in vindication as the Son of Man to judge the world. The questers, both old and new, had for the most part claimed that such material in the Gospels was inauthentic and unworthy of Jesus. The inadequacy of the new quest’s search for establishing a significant continuity between the Jesus of history and the proclaimed Christ of the Gospels soon became clear.²⁴

The more lasting result of the new quest was to once again raise interest in historical Jesus studies. Scholars, inspired by Käsemann, sought to find various “criteria of authenticity” by which they could establish more objectively the authenticity of various sayings of Jesus. Some of these criteria that have proved especially helpful are:

1. *Multiple attestation.* This criterion assumes that the greater the number of witnesses attesting a teaching of Jesus, the greater the probability is of it being authentic. These witnesses are Mark, Q (the material common to Matthew and Luke not found in Mark), M (the material unique to Matthew), L (the material unique to Luke) and John.
2. *Multiple forms.* This criterion assumes that if a particular teaching of Jesus is found in multiple literary forms, it is more likely to be authentic. Thus the fact that Jesus’ teaching on the arrival of the kingdom of God

²³Just as the first questers approached their quest for the historical Jesus from the perspective of the theological liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so the new questers approached their quest from the perspective of the philosophical existentialism of the first half of the twentieth century.

²⁴It should be noted that the best-known attempt at a life of Jesus during the new quest, Bornkamm’s *Jesus of Nazareth*, states at the very beginning, “No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus” (p. 13).

in his ministry is found in parables, miracle stories, various sayings and stories about Jesus argues for its authenticity.

3. *Aramaic linguistic phenomena.* Since Jesus' native tongue was Aramaic, the presence of Aramaic terms and of customs of Aramaic-speaking Jews in Palestine, such as the avoidance of God's name by the use of the "divine passive" (a passive tense allows the avoidance of the mention of God as the subject of the action),²⁵ as well as the substitution of another term for God (e.g., "kingdom of *heaven*"),²⁶ suggests that in such cases we may well be dealing with a saying or custom that reflects the situation of Jesus.
4. *Dissimilarity.* This criterion argues that if a saying of Jesus conflicts with the teachings of Judaism in Jesus' day and the teachings of the early church, it almost assuredly is authentic. This criterion was hailed with great fanfare as a sure indicator of Jesus' teaching and is quite useful, but it is, however, also quite limited in its applicability. A Jesus who taught nothing in common with the Judaism of his day and the teachings of the early church would be a startling anachronism. Thus while this criterion is quite helpful in detecting what is distinctive in Jesus' teachings, it is not particularly helpful in detecting what is characteristic, and it is the latter that is more important.²⁷
5. *Embarrassment.* This criterion assumes that a saying or action of Jesus that would have embarrassed the believing community (such as Jesus submitting to John the Baptist's baptism of repentance, Mk 1:4, 9; cf. Mt 3:13-17, or Jesus' confession that he was ignorant of the day or hour of the end, Mk 13:32) almost certainly must be authentic. It is highly unlikely that someone in the Christian church would have created such embarrassing traditions.
6. *Tradition contrary to editorial tendency.* When we find sayings or actions of Jesus that are contrary to an Evangelist's emphases, it indicates that

²⁵Examples of the use of the divine passive to avoid the use of God's name can be found in Mt 7:1, 7; 10:30; Mk 4:25; 10:40.

²⁶Examples of the use of substitution or circumlocution to avoid God's name can be found in Mt 5:34-35; 6:9; Mk 11:30; 14:61-62; Lk 6:35; 12:8-9; 15:10, 21.

²⁷For a helpful survey of the use and development of this criterion, see Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

such a tradition was so well-known and established that it was included by the Evangelist in his Gospel despite his own editorial purposes in writing. Such a well-known tradition is likely to be authentic. (Contrast Mt 11:13 with the strong Matthean emphasis on the permanence of the law found in his Gospel.)

7. *Eschatological character of sayings.* Unlike the old questers who rejected the authenticity of Jesus' eschatological teachings found in the Gospels, scholars now recognize that Jesus' teachings are thoroughly eschatological in nature. This criterion is most helpful in preventing scholars from modernizing Jesus and making him in our own image. The similarity of Jesus' teachings with first-century Jewish eschatological thinking is now recognized not as a negative factor but a positive one in judging their authenticity. Jesus' teaching differed in various aspects with contemporary Jewish thinking in the first century, but it was not that his thinking was noneschatological as the nineteenth-century questers maintained! His teachings were thoroughly eschatological and centered on his pronouncement that the kingdom of God had arrived.²⁸
8. *Parables and poetry.* It is quite evident that Jesus made great use of these literary forms. Even the more critical scholars acknowledge that in these literary forms found in the Gospels we are at the bedrock of the Jesus traditions. On the other hand, these literary forms are rarely found in the teachings of the early church (this is especially true with respect to the parables), so we should come with a positive attitude toward the authenticity of this kind of material in the Gospels.²⁹
9. *Coherence or consistency.* Once we arrive at a general understanding of Jesus' teachings and at a critically assured minimum, other teachings of Jesus in the Gospels that fit this minimum should probably be considered authentic and the burden of proof placed on attempts to deny their authenticity.

²⁸It is interesting to note that, whereas in the nineteenth century the eschatological teachings of Jesus were considered inauthentic because they resembled Jewish messianic and apocalyptic hopes, now the presence of such features is generally seen as a sign of their authenticity!

²⁹Cf. the following statement from Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Parable," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 596: "Even scholars who are persuaded that the Gospel parables include additions by the early church still view the parables as providing some of the most authentic and reliable teaching from Jesus."

Certain criteria have also been found that serve a negative function in the pursuit of the authentic teachings of Jesus. Some of these are:

1. *The tendencies of the developing tradition.* During the early days of form criticism, there was great confidence that the passing on of oral tradition followed certain laws and that by knowing these laws we could apply them to the Gospel traditions to arrive at earlier forms of the tradition. These laws were determined by noting how Matthew and Luke used Mark, how the later apocryphal Gospels used the canonical Gospels and how folk traditions developed in various cultures over the centuries. Knowing these “laws” of tradition development, we could apply them in reverse to the present Gospel traditions, remove later church crustaceans and arrive at their earlier, more primitive forms. Later, more careful investigation, however, found that these supposed “laws” were not laws at all, and that many times these “tendencies” were found to have comparable countertendencies. (Sometimes we find that the later form of a tradition tends to be more specific, such as giving the names of people involved; sometimes we find the later form of the tradition tends to be less specific and more general.)³⁰ Furthermore, the short time between the ministry of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels argues against the development of these tendencies, which in many of the examples used took place over hundreds of years. The presence of the eyewitnesses (Lk 1:2) also placed a damper on any radical modification of what was considered “sacred” tradition (Mk 8:34-38; 13:31).
2. *Environmental and linguistic contradiction.* It is essentially an axiom that a saying or action that violates the environmental and literary world of Jesus cannot be authentic—that is, a saying of Jesus that he *could not* have said in his ministry he *did not* say. (The saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* 47, “It is impossible for a man to ride two horses,” might be authentic, but a saying such as “It is impossible for a man to ride two motorcycles” could not be.) It is often argued that Mark 10:11-12 is not authentic with respect to a woman divorcing her husband, because this

³⁰E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTSMS 9 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969) is most helpful in this respect. He concludes, “Dogmatic statements that a certain characteristic proves a certain passage to be earlier than another are never justified” (p. 272, his italics).

was not permitted in Jewish law. But a letter written during the Bar Kokhba revolt (A.D. 132–35) refers to a woman divorcing her husband, and more importantly we should remember that John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, was beheaded for saying essentially the same thing Jesus says in Mark 10:12 (cf. Mk 6:17–29).

3. *Contradiction of authentic sayings.* Even as teachings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels that are in harmony with the generally accepted authentic sayings of Jesus are more likely to be authentic, so teachings that contradict such sayings are more likely to be inauthentic. Care must be taken, however, in determining if a saying of Jesus found in the Gospels really contradicts other sayings. The present writer has often found that many such alleged contradictions do not take sufficient note of Jesus' use of hyperbole and exaggeration as literary forms, as well as his use of poetry and puns and the context in which they occur.

Along with these criteria dealing with the authenticity or inauthenticity of individual sayings or teachings in the Gospels, there are several factors that shape one's general attitude toward the reliability of written sources. These involve the age of the tradition, the local coloring of the tradition and the independence of various traditions.³¹

The search for the actual words of Jesus has had mixed results, and for critical scholars the burden of proof is placed on the argument that the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels are authentic. This is an unwarranted skepticism that assumes the Gospel accounts are guilty (unreliable) unless proven innocent (reliable). The use of the criteria for authenticity should not be understood as seeking to prove the innocence (reliability) of certain Gospel sayings but rather as providing additional evidence for the authenticity of various sayings in the Gospels.³²

During the last quarter of the twentieth century one manifestation of the

³¹See Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, pp. 12–15.

³²For a more detailed discussion of the criteria for authenticity, see Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), pp. 225–63; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussions and New Proposals*, JSNTSS 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*.

“new quest” was the Jesus Seminar,³³ a group of scholars in North America who investigated the Jesus materials, both canonical and extracanonical (the most important of the latter being the *Gospel of Thomas*), and sought to determine the degree of authenticity of the sayings and actions of Jesus found in these materials. Authenticity would be determined by the vote of the seminar members in which colored beads revealed the degree of probability the voters attributed to a saying or action being authentic. A red bead denoted that the voter thought that the saying was authentic; a pink bead meant that they thought the saying was probably authentic; a gray bead denoted that it was thought probably inauthentic; a black bead that it was considered inauthentic. The result of the voting can be found in *The Five Gospels*.³⁴

In practice the method of weighing ballots at times brought questionable results. For example, if a majority voted red or pink—that is, a saying was seen as authentic or probably authentic—but a high proportion of the minority voted black, the result could be a gray rating—that is, probably inauthentic. Such a result is highly dubious. In addition, it should be noted that there was present among many of the scholars a strong antieschatological bias, just as in the original questers. This is evident in the resultant coloring of Mark 13. The entire chapter is either black or gray, and the predominant color is black, with only 13:2, 21, 28-29, 32, 34-36 being gray. With respect to Matthew 24-25, both chapters are either black or gray with only Matthew 25:14-28 being pink.

It is fair to say that the group that made up the Jesus Seminar was far from being representative of New Testament scholars worldwide. It was made up almost exclusively of North American scholars, and even here there was a disproportionate representation of the theological left wing of New Testament scholarship. The degree of credence given to extrabiblical sources such as the *Gospel of Thomas* (note the title, *The Five Gospels*) and to such hypothetical sources such as the *Secret Gospel of Mark* and the *Cross Gospel* is totally unwarranted. Some seminar members even valued the *Gospel of Thomas* more highly than our canonical Gospels. This may be due to the minimization of eschatology in the *Gospel of Thomas*, which concurs with

³³Although some argue that the Jesus Seminar belongs more properly to the “third quest,” it contrasts greatly with the very Jewish Jesus of that quest.

³⁴Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Poleridge, 1993).

the same antieschatological bias possessed by the earliest questers. As to the dating of the *Gospel of Thomas*, some seminar members placed it as having been written in the 50s before any of the canonical Gospels. In contrast most scholars date it around A.D. 180.³⁵

With respect to the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, supposedly discovered in 1958 by Morton Smith,³⁶ for years the only access to it has been a set of black-and-white photographs of the text contained in a book published by Smith in 1973. In 2000 color photographs of the manuscript were published. At present the whereabouts of the actual manuscript is unknown, so that access to it is only available by these two sets of photographs. There is great debate as to whether the *Secret Gospel of Mark* is a fraudulent hoax, perhaps perpetrated by Smith himself, or is “authentic” in the sense that it was written by someone in the eighteenth century who was copying an earlier second-century work. Although some scholars believe that the *Secret Gospel of Mark* was written before our canonical Gospels and served as a source for the Gospel of Mark, very few hold this position. As of 2013 the manuscript’s whereabouts are unknown, and thus the ink and fiber of the alleged manuscript have never been subjected to examination. As a result—unless access to the manuscript becomes available and it is subjected to exacting scientific investigation and passes such tests—the *Secret Gospel of Mark* cannot be taken seriously as a source of information concerning either the origin of the Gospel of Mark or the historical Jesus.

The *Cross Gospel*, which some Jesus Seminar members argue is earlier than the canonical Gospels, has a similar history. It is allegedly part of a second-century work called the *Gospel of Peter*, referred to by Eusebius (260–340), the famous early church historian. In 1886–1887 a codex was discovered at Akhamin, Egypt, that is generally assumed to contain a fragment of this Gospel. Within the *Gospel of Peter* several scholars claim to have discovered an old tradition, a “Cross Gospel,” that served as a source for the writers of the canonical Gospels. Additional fragments of the *Gospel*

³⁵See Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), pp. 52–77.

³⁶The actual fragment of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* is found in a manuscript claiming to be an unknown letter of Clement of Alexandria. It appears in some end papers of a seventeenth-century printed collection of the works of Ignatius of Antioch. It is written in Greek in an eighteenth-century hand.

of *Peter* (POxy 2949 and 4009) were found in the 1970s and 80s. To argue that this material, dealing with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (hence the *Cross Gospel*), is earlier and more authentic than the corresponding material in the canonical Gospels is unconvincing. The accounts—which refer to the scribes, Pharisees and elders confessing Jesus’ righteousness; a moving cross that talks; the “Lord’s Day”; the presence of angels whose heads extend above the heavens; and so on—give little support for it being considered as providing an earlier and more reliable, historical source than our canonical Gospels, no matter how much it is surgically pruned of secondary materials. Thus the claim that these extracanonical materials are supposedly more primitive and authentic sources for arriving at the real Jesus disappears under closer scrutiny, as surely as the morning haze vanishes at the appearance of the coming midday sun.³⁷

The “third quest” for the historical Jesus.³⁸ In contrast to the Jesus Seminar, which “de-Judaized” and “de-eschatologized” Jesus and in many ways continued the pursuit of the old questers, the “third quest” promises a more lasting achievement. This is because it is based on a more sound foundation: the full recognition of the Jewish origin and character of the historical Jesus and the eschatological nature of his ministry and teaching.³⁹ Here, ironically in contrast to the Jesus Seminar and the old questers, Jewish and eschatological features in the Gospel accounts are seen as evidence of their authenticity not inauthenticity. The third quest added an important criterion to those already suggested: “double similarity.” If a saying of Jesus appears credible (though perhaps deeply subversive) within the Judaism of the first century, and it appears credible as a starting point (though not the exact replica) of later Christian teaching, this “double similarity” argues for its authenticity.⁴⁰

³⁷For a more detailed discussion and critique, see Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, pp. 78-99.

³⁸The designation “the ‘third quest’ of the historical Jesus” comes from N. T. Wright, in Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 379.

³⁹See John P. Meier, “The Present State of the ‘Third Quest’ for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain,” *Biblica* 80 (1999), pp. 485-87; cf. also Martin Hengel, “Tasks of New Testament Scholarship,” *BBR* 6 (1996), p. 70: “Today one may say that among the most important insights of our field of study [New Testament] since the Second World War belongs the recognition of how deeply rooted earliest Christianity is in Judaism as its native soil.”

⁴⁰N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 132.

The investigation of Mark 13 for Jesus' teachings about the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man is a legitimate and worthwhile task. It is, however, not as simple as may be thought at first, as the difficulties noted above indicate. One additional difficulty that needs to be mentioned is the probability, acknowledged by most scholars, that the sayings of Jesus in Mark 13 were not all proclaimed at the same time and in the same order. If, as is probable, some were taught by Jesus at different times, the order and the logical progression of the argument in 13:5-37 is not so much that of Jesus as that of Mark. Nevertheless it appears reasonable to conclude that the Jesus of Mark 13 taught the following:

- The temple and city of Jerusalem would be destroyed in the lifetime of the disciples.
- Wars, natural disasters, false prophets and messianic pretenders would arise, but these were neither signs nor immediate precursors of the temple's destruction but part of the natural order of things.
- The followers of Jesus would face persecution and, either through or despite this, spread the gospel to all nations.
- In their persecution the Holy Spirit would be with them and aid them in their defense.
- An "abomination of desolation" would precede Jerusalem's destruction, and the believing community should take this as a sign to flee the city immediately.
- The Son of Man would come from heaven and gather his elect from throughout the world.
- No one knows the time of his return but God alone, and as a result believers should live a life prepared for his arrival.

We will look at the exegetical basis for these conclusions in chapters three to seven below.

INVESTIGATING MARK 13 FOR INFORMATION ABOUT ITS SOURCES

During the nineteenth century the search for written sources used in the writing of the biblical accounts played a dominant role in the investigation of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels. For the Pentateuch this in-

volved sources referred to as J (a group of passages in which God is called *Yahweh* [the “J” comes from the German spelling of the name]), E (a group of passages in which God is called *Elohim*), P (a group of passages having special interest in priestly matters) and D (material that was used in the writing of the book of Deuteronomy). With respect to the Synoptic Gospels the basic sources are understood as Mark (our present Mark, although some scholars argued for the existence of a Proto-Mark that was different from but the basic source of the canonical Mark), Q (the common material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark), M (the material unique to Matthew) and L (the material unique to Luke). Some scholars argue for the existence of a Proto-Luke that was essentially an early version of Luke, but this is not generally accepted. It is also believed that before the present canonical Gospels were written, the gospel traditions contained in them were passed on orally. These existed both as individual pieces of tradition and as collections of parables, miracle stories, pronouncement stories, a passion narrative, a birth narrative and so on. Some of these collections were probably also written down. Exactly how this material was used by Mark, the earliest Gospel writer, is, however, far from certain.

Proportionally more time and effort have been spent on the source analysis of Mark 13 than on any similarly sized portion of the Bible. The work that had the most to do with commencing the search for the sources of Mark 13 is T. Coloni's *Jésus Christ et les croyances messianiques de son Temps*, which appeared in 1864. This work was based on Coloni's earlier works and conclusions that Jesus avoided the application of the title “Messiah” to himself, only considered himself a prophet, and preached that the kingdom of God had already come and would gradually extend over all humanity. Thus Jesus did not believe that he would come as the Son of Man in any apocalyptic manner to bring the kingdom of God. Coloni also believed that such statements as Mark 13:24-27 in which the Son of Man returns soon after the fall of Jerusalem, and 13:30 in which the end of history would take place within the lifetime of the disciples, were not authentic teachings of Jesus because Jesus could not have been so mistaken on such things. It was the disciples who later added such Jewish messianic and apocalyptic beliefs to the Jesus traditions. In his study of Mark 13 Coloni brought these beliefs and presuppositions with him into his investigation. His conclusions in mining Mark 13 for

the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus are therefore not unexpected. He saw Mark 13:5-31 as consisting of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic teachings that did not come from the historical Jesus and were in fact contrary to his teachings. Since then numerous scholars have followed Coloni and found behind Mark 13 a Jewish or Jewish-Christian source consisting of something like 13:7-8, 12, 14-22, 24-27; or 13:5b-8, 12-16, 19-22, 24-27; or 13:6, 7b, 8, 12, 13b-20a, 22, 24-27; or 13:7-8, 14-20, 24-27.⁴¹

Although some scholars continue to argue that a Jewish apocalyptic source lies behind Mark 13, the great majority of scholars today believe that the material in this chapter has a Christian origin. Those who see a Jewish-Christian source behind the Little Apocalypse find this primarily in 13:7-8, 14-20 and 24-27.⁴² The trend, however, is to acknowledge that much or most of this material had its origin in the teachings of Jesus. There is nothing in the material describing the judgment of Jerusalem that is not already found in earlier prophetic predictions and descriptions of such an event (cf. Ps 74:3-7; 137:1-9; Jer 7:14; 9:11; 26:6, 17-19; 32:24-29; 52:4-30; Ezek 4:1-3; Mic 3:9-12). There is also nothing in this material that must be attributed to a post-A.D. 70 reading of descriptions of the actual event back on the lips of Jesus. On the contrary, there are several things missing in Jesus' prediction that indicate Mark 13 was written before A.D. 70. One is the lack of any mention of the large part that fire played in the destruction of the temple and the city.⁴³ Another is the omission of any mention of the violent, intra-mural fighting among various Jewish groups during the siege. Still another is the lack of any mention of the thousands of Jews that were crucified by the Romans outside the city walls. Finally, the reference to praying that the destruction not take place during the winter (13:18) would be most strange if written after A.D. 70, since the destruction of the city took place in the summer of that year.⁴⁴

⁴¹For an attempt to reconstruct the presynoptic eschatological tradition of Jesus' teachings, see David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*, Gospel Perspectives 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

⁴²See Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 583n4.

⁴³Compare *J.W.* 6.249-87.

⁴⁴Grayston, "Mark XIII," p. 377, also points out that "the situation presented by the four temporal clauses [13:7, 11, 14, 18] . . . in no way corresponds to the situation after A.D. 70, indeed they set the scene of a dramatic episode before the Jewish revolt at a time when the likely outlines of a conflict could be discerned though the actual clash had not yet developed."

The main purpose of the mining of Mark 13 for its sources was in order to discover material earlier than the Gospel of Mark. Having come to the conclusion that Mark was the earliest Gospel, and therefore by implication that it contained the more primitive form of the Jesus traditions, it was hoped that further literary criticism would lead to even more primitive forms of the tradition. This material would then bring us even closer to the *ipsissima verba* and *vox* of Jesus. Thus “investigating Mark 13 for information about its sources” is in reality the basic tool for “investigating Mark 13 for information about the historical Jesus.”

It must be acknowledged that behind much of the investigation for the sources of Mark 13 lay the desire to separate the teachings of Jesus from the eschatological material found there. This was especially true during the heyday of theological liberalism in the nineteenth century. There was also, however, in the search for the primitive sources of Mark 13 a genuine desire by many to arrive at the *ipsissima verba* and *vox* of Jesus. The degree of success achieved in this effort is much debated, and unfortunately the results were often predicated not on the research itself but on the presuppositions brought to the research.

Other goals in the search of the sources of Mark 13 can be simply literary in nature. Source critics are interested not only in what written sources may underlie our present Mark but also in discovering any oral sources that may underlie the Gospel. Literary critics can investigate Mark 13 to observe its metaphorical terminology. When is the language to be interpreted literally? When does it use nonliteral, hyperbolic terminology? Where do we find poetry? Are the two questions in 13:4 to be understood as examples of synonymous parallelism? Step parallelism? How does the argument of Mark 13 proceed? Should we define the language as apocalyptic in nature or prophetic? Does it matter how we define it?

It is evident that the investigation of Mark 13 can be done for various reasons and with different purposes in mind, but in the investigation of Mark 13 is there “a still more excellent way”?

SEEKING THE MEANING OF THE EVANGELIST IN WRITING MARK 13

Whereas research in the Gospels in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on ascertaining the actual teachings of Jesus

(the pursuit of his *ipsissima verba* and *vox*) and the sources of the present Gospels (what in the past has been called “literary criticism”), in the 1930s “we . . . come to a period when scholars have become more interested in the teaching of our Gospels than in their analysis, and this is reflected in their treatment of Mark 13.”⁴⁵ With the advent of redaction criticism in the 1950s and 1960s scholarly research began to focus on the unique role of the final authors in the composition of our present Gospels. Whereas the quest for the historical Jesus concentrated its attention on the first setting of the Gospel tradition—that is, the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth—and the investigation of the oral and written sources underlying our present Gospels focused on the second setting of the Gospel tradition—that is, what it could learn about the early church—redaction criticism focused its attention on the third and final setting of the Gospel traditions.⁴⁶ Unlike the quest for the historical Jesus and form criticism, which either ignored the work of the Evangelists in the writing of the Gospels or deleted it because it was a distraction to the investigation, redaction criticism concentrated its attention and interest on the work of the Evangelists and their contribution to the Gospel traditions. It sought the unique theological emphases and purposes of Matthew, Mark and Luke in writing their Gospels and the setting in life in which they were written. It was the diversity of the Synoptic Gospels that now became the center of attention. Not surprisingly, their unity and their lookalike character, which caused earlier scholars to refer to them as the “Synoptic Gospels” and place them side by side in the New Testament, were minimized. With respect to Mark, redaction critics concentrated on the Evangelist’s unique contribution to the present Gospel rather than his main emphases, which more often than not coincided with those of Matthew and Luke.

In seeking to understand the meaning of the present text of Mark 13, there is much debate as to where this meaning is to be found. There are advocates for each of the three components of the communicative act being the determiner of the meaning of Mark 13. Between the 1930s and 1960s a movement arose called the “New Criticism” which argued that meaning is the property of the text. Readers therefore began to focus their attention on under-

⁴⁵Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days*, p. 142.

⁴⁶The original German expression used to designate such a setting in life is *Sitz im Leben*.

standing the present form of the text itself. What the original author sought to communicate by the text was irrelevant. Texts were seen as autonomous works and were to be treated as isolated works of literary art. The biggest problem with the claim that meaning is a property of the text is the question of how an inanimate object (primarily papyrus/parchment and ink) can “mean” anything. Meaning is the result of reasoning and thought. Thus, whereas a written text can convey a meaning, it cannot will a meaning because, as an inanimate object, it cannot think! Only the other two components of communication (the author and reader) can reason and think. Thus a willed meaning is only possible from the two human components of the communicative process.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, a reader-response hermeneutic became popular in literary circles. This view argued that it is the reader who determines the meaning of a text. Until the reader bestows meaning on a text, a text is essentially dead or in hibernation. It is the reader who actualizes a text and gives it a meaning. As a result a text has not a single meaning, but as many meanings as readers choose to give it. Readers are encouraged to bring their own causes and interests to texts, for in so doing they give life and passion to texts. Consequently, we come across readings of texts that are Marxist, feminist, egalitarian, gay, lesbian, liberationist, postcolonial, ecological, social-scientific and so on, though the authors of those texts had no such concerns in mind when they wrote and may have actually opposed such views.⁴⁷

The present work is based on a traditional, author-oriented hermeneutic and seeks to understand the meaning that the author of Mark 13 sought to convey to his first-century readers.⁴⁸ It is not primarily an attempt to investigate its subject matter as to what the historical Jesus taught concerning the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem or the coming of the Son of Man. It is not an attempt to learn about the history of the early church between the resurrection of Jesus and the time when Mark was written. At times these

⁴⁷For a more detailed discussion of these three alternative views as to where the meaning of a text is to be found, see Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 5-18.

⁴⁸The present writer is in full agreement with Hengel, “Tasks,” p. 83, who states, “The definitive starting point [for the study of a text] remains, despite ‘reader response,’ the early Christian author, that is, what he meant and intended in view of his addressees, hearers, and readers.”

issues may be discussed briefly but only if they help us better understand the Markan meaning of the text that we possess. The goal of this work is to understand what the author of the Gospel we call Mark meant and sought to convey by the present text of Mark 13. The issue of who actually wrote the second Gospel in the New Testament is not important for our quest of the meaning of Mark 13. The meaning of this chapter is what its author, whoever he may have been, meant by the Greek text he has given to us. Concerns about authorship usually involve the significance or value a person places on the message of the author. If the Mark of Acts, in whose home the early church met (Acts 12:12), wrote this Gospel, its value as an accurate and reliable account of the life and teachings of Jesus is considerably enhanced. If it was written by some unknown Mark whose relationship to the eyewitness reports of the Gospel witnesses is uncertain, its historical value is considerably diminished. The meaning of Mark 13, however, is not affected! The meaning of Mark 13 still means what its author meant when he wrote it, whoever the author may have been. Support for the traditional Markan authorship of the second Gospel is strong and convincing.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in using the name “Mark” in this work, we will be simply using this traditional name associated with this Gospel without making any claim as to its actual authorship.

A helpful aid in understanding the meaning of Mark 13 is to know the audience for whom Mark wrote this chapter. Information for this comes from two sources: external information (tradition) and internal information (what we can learn about the audience from the Gospel of Mark itself). The latter is the most objective, and we learn from it that:

1. The native tongue of the readers was Greek, the language of our text, and they did not know Aramaic, for Aramaic terms and expressions in the text are translated for the readers into Greek (see 3:17-22; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34).
2. The readers were Christians. Titles such as Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David and Lord are not explained; John the Baptist comes on the scene without explanation of who he is (1:4-8); and so on.
3. The readers belonged to a church that two sons (Alexander and Rufus) of an eyewitness (Simon of Cyrene) attended (15:21).

⁴⁹For a discussion of the authorship of Mark, see Stein, *Mark*, pp. 1-9.

4. The readers were familiar with places named in the Gospel (Capernaum, Tyre, Sidon, Jerusalem, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi, Jericho, Bethany, Bethphage, Jordan River, Judea, Galilee, the Decapolis, Gennesaret and Mount of Olives are referred to without explanation).
5. The readers were familiar with Old Testament characters (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David) and the Old Testament (12:10-11, 26; 14:49).
6. The readers knew of certain leaders involved in the life of Jesus (Herod, Pilate).
7. The readers were familiar with Old Testament rituals and rites (Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, cleansing rites for a healed leper) but were ignorant of certain rituals associated with the Pharisees (7:3-4).
8. The readers were primarily Gentiles in contrast to Jews (7:3).⁵⁰

The way the above are referred to in Mark without explanation assumes that the readers were familiar with much of this. In summary, we learn from the Gospel itself that the audience for whom the Gospel was written was Greek speaking, Gentile, Christian, and well acquainted with the Christian traditions and the Old Testament.⁵¹

As to the location of the Gospel's audience, this is less certain. Ancient tradition for the most part states that the Gospel was written in Rome for the Roman church. (The much-debated *Secret Gospel of Mark* and John Chrysostom argue that Mark was written in Alexandria.) Certain internal evidence suggests Rome as the likely place of origin. This includes the presence of certain "Latinisms": mat (2:4, 9, 11; 6:55), basket (4:21), legion (5:9, 15), soldier of the guard (6:27), denarius (6:37; 12:15; 14:5), fist (7:3), pitcher (7:4), tax (12:14), penny (12:42), centurion (15:39, 44, 45), to satisfy (15:15), scourge (15:15), praetorium (15:16). The "frequency [of these words] in Mark suggests that the Evangelist wrote in a Roman environment."⁵² The mention of the "fourth watch" (6:48 ESV; 13:35) involves a Roman reckoning of time and sug-

⁵⁰For a more detailed discussion of the audience of Mark, see Stein, *Mark*, pp. 9-12.

⁵¹Morna D. Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII," *BJRL* 65 (1982): 98, argues that the readers of Mark were probably "Christians who are unduly excited and agitated by eschatological expectation." For a discussion of the difficulty in trying to obtain a more detailed picture of the "Markan community," see Michael F. Bird, "The Markan Community, Myth or Maze? Bauckham's *The Gospel for All Christians Revisited*," *JTS* 57 (2006): 474-86.

⁵²Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 45.

gests a Roman environment since the Jewish reckoning of time involves only three watches of the night. The other main alternative for the audience of Mark involves the church in Syria. In the present work, neither of the two most suggested audiences will be assumed. Certain conclusions found in the concluding summary of the previous paragraph may at times be referred to, but the question of the exact location of the audience will be left open.