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**Seeing the Meaning of Mark 13:  
A Narrative-Critical Approach**

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*In Loving Memory of Robert G. Holmes*

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## Introduction

The narrative of the Gospel of Mark is this exciting journey full of many fast-paced and intense scenes of Jesus's life and ministry. Compared to the other gospels, Mark contains less of Jesus's teaching and instead provides a narrative that reveals Jesus's identity through his actions.<sup>1</sup> Readers are quickly shown the many mighty deeds of Jesus that reveal his divine identity. However, in Mark 13 the narrative slows down dramatically as Jesus begins his long and final discourse with his disciples. In this chapter, Jesus reveals things which were unknown to the disciples and coming at a later time in the redemptive plan of God. This passage is rich in teaching and prophecy through the pronouncements and parables that it contains.<sup>2</sup> Jesus reveals the destruction of the Jewish temple, false messiahs, wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, suffering, persecution, betrayal, and more.

This theme of revealing is not unique to Mark 13 but is rather integrated throughout the entire narrative. N.T. Wright explains, "The reader is constantly invited by the gospel as a whole to do what the disciples are invited to do in the parable-chapter, that is, to come closer and discover the inner secret behind the strange outer story."<sup>3</sup> Here, Wright is discussing the apocalyptic nature of Mark 4 but still displays that the wider narrative of Mark invites readers to

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathon T. Pennington, "The Parables of Enoch and Mark 13:1-37: Apocalyptic Eschatology and the Coming Son of Man," in *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 210.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 348.

<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 395.

pay closer attention to the deeper intricacies and truths being revealed throughout the story. The interconnectedness between Mark's narrative scenes should impact how one understands the parts of the narrative. Yet, this has not been the case for interpretations of Mark 13 throughout history. In its history of interpretation, Mark 13 has been interpreted outside of its narrative context. Scholars treat this passage in such a manner because it has been suggested that Mark 13 is a separate text genre from the rest of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> This isolating method of interpretation not only neglects the intrinsic interconnectedness of the Gospel of Mark but also creates a range of speculative interpretations that are unfaithful to Mark 13 and what it truly means.

When approaching any text in Scripture, one's methodology is gravely important as different hermeneutics may lead individuals to completely different meanings of a text. Many different hermeneutical approaches can be taken, such as historical criticism, grammatical criticism, source criticism, and form criticism. A standard mode of interpreting Scripture within Christianity, especially among the laity, is to read and interpret parts of Scripture independently from its literary context; this will be referred to as an isolating hermeneutic. This method profoundly impacts a text's understanding and application, which can lead to reverberating real-life effects on one's mental and spiritual health.

A prominent example of this isolating hermeneutic that has seen much attention in recent years is the topic of the end times, drawing on such texts as Mark 13. From the Coronavirus to the ongoing wars to the political unrest and divide in North America, people connect these events to biblical prophecies as they mirror what is being described in Scripture. An example of this is seen in Britt Mooney's article, "7 Signs We Are in the End Times." In this article, she connects

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<sup>4</sup> I am drawing on the discussion of Colani's proposal in George Beasley-Murray. See Timothy Colani, *Jésus Christ et les croyances messianiques de son Temps*, 2d ed. (Strasbourg, France: 1894); discussed in George Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Criticism of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13, with Special Reference to the Little Apocalypse Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1954), ix-32.

real-world events to prophecies within Scripture but taken out of context (predominantly the Matthean parallel of Mark 13) to speculate that the world is within the end times.<sup>5</sup> Mooney is undoubtedly not alone in this belief. In 2022, the Pew Research Centre conducted a study on the American population and found that 39% of U.S. adults believe the world is in the end times.<sup>6</sup> This statistic is staggering and represents a large majority of individuals affected by this hermeneutical approach.

It is understandable given the state of worldly affairs that many hold this belief, but what impact does holding beliefs like this have on individuals? The effect of this belief and the isolating hermeneutic employed can have a profound negative impact on mental health. A study conducted by the Global Center for Religious Research found that end-time attitudes within Christian churches in America have led to an increase in overall anxiety, stress, and religious trauma in individuals.<sup>7</sup> This isolating hermeneutic, especially when applied to eschatological texts like Mark 13, leads to interpretations of Scripture that disregard the context of a text. The example given above is not to suggest that this thesis will be focusing on practical theology, but it is given to exemplify how careless hermeneutics can lead to real-life consequences that may impact one's mental and spiritual health.

Therefore, it is of interest to this thesis to take an eschatologically charged passage, Mark 13, and interpret it not using the isolating hermeneutic mentioned above but one that is faithful to the nature and literary context of the passage. This thesis aims to interpret Mark 13 in light of the entire narrative of the gospel and the tapestry being developed through each part of the story. To

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<sup>5</sup> Britt Mooney, "7 Signs We Are in the End Times," Christianity.com. January 16, 2025. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/slideshows/7-signs-we-are-in-the-end-times.html>

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Diamant, "About Four-in-Ten U.S. Adults Believe Humanity Is Living in the End Times," *Pew Research Center*, December 8, 2022. <https://pewrsr.ch/3FDXtH0>.

<sup>7</sup> Darren M. Slade, Adrianna Smell, Elizabeth Wilson, and Rebekah Drumsta, "Percentage of U.S. Adults Suffering From Religious Trauma: A Sociological Study," *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2023.vol5.no1.01>

begin this endeavour, in chapter one, this thesis will provide an overview of the content of Mark 13 and the discourse's history of interpretation. This is necessary as it will provide the basis for understanding the interpretive methods applied to Mark 13 and the aspects of the passage that have been neglected. In chapter two, this thesis will examine how Mark 13 fits into the story of the Mark and prove that the chapter should not be interpreted in isolation; rather it should be interpreted in light of the whole story of Mark as it is key portion of the narrative that develops themes being revealed throughout the story of Mark. In light of this, chapter two will provide an exposition on the narrative lens that will be employed to properly approach Mark 13 in chapter three. The final chapter of this thesis will provide a renewed interpretation of Mark 13. The method employed will consider the plot development, characters, relevant themes, sequence of events, story structure, intertextuality, historical context, grammatical features, biblical context, and socio-cultural context of Mark 13.<sup>8</sup> This interpretive method will prove that the text's main focus does not surround end-time speculation or fulfillment of prophecy but rather is centred around the type of disciples that believers are to be amidst trying and terrifying times. It will conclude that in Mark 13 Jesus reveals that throughout all times his followers are to remain watchful, prepared, and faithful to God while his plan to redeem the cosmos unfolds.

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<sup>8</sup> Jeannine Brown, *The Gospels As Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 19-20; 140.

# I

## An Overview of Mark 13 & its History of Interpretation

When considering the seemingly straightforward connections of Mark 13 to other narrative scenes of Mark's story, there is a wide variation in how this passage is interpreted within scholarship. Before addressing these interpretations, it is necessary to first understand the content and characteristics of Mark 13 that scholars are referring to. Henceforth, chapter one will begin with an overview of the characteristics and structure of Mark 13. It will then provide a survey of the interpretations throughout history regarding Mark 13. This survey is essential as it will develop a foundation of knowledge surrounding how the text has been interpreted throughout history and reveal the overall disregard of the passage's narrative context. This is needed as in chapter two of this thesis the basis of these interpretations will be challenged, namely that Mark 13 is a separate genre of the text. Understanding the landscape of the interpretations of Mark 13 will then allow this thesis to expand on why certain views are taken in the first place and whether or not they are faithful to Mark 13 and the Gospel as a whole.

## The Content, Structure & Characteristics of Mark 13

### *The Content of Mark 13*

Before overviewing the content of Mark 13, it is first necessary to outline and condense the structure of Mark 13 to understand the discourse at a more intimate level. This section will adapt Kim Huat Tan's eight-section outline of the discourse in Mark 13 to a seven-section outline to trace the flow of Jesus's discourse.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Setting – Mark 13:1-4*

After Jesus's controversy with the Jewish religious officials in chapters 11-12, the story transitions now, moving outside the city walls of Jerusalem, heading east towards Bethany and positioning him on the other side of the Kidron Valley, upon the Mount of Olives looking over Jerusalem. From this vantage point, the disciples would have had an adequate view of the temple, explaining the remark of wonder given in v. 1 at the grandeur of the Temple Mount.<sup>2</sup> Jesus then, in the presence of all his disciples, says, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:2).<sup>3</sup> This prompts the disciples, namely Peter, James, John, and Andrew, to further inquire in private about the meaning of Jesus's declaration by asking when this will be and what signs will herald these events.

### *Rumours of the End – Mark 13:5-8*

In 13:5-8, Jesus then pronounces that they need to beware of those trying to lead them astray and of those that will proclaim to be him. Furthermore, Jesus describes that there will be wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, and famines; however, this is only the beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> Tan's eight-section model splits Mark 13:14-23 into two sections (13:14-20 and 13:21-23), but there is not sufficient support to divide the sections; Kim Huat Tan, *Mark: A New Covenant Commentary*, edited by Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015) 175-187.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 340.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations have been taken from the NSRVue unless otherwise stated.

### *Persecution and Betrayal – Mark 13:9-13*

The discussion of the things to come continues with Jesus warning the disciples of persecution that will come against them and that they will give testimony concerning their faith in him. Jesus then exclaims that the gospel must be preached to all nations and that families will betray one another, even to death. However, Jesus assures them that when persecution comes against them, they will be empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus concludes this section by stating that the one who endures this persecution will be saved (Mark 13:13).

### *The Abomination of Desolation – Mark 13:14-23*

In vv. 14-23, Jesus proclaims that there will be an abomination of desolation standing where it should not be in the temple (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἐστηκότα ὅπου οὐ δεῖ). Here, Jesus begins to be more explicit in his answer to the disciples' question about when the destruction of the temple will occur. Köstenberger, Stewart, and Makara say, "Up to this point in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus has not given a sign but rather has listed a series of events that will take place prior to the destruction of the temple. Now he focuses on one singular visible incident, the abomination of desolation..."<sup>4</sup> Jesus begins to narrow in on his answer to the disciples, but the reference remains ambiguous. Jesus then instructs and reassures them when he says, "...be alert; I have already told you everything" (Mark 13:23).

### *The Coming of the Son of Man – Mark 13:24-27*

In vv. 24-27, Jesus speaks to a coming event when "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:26-27).

Tan notes, "It is laden with scriptural language and should be seen as metaphorical in many

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<sup>4</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, Alexander Stewart, and Apollo Makara, *Jesus and the Future: Understanding What He Taught About the End Times* (Ashland: Lexham, 2018), Ch.2 "The Abomination of Desolation."

ways. But what it is a metaphor of is precisely the question.”<sup>5</sup> Although Jesus is responding to the disciples here, the complexity of what he says and how he says it makes it difficult to fully grasp the meaning of his discourse for readers today.

#### *Lesson from the Fig Tree – Mark 13:28-31*

Jesus continues the teaching by giving the disciples a parable using a fig tree metaphor. Adella Yarbro Collins notes, “In the transition from v. 27 to v. 28, the language shifts from mythic-realistic prediction of events to a comparison between the sequence of events in nature and the sequence of events in human ‘history.’”<sup>6</sup> Through parabolic language, Jesus, once again, uses imagery to speak to times of trials and vindication lying ahead for the disciples.

#### *The Unknowable Hour – Mark 13:32-37*

This last section of the dialogue between Jesus and his followers follows suit with the rest of the discourse as he continues to speak in symbolic language. Jesus says, “...about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). Jesus then uses a second parable to encourage his disciples to be ready for the return of the Son of Man.

#### ***Categorizing the Content of Mark 13***

Throughout Jesus’s speech, he discusses the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of Man; however, as will be seen in the survey of the history of interpretation, scholars vary on how these topics and different pronouncements are to be interpreted.<sup>7</sup> Kim Huat Tan articulates, “The discourse is chiefly concerned with events connected with the destruction of the

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<sup>5</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 183.

<sup>6</sup> Adella Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 616.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathon T. Pennington, “The Parables of Enoch and Mark 13:1-37: Apocalyptic Eschatology and the Coming Son of Man,” in *Reading Mark in Context: Jesus and Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 210-211.

Temple because, after all, it is the context of the discourse. However, the destruction of the Temple is linked with the vindication of the Son of Man, who will be shown in all his glory before Israel and the whole world at his Parousia.”<sup>8</sup> Tan here identifies the two primary components of Jesus’s discourse as the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of man. Regarding the destruction of the temple, in 13:2 Jesus proclaims that the stones of the great buildings will all be thrown down, and that the buildings will no longer be. The second topic of discussion that Tan argues to be present within the text relates to the Parousia of the Son of Man.

Christopher Rowland defines the Parousia as “a technical term to speak of the arrival or presence of Christ in glory at a particular point in the eschatological process.”<sup>9</sup> Here, Tan suggests that this arrival or presence of Christ is being spoken of in Mark 13:24-27. However, within the Greek text, “παρουσία” is not found within the Markan recounting of this story, but rather in the Matthean account of the discourse (Matt. 24:3). In Mark’s account the word used to describe the “the Son of man coming...” is the participle “ἐρχόμενον,” which denotes the idea of both “coming” or “going,” according to BDAG.<sup>10</sup> Wright argues, “the section has had nothing whatever to do with ‘the signs of the Parousia (in the normal scholarly sense), despite being labelled in some such fashion in commentaries, synopses, monographs and articles.”<sup>11</sup> This theme of Jesus’s Parousia within the text is worth noting, but the extent to which it is present will be discussed in chapters two and three of this thesis. For now, what needs to be understood is that the traditional reading of this text asserts that it speaks of the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of Man.

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<sup>8</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 172-173.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Rowland, “Parousia,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: O-Sh*, edited by David Noel Freedman, et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 166.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 361.

<sup>11</sup> “ἐρχομαι,” BDAG: 393-395.

## *The Structure of Mark 13*

In Jesus's dialogue in Mark 13, there are evidently two different topics: the destruction of the Temple and the coming of the Son of Man; but how are these distinguished in the text? Tan provides this model to separate the two sections of discussion in the text:

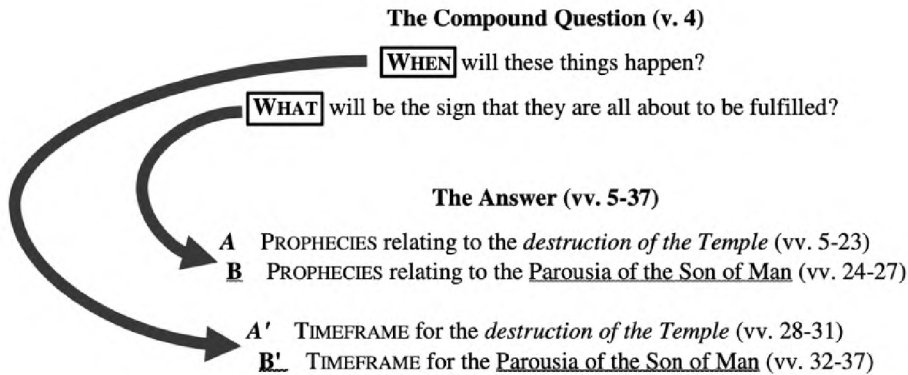


Figure 1. Structure of the Olivet Discourse. Kim Huat Tan, *Mark: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, *New Covenant Commentary Series* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 175, Diagram 5.

In this model, Tan suggests that there is an ABA'B' structure to the passage. He says, "The structure also shows that the two questions the disciples asked are answered in reverse order: the events (or signs leading to the key events) are first discussed (A and B material), followed by the teaching on the time (A' and B' material)."<sup>12</sup> This model shows the two separate components of Jesus's teaching in Mark 13. When condensing Mark 13 into this structure of a two-part topic structure, it aids in making the content more comprehensible as, at first glance, the ambiguous language and imagery that Jesus uses in this chapter may become overwhelming. This structure will also prove beneficial when inspecting the reception history of Mark 13, as many scholars' interpretations of the passage weave in and out of the different categories of interpretation.

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<sup>12</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 175.

### *The Characteristics of Mark 13*

With the content and structure of Mark 13 now laid out, it is necessary to look at the characteristics of the text itself. In Mark 13, Jesus is evidently speaking about future events to come but when and how these events will be fulfilled is disagreed upon. The traditional reading of this text asserts that it is a prophetic and apocalyptic text. Adella Yarbro Collins notes, “An apocalypse, however, is best defined as a narrative account of the reception of revelation by a human seer from a heavenly being.”<sup>13</sup> This framework of an apocalypse does not match the content of Mark 13’s narrative. Collins notes that this narrative discourse would not fit into the traditional description of an apocalyptic text as Jesus in this scene is presented as a teacher and prophet and not as a heavenly being.<sup>14</sup> She does note, “The speech, however, does contain apocalyptic eschatology, which may be defined as the types of ideas, symbols and teaching associated with the heavenly world and the future that one finds in the apocalypses.”<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, this text does not fit the traditional framework of an apocalypse, but its contents mirror similar teachings traditionally found within that genre of writing. Collins asserts, “Jesus’ monologue is best described as a prophetic oracle or apocalyptic discourse.”<sup>16</sup> As a prophetic and apocalyptic discourse, Mark 13 functions as a signpost pointing to things to come, things to beware of, or attitudes to persist in. Therefore, in light of this this classification of Mark 13 it is plausible to ask: Have these events been fulfilled? When will they be fulfilled? Are they to be taken literally? Scholarship on Mark 13 displays a wide variety of answer to these questions.

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<sup>13</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 594.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, 594.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, 594.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, 594.

## The Three Approaches to Mark 13

From the early church to modern biblical scholarship, three main approaches have dominated the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse in the Synoptic Gospels: Historicist, Futurist, and the Idealist (Metaphorical/Symbolic). These approaches are also more widely used in systematic theology discussions of eschatology and are applied to many different passages in the Old and New Testament. In what follows, an overview of the interpretative views that the reception history section will use to categorize specific scholars' interpretation of Mark 13 is provided.

### *Historicist*

The Historicist viewpoint contends that the prophecies given in Mark 13 were fulfilled in the first generation of Christians, who would have witnessed the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.<sup>17</sup> In this view the coming of the Son of Man prophecies (13:24-27) were fulfilled through God's judgement on the Jewish people during the destruction of Jerusalem in the wars from 66-70 A.D. Hays, Duvall, and Pate explain that this view "interprets Jesus' prophecies given in about A.D. 30 as being completely fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70... That war brought on severe tribulation and persecution for the Jews as the Roman legions systematically conquered Palestine..."<sup>18</sup> The Historicist view comes to these conclusions regarding the fulfillment of Jesus's words through the writings of Josephus, which document these events during the Jewish Revolt wars.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 269; Hays, Duvall, and Pate do not argue for one specific view but provide an overview of the three categories of interpretation for Mark 13.

<sup>18</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 318.

<sup>19</sup> For the documentation of the Jewish wars see Flavius Josephus, *Josephus The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 427-606.

### ***Futurist***

The Futurist perspective has risen in popularity within American Christianity and asserts that Jesus's discourse in Mark 13 pertains to future events during the end times and the Great Tribulation discussed in the book of Revelation (Mark 13:19-20, Revelation 2:2; 7:14).<sup>20</sup> The Futurist view interprets the language used in Mark 13 literalistically maintaining that the events prophesied will occur during the current age and that the return of Jesus is imminent. Modern Futurist interpretations interpret that the "signs of the times" began to be fulfilled in 1948 with the creation of the nation-state of Israel; therefore, Jesus could return at any moment as the prophecies in the New Testament.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Idealist (Symbolic, "already – not yet")***

The Idealist view of this passage asserts that the events discussed in this passage have already taken place but will continue to occur until Jesus's second coming; therefore, already – not yet. Hays, Duvall, and Pate note that this view sees "...the messianic woes began with Jesus and his generation, especially the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, and will be in effect until his second coming...Mark 13 attests to the conviction that the kingdom of God has already dawned...but it will not be completed until Jesus' second coming..."<sup>22</sup> This perspective sees that although these prophecies may have been fulfilled, the woes given by Jesus in Mark 13 will continue to be in effect until his second coming.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times*, 269.

<sup>21</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 269.

<sup>22</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 269.

<sup>23</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 318.

## Reception History

The last section developed a framework of the three categories of interpretation that are taken regarding the Olivet Discourse.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the scholarship of Mark 13, there is a vast range of interpretations offered of the passage that fall in one or two of these categories. This section will provide a brief overview the history of how Mark 13 has been specifically interpreted by individuals. Furthermore, it will provide the evidence to support the idea that the dominant readings of Mark 13 remove the passage from its narrative content.

Interpretations of the Olivet Discourse extend back to the third century beginning with Origen (died 254 A.D.). He finds much of the Olivet Discourse to refer to the future fulfilment of prophecies. Regarding Christ's second coming, Origen says, "Those, therefore, who have confidence for approaching Christ in private necessarily want to learn the sign of the coming of Christ and of the consummation of the age, so that, aided by what they have learned of the coming of Christ and the consummation, they might present themselves as worthy to see his second coming, even the second coming that we are proposing is the end of the age."<sup>25</sup> Origen views the referent to Christ's second coming in the discourse in two manners. The first is that he expected a physical bodily return at the consummation of the world, and second, he also viewed Christ second coming in a more symbolic way and articulates that Christ's second coming is also present when people let Christ work within them, and they become stewards of the word of God.<sup>26</sup> Origen views the prophecies regarding the birth pangs as a past, present, and future event/s being constantly fulfilled throughout the ages.<sup>27</sup> Alongside a literalistic interpretation of

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<sup>24</sup> "Olivet Discourse" is commonly used to refer to all three accounts of a speech given in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21). For this thesis the Olivet Discourse will refer specifically to Mark 13 unless otherwise specified.

<sup>25</sup> Origen, *The Commentary Cf Origen On The Gospel Cf St Matthew*, Vol. 2, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 588.

<sup>26</sup> Origen, 588.

<sup>27</sup> Origen, 596-602.

the birth pangs that Jesus foretells, Origen believes in the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the coming of the Antichrist (e.g. 1 John 2:18)<sup>28</sup> but also contends that “the abomination of desolation” could speak of any false word that has come against the Scripture of God.<sup>29</sup> With this interpretation regarding “the abomination of desolation,” it is seen that part of Origen’s interpretation of the Olivet Discourse aligns with the Idealist perspective. Origen understands Jesus’s prophecies as literal events that will take place throughout the ages before Christ’s return but also as truths for the Church in throughout the ages reflecting a blended view of the Futurist and Idealist perspectives.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, Augustine of Hippo in his letter, “On the End of the World,” offers an interpretive view of the Olivet Discourse that correlates to that of the Idealist view. Augustine notes that Jesus is clearly referring to the destruction of the temple during this discourse but that he is also referring to his second coming.<sup>30</sup> Regarding “the abomination of desolation,” Augustine views this as being direct prophecy correlating to the destruction of the Jewish temple.<sup>31</sup> Although this would seem fit with the Historicist view of the discourse, Augustine then continues to assert that Christ has come again through his Church and will come again in bodily form. Augustine says, “As I see it, this could be taken in two ways: one, that He will come in the Church as in a cloud, as He continues to come now according to His word... The other way in which He will come will be in His Body in which He sits at the right hand of the Father/ in which, also, He died and rose again and ascended into heaven.”<sup>32</sup> Augustine interprets this discourse as having previously being fulfilled in part and still unfulfilled, correlating with

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<sup>28</sup> The Antichrist is seen as synonymous with the Abomination of Desolation.

<sup>29</sup> Origen, *The Commentary Cf Origen*, 603-606.

<sup>30</sup> Saint Augustine, *Letters, Volume 4 (165-203)*, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 377.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, 379.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, 389.

the Idealist perspective. In view of the whole discourse and when the prophecies might be fulfilled, Augustine says, “Therefore, He said if not only to those who then heard Him speaking, but also to those who came after them and before us, as well as to us and to those who will come after us until His final coming... For that day will come to every single one, when the day comes for him to go out of life, such as he is, to be judged on the last day. For this reason, every Christian ought to watch lest the coming of the Lord find him unprepared.”<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Augustine’s interpretation of the Olivet Discourse fits into the Idealist category.

During the fifteenth century, Martin Luther offers commentary on the version of the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24, but not specifically Mark 13. In Luther’s view, the discourse is concerned with the end of two kingdoms: the kingdom of the Jews in the first century and the kingdom of the world as a whole.<sup>34</sup> Luther says, “First, Christ begins in this chapter to prophesy about the final destruction of the Jewish kingdom, which the Jews did not at all believe or expect.”<sup>35</sup> Luther interprets the content of the Olivet Discourse regarding the destruction of the Jewish temple in relationship to “the abomination of desolation.”<sup>36</sup> However, Luther continues to note that these prophecies are also fulfilled by his contemporaries. He says, “Therefore, the words of Daniel about the abomination also apply to us. We also have a truly desolate abomination sitting in a holy place, namely, in Christendom and in the human conscience, where God alone was supposed to sit and rule.”<sup>37</sup> Here, Luther argues that the prophecies given in the Olivet Discourse also apply to believers throughout all ages, expressing an Idealist view of the discourse. Lastly, as said above, Luther interprets this discourse as

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine, 359.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Church Postils V*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and James Langebartels (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 324.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, 324.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, 325.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, 329-330.

predicting the end of the kingdom of the world but does not offer any speculation as to when this will be.<sup>38</sup> In summary, Luther's interpretation of the Olivet discourse combines the Historicist and Idealist perspectives on the prophecies but also has a future expectation of Christ's return.

In the sixteenth century, Jean Calvin views the elements of the passage such as the reference to "the abomination of desolation" as being fulfilled historically through the destruction of Jerusalem, and that this is not a single referent to a specific being or thing, but rather to the cessation of the temple.<sup>39</sup> Calvin further expresses that this discourse is also concerned with future things to come. Calvin notes in his commentary on 13:24-27 that the return of the Son of Man surely points to a future day to come.<sup>40</sup> In these examples of Calvin's work on the Olivet Discourse, one sees that Calvin views Jesus's prophecies as having already been fulfilled but not yet finished being fulfilled.

During the eighteenth century, John Wesley provides explanatory notes on Mark 13. Regarding Mark 13:4, Wesley notes, "Two questions are here asked; the one, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; the other, concerning the end of the world."<sup>41</sup> Here, Wesley sees that the following discourse is concerned with two different times. Furthermore, regarding the Jesus's prophecy of persecution, Wesley notes that Christians have historically seen the fulfillment of this, but more is to come for the Church as well.<sup>42</sup> Lastly, Wesley sees that Christ's return is in the future but will surely come. Wesley says regarding the Matthean parallel, "Here our Lord speaks of his last coming... Many primitive Christians, not observing this, thought he would come immediately, in the common sense of the word a mistake which St. Paul labours to remove

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<sup>38</sup> Luther, 324.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 131-135.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, 145-149.

<sup>41</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament: Volume I Matthew to Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), Mark XIII. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Wesley, Mark XIII. 19.

in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.”<sup>43</sup> Taking all this into account, Wesley exhibits a blended view of the three interpretive perspectives on the Olivet Discourse.

In the nineteenth century, Ezra P. Gould’s (1896) work reflects the Historicist view of Mark 13. Gould asserts that the two events discussed in Mark 13 should not be separated but rather taken in conjunction with one another. Furthermore, he argues that the author of the text shows a close relationship between these two events, and not one in that generation and the other in the indefinite future. He says:

...the event predicted in the second part did take place in that generation and in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. The event itself, and the signs of it, it interprets according to the analogy of prophecy, figuratively... The prophecy becomes thus a prediction of the setting up of the kingdom, and especially of its definite inauguration as a universal kingdom, with the removal of the chief obstacle to that in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup>

With this view, Gould attests that the events prophesied in Mark 13 were fulfilled within the first generation of Christians.

In the twentieth century, C.E.B. Cranfield (1959) holds a mixed view of Mark 13, intertwining aspects of each interpretative method. Cranfield asserts that Jesus did truly predict the destruction of the temple and that the signs of his second coming will come to fruition, but also that, “The purpose of his reply is not to impart esoteric information but to strengthen and sustain faith.”<sup>45</sup> Cranfield displays that the interpretative approaches are not mutually exclusive but can be integrated and applied to different parts and levels of the passage. In contrast to Cranfield, N.T. Wright argues that the prophecies given in Mark 13 are not concerned with the second coming of Jesus. Wright argues that 13:24-27 is concerned with Jesus’s vindication and

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<sup>43</sup> Wesley, Matthew XXIV. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, Vol. 27, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 241.

<sup>45</sup> Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, CGTC (Cambridge: CUP, 1959), 392-394.

that the prophecy is fulfilled through the destruction of the temple. He articulates that this imagery is to be read in light of the narrative's first century context and the context of the narrative itself. He says, "So far, the section has had nothing whatever to do with 'the signs of the Parousia' (in the normal scholarly sense)... Jesus, it appears, has woven into this story a further strand, that of the rescue of Israel from destruction by holding firm to the end; but now the Israel that holds firm, and so is rescued, consists of his own disciples."<sup>46</sup> Wright asserts that it was a historical fulfillment of the passage that has eschatological implications for followers of Jesus throughout all time. Wright displays views that the text within a historical fulfillment (Historicist) but sees that it also has larger implications for believers today (Idealist).

Lastly, when looking into the writings of the twenty-first century, there are multiple scholars who would support a more symbolic reading of the text that falls into the Idealist perspective on Mark 13. Firstly, Kim Huat Tan posits that the text indeed is dealing with both the destruction of the temple and the Parousia, but then he contends, "Regarding its themes, the first thing to note is that this discourse is not so much about the signs of the end as the discernment and attitudes Jesus' disciples must have, in order to face the ordeal awaiting them. In other words, the discourse is chiefly about *discipleship*..."<sup>47</sup> Alongside Tan, Micah Kiel articulates that instead of fixating on the fulfillment of prophecies, whether past, present, or future, the text offers theological insight on how disciples of Jesus are to persist in their faith in uncertain times that will surely come.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 348.

<sup>47</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Micah D. Kiel, "The Open Horizon of Mark 13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017): 161.

## **Conclusion**

When looking at the content of Mark 13, it is evident that Jesus is speaking of times and events to come; but the question that remains pertinent for this study is whether or not these have been fulfilled, will be fulfilled, or have been being fulfilled since Jesus's ascension and will continue to be until his second coming. Throughout Mark 13's reception history, it is apparent that the understandings vary and may even flow in and out of one another when applying it to such a lengthy discourse as Mark 13. The two most prevalent views of Mark 13 are the Historicist and Futurist perspectives. Many of the interpretations overviewed display a heavy importance laid upon the question of when will/was the prophecies fulfilled. But is the fulfillment of prophecy the main concern of Mark 13? To answer that question, one must first grasp the characteristics of the Olivet Discourse. With the overall content, characteristics, and interpretative landscape laid out, it is necessary to inspect whether or not the past interpretations of Mark 13 are faithful to the text's genre and purpose. The interpretations discussed above focus heavily on the question of when these things described in the Olivet Discourse have been fulfilled. The Historicist and Futurist perspectives on Mark 13 are primarily focused on when the prophecies have/will be fulfilled and do not focus on how Mark 13 contributes to the overall narrative of the Gospel of Mark and how its narrative context might affect its meaning. Chapter two will inspect the characteristics of Mark 13 and how they should impact one's approach to the Gospel of Mark and one's interpretation of the passage.

## II

### Genre and Method: The Apocalyptic Nature of Mark 13

When examining Mark 13, it is important that readers should imagine that drawing out the meaning of any text is less like trying to piece together a puzzle and more like a journey. Take this analogy for instance: if one were to plan a hike up a mountain they would first need to know where to start; if one did not know where the start of the trail was, surely, they would never end up in the right place. If one does not know the map, then they would not know where to go. All this is to say that interpreting Mark 13 is much like a journey. If one does not have the proper knowledge of Mark 13 or does not understand the type of literature it is, one can get very lost in reading and interpreting its meaning. This chapter aims to do just that: to prepare and situate this thesis with the proper tools and understanding of Mark 13 so that the fullness of its meaning and impact is understood.

The previous chapter of this study highlighted that the two most taken views of Mark 13, namely Historicist and Futurist, mainly interpret the text outside of its narrative context and view the passage as being mainly concerned with the fulfillment of prophecy. This approach neglects key aspects of the Gospel of Mark that are being built on throughout the narrative of Mark. This chapter will show that Mark 13 is often uprooted from the overarching story and interpreted

outside its narrative context. Scholars such as Colani and Brandenburger approach Mark 13 in this way because they view it as a different literary genre compared to the rest of Mark.<sup>1</sup> This perspective does not consider the entirety of Mark's narrative, themes, and message that the author is developing.

This chapter argues for a revised interpretative framework for Mark 13 that is mindful of the text's placement and contribution to the story of Mark. This chapter will begin by discussing the traditional interpretive approach to Mark 13 as apocalyptic. This section will provide a concise explanation of what apocalyptic literature is as well as the arguments for Mark 13 being categorized within it. Next, it will then be argued that Mark 13 should not be categorized as an apocalypse, and instead that the author of Mark employs apocalyptic *topoi* throughout the narrative. From this understanding it will then be argued that Mark 13 should be interpreted in light of the whole story of Mark. This chapter will then come back to the question of genre but ask it of Mark's entire narrative. This provides an interpretive framework of Mark 13 that considers its narrative purpose and placement within Mark, which will provide the basis of the final chapter.

### **Mark 13 & Apocalyptic Literature**

In the scholarship of Mark 13, there is a consensus that the text is apocalyptic in nature; however, there is disagreement regarding the *level* of apocalyptic in the nature of the text. To understand to what level apocalyptic influences Mark 13, one must first gain an understanding of what apocalyptic literature is so that the relationship between Mark 13 and apocalyptic literature may be discerned.

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<sup>1</sup> This will be further explained below.

The word “apocalypse” come from the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις which translates as “revelation” or “unveiling.”<sup>2</sup> Biblical scholars use the words “apocalyptic” or “apocalypse” in wide range of meanings with varied connotations.<sup>3</sup> According to Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, the use of these words by scholars commonly refers to “...future, cataclysmic judgment or to an imminent expectation of the end of time.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Reynolds and Stuckenbruck display in their writing, this description of apocalypses does not take into account the many nuances and features of the genre.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, J.J. Collins provides further identifiable attributes and characteristics that are indicative of the apocalyptic genre. Collins says, “...a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”<sup>6</sup> Collins further delineates that there are different types of apocalypses; historical apocalypses that consist of a review of history, and apocalypses that recount otherworldly journeys.<sup>7</sup> Not all apocalypses will include all of the characteristics of the genre, but rather the genre has “fuzzy edges,” meaning that some works may include all the aspects of apocalypse while others are intertwined into different genres alongside apocalypse.<sup>8</sup> Collins

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<sup>2</sup> “ἀποκάλυψις,” BDAG: 112.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin E. Reynolds and Loren Stuckenbruck, “Introduction,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2017), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, 1-12.

<sup>6</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Collins, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Collins, 17.

concludes that the activity of heavenly beings, a final judgment, and the destruction of wickedness are central aspects to all apocalypses.<sup>9</sup>

Within Collins's framework, there is an emphasis placed on the aspect of the temporal reality of eschatological salvation. From a canonical viewpoint, there is validity in this description of apocalypse as the books of Daniel and Revelation both in their nature and content "...describe signs, events, and historical timeframes that will precede the end of the world and final judgment."<sup>10</sup> However, the books of Daniel and Revelation are only a small portion of the wider apocalyptic canon found in Scripture and ancient Jewish literature. Some of these other works that are categorized within the apocalyptic genre are 1 Enoch, Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the War Scroll (1QM), Melchizedek (11QMelch), the Testament of Solomon, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and 2 Baruch.<sup>11</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck assert, "Eschatology is common to many apocalypses, but by fixating on Daniel, Revelation, and historical apocalypses, scholars have often inappropriately equated apocalyptic eschatology with the entirety of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition."<sup>12</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck rightly assert that not all apocalypses are eschatological in nature. They note that this is an important aspect, but not as central as it is presented throughout most scholarship; instead, they argue that the aspect of revealing of hidden knowledge to human beings through the mediator figures is central across apocalypses.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, eschatological references and the revelation of hidden knowledge are key defining factors of the apocalyptic genre, but as stated earlier, a single work may not contain all

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<sup>9</sup> Collins, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth E Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel cf Mark: The Literary and Theological Role cf Mark 3:22-30* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 84; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 15-17.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>13</sup> Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, 4.

characteristics common to apocalypses. Collins says, “The literary genre apocalypse is not a self-contained isolated entity. The conceptual structure indicated by the genre, which emphasizes the supernatural world and the judgment to come, can also be found in works that are not revelation accounts, and so are not technically apocalypses.”<sup>14</sup> This understanding of apocalypses and the genre of apocalyptic literature as a conceptual framework is the standard which will be used to examine Mark 13.

Having now expounded upon apocalypse and apocalyptic literature, this study will inspect the relationship of this genre to Mark 13. This next section will assess two theories that view Mark 13 as an apocalypse and argue that they do not provide adequate interpretation of the characteristics of Mark 13. The final two sections of the chapter will propose an alternative framework for understanding the function and purpose of Mark 13.

### **Is Mark 13 an Apocalypse? The Little Apocalypse Theory & More**

The first theory that interprets the genre of Mark 13 as an apocalypse is called the “Little Apocalypse Theory.” The “Little Apocalypse Theory” was first proposed by T. Colani in the mid-nineteenth century and interprets Mark 13 as an adaption of an earlier Jewish/Christian text that circulated during the Jewish War of 66-70 A.D.<sup>15</sup> Referring to Colani, Hooker explains:

The tensions and apparent contradictions within the chapter, the basic structure of the chapter and its artificial setting, the expectation of an interval before the Parousia and the descriptions of the events that would precede it, together with the phrases which echo apocalyptic mood and tone, are all explained, if it is recognized that the discourse goes back, not to Jesus himself, but to a document that Mark has taken over and edited.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Colani, *Jésus Christ et les croyances messianiques de son Temps*, 2d ed. (Strasbourg, France: 1894); discussed in George Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Criticism of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13, with Special Reference to the Little Apocalypse Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1954), ix-32.

<sup>16</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*, BNTC (Edinburgh: Black, 1991), 298.

The document in question, often regarded to as a “flyleaf” from the Jewish War, is speculated to have served as a writing of encouragement to Christians or Jews living in the region during that time.<sup>17</sup> Garland further comments that a major point of contention for Colani when inspecting the text was that Jesus did not engage with eschatological expectations, and if he had hypothetically done so, he would not have mistakenly predicted that “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (13:30).<sup>18</sup>

There is disagreement within scholarship surrounding which parts of Mark 13 are derived from this hypothetical flyleaf. Hooker explains that the general assumption is that vv. 7-8, 14-20, and 24-27 are derived from the flyleaf as they mirror the structure of Jewish apocalyptic texts (birth-pangs, tribulation, and the End).<sup>19</sup> Hooker refutes the idea of the “Little Apocalypse.” She notes, “The existence of the ‘Little Apocalypse’ cannot be either proved or disproved, but this is not of great importance, since the hypothesis in fact helps us little in understanding Mark 13 as it is now.”<sup>20</sup> She sees that this hypothesis is not beneficial to interpreting the text as the discourse displays clean indications of Markan editing and the current form of the text is evidently composite.<sup>21</sup>

Another argument outside of the “Little Apocalypse” theory that interprets the text’s genre as apocalypse is put forward by Egon Brandenburger. Shively explains in her discussion of Mark 13 that the argument put forward by Egon Brandenburger. In Shively’s discussion, she notes that Brandenburger attests that Mark 13 shares key features of Jewish apocalypses and identifies through the examination of other ancient Jewish apocalyptic texts that the chapter was

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<sup>17</sup> Hooker, 298.

<sup>18</sup> David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*, edited by Andreas Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 513.

<sup>19</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 298.

<sup>20</sup> Hooker, 298.

<sup>21</sup> Hooker, 298.

constructed from a Christian apocalyptic source.<sup>22</sup> Key features of the text that Brandenburger uses to qualify Mark 13 as an apocalypse are the esoteric teacher-student discussion, the revelation of eschatological secrets, the *inclusio* structure of the introduction and conclusion of the text, and the discussion surrounding the end of time.<sup>23</sup>

However, in response to claims such as Brandenburger's, Hooker exemplifies succinctly that the text should not be categorized as an apocalypse. She articulates, "the discourse lacks many of the features of apocalyptic writing: there is no heavenly vision, no use of bizarre imagery, no description of what happens after the Parousia – no resurrection, no judgement, no punishment or reward – and the idea that one can pinpoint the time of the End is specifically denied."<sup>24</sup> Many of the key features within apocalypses are missing, which proves that Mark 13 is not an apocalypse. This view is even further supported by J.J. Collins's assertion that not all texts which contain apocalyptic characteristics should be categorized within the genre of apocalypse.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Shively articulates that there are many other features from other literary genres present within the Olivet Discourse, such as parenthesis, testament, and prophecy and that it defies the boundaries of any specific genre.<sup>26</sup> Undoubtedly, Mark 13 displays characteristics of apocalypse, but it is evident that the arguments put forth for it to be classified as an apocalypse are unconvincing.

Still, the question arises: how is this discourse is functioning within Mark seeing that it does not stand independent from the narrative? Shively argues that this chapter functions within a larger theme interwoven throughout the gospel that employs apocalyptic *topoi*.<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> Egon Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik* (FRLANT 134 Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 13-18, discussed in Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Shively, 186-187.

<sup>24</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 299.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 187.

<sup>27</sup> Shively, 84.

discussion of Mark's apocalyptic narrative will be discussed at greater length later in the following chapter. First, it is necessary to build a foundation of understanding regarding Mark's genre as a whole, and therefore how one is to approach the text.

### **The Genre of the Gospel of Mark**

The Gospel of Mark is commonly classified into the genre category of *bios*.<sup>28</sup> This genre is a Greco-Roman form of biography, very similar to that of modern-day biographies. Burrige explains that the structure of a writing in the *bios* category consists of continuous narrative prose and does not contain the full scope of a person's life in a strict chronology. Furthermore, a writing in this genre commonly begins with an origin story recounting one's family or birth, and it heavily focuses on narrating the death of the subject of the biography to make a definitive statement regarding one's character, teaching, or life's impact.<sup>29</sup>

However, not all scholars agree with this classification of Mark. Marcus disagrees with Mark being *bios* because although Mark does share similarities with the genre, it nevertheless is missing key aspects. Marcus explains that *bios* covers "...the story of the completed life of a revered (or reviled) figure of the past."<sup>30</sup> This in Marcus's view is inconsistent with the Gospel of Mark as he rightly explains that the story of Jesus can never be completed and will never come to an end.<sup>31</sup> The absence of a birth narrative within Mark is relevant to consider when labelling Mark as *bios* as this was a very common characteristic of the genre.<sup>32</sup> In view of these discrepancies, Marcus proposes that the Gospel of Mark makes use of many different

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<sup>28</sup> See, Helen K. Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), for an argument for Mark as *bios*.

<sup>29</sup> R. A. Burrige, "Gospel: Genre," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, second edition, edited by Nicholas Perrin, Jeannine Brown, and Joel Green (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 812-813.

<sup>30</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 27a. (New Haven: YUP, 2021), 67.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Marcus, 67.

characteristics across many genres and would be better fit into the genre of “*euangelion*, a proclamation of good news: a redemptive story reenacted and reexperienced in the church’s celebration of the compassionate, suffering, risen Lord who not only has gone before it in the way of suffering and death but is also present in its midst, traveling with it ‘on the way.’”<sup>33</sup> This category sees the content of Mark through a more intentional lens. The Gospel of Mark is no longer seen as only recounting the significant events of Christ’s life but is now rather seen as revealing the redemptive story of God that is continued within the Church body and experience.

Shively agrees with Marcus, and she bolsters her argument of Mark falling within the genre of *euangelion* through examining the narrative coherence of the gospel. Shively illustrates the coherency of the gospel’s narrative through a deep inspection of the narrative scenes found within Mark 6:32–8:21. She articulates that there is a coherent narrative as there are logical progressions of events and narrative scenes as exhibited through the characters of Mark, geographical locations, and causal relationships between events.<sup>34</sup> Through her examination of the text, Shively comes to this conclusion: “Mark blends a variety of genres (e.g., history, biography, apocalypse, prophecy, drama) to narrate a scriptural, apocalyptic-eschatological history which he has framed as “good news.” That is, Mark presents the narrativized εὐαγγέλιον in written form, composed of a network of existing, recognizable genres.”<sup>35</sup>

This conclusion is pivotal for the argument within this thesis as it brings Mark 13 into the framework of the entire gospel. As previously discussed, many scholars see that that Mark 13 is incoherent with the gospel narrative, and this would lend towards a reception of Mark 13 being interpolated into the text and not original to Mark’s composition. However, with this idea of

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<sup>33</sup> Marcus, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth E. Shively, “The Eclipse of the Markan Narrative: On the (Re)Cognition of a Coherent Story and Implications for Genre,” *Early Christianity* 12, no. 3 (2021): 384.

<sup>35</sup> Shively, “The Eclipse of the Markan Narrative,” 386.

Mark 13 being independent from the gospel narrative disproved, one can approach the interpretation of the text through the lens of the entire gospel. Viewing Mark as a coherent narrative delivered in the genre of *euangelion* allows readers to approach the text with an understanding that the author of Mark has intentionally developed a narrative of the life of Jesus that communicates the good news of Jesus. In light of this, how are readers to view Mark as a story? How does this impact one's interpretative approach to Mark 13?

### **Mark as Story – A Narrative Approach to the Gospel**

The understanding of Mark as a coherent story impacts the way one understands the purpose of the narrative and how the author of the text develops the story and ultimately culminates it. To understand Mark as a story, the lens that needs to be adopted to interpret the gospel is a narrative-critical approach. In discussing the necessity of this approach for the interpretation of the gospels, Brown notes, “Yet for all our comfort level with stories, we often do strange and odd things with the Gospels. In church contexts we chop them into very small pieces (single verses or individual episodes) and turn them into allegories for our own experiences.”<sup>36</sup> Chopping up the text, as Brown noted, is harmful to the reader's interpretation of a text as it neglects the overall argument and themes that are being developed throughout the narrative. This fragmented presentation of the gospels, or any narrative within Scripture, disrupts the coherency of the story being told.<sup>37</sup>

To avoid this fragmenting of the text and to take a more informed approach to interpreting the gospels, a narrative-critical approach must be taken. Brown explains, “...narrative criticism (NC) attends to the literary and storied qualities of a biblical narrative, like

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<sup>36</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels As Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, 8.

a Gospel. This ‘storied’ analysis is accompanied by a focus on the final form of the text rather than emphasis on issues of the text’s production, which is characteristic of methods like source and redaction criticisms.”<sup>38</sup> This approach is necessary for this thesis as the normative approach to Mark 13 removes the text from its narrative context and interprets independently. As Brown argues, this disrupts the coherency of the narrative and the overall impact a piece of the narrative has within the story. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie use this narrative approach in their work, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative c/a Gospel*. They articulate, “Because the Gospel of Mark is a coherent narrative with a powerful impact, it is important to experience the narrative as a whole.”<sup>39</sup> To interpret Mark 13 in the context of the whole gospel, and thus experience the whole of Mark’s story, this thesis will adopt a narrative critical approach that is informed by the sociohistorical context in which Mark has been formed. To do this, the method that will be adopted within this study is a combination of adapted approaches outlined by Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie in *Mark as Story*, and the approach offered by Brown in *The Gospels as Stories*.

The approach that will be used in last chapter of this thesis will aim to read Mark as a story. This means that this thesis is interested in the story Mark tells and not getting behind that story. This approach will be taken not to confuse the historical Jesus with the Jesus portrayed in the Gospel of Mark, as it pertains to Mark’s intended purposes in his narrative.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, this thesis will read the story of Mark independently from the other gospels. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie explain, “In narrative study, we cannot legitimately use the other Gospels to ‘fill out’ or to ‘fill in’—as a way to explain or elaborate Mark’s story... Mark’s story is complete in itself apart from the other Gospels—which are themselves also, in the same sense, self-contained stories

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<sup>38</sup> Brown, 11.

<sup>39</sup> David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative c/a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 5.

about Jesus.”<sup>41</sup> This will aid in the reading of Mark 13 as the Synoptic Gospels each contain this discourse and differ in detail and structure. By limiting the reading to only Mark’s gospel, the lens is focused to examine *what the Gospel of Mark is conveying throughout the discourse and narrative as a whole*.

From a more myopic viewpoint, this thesis will examine the historical context and grammar of Mark 13 as they provide deeper insight into the larger framework of a passage. Historical criticism is needed when approaching any ancient text because of the ever-growing cultural and societal gap between the context in which the text was written to modern-day readers. Brown says, “Story informed by history leads us to theology and theologizing... And staying close to the story helps us to know when to fill in narrative gaps with historical information and how to hear a Gospel’s theology.”<sup>42</sup> This will specifically be beneficial as Mark 13 contains scriptural and cultural references that are situated within the context of first-century readers.

The story-world of Mark will be used to inspect the developments throughout the narrative. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie define a story world as “...a world that engages and grips us, a world such as we experience when we get ‘engrossed’ in reading a novel or experiencing a theatrical play. As a way to grasp the notion of a story world, consider the experience of seeing a film...”<sup>43</sup> The story of Mark engages its readers and is relevant across all generations of Christians. Like films and novels, the story of Mark leaves an imprint on its readers and should have a residual impact on their lives moving forward. From the viewpoint of the story-world there are other features of the text that need attention to gain an informed understanding of the

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<sup>41</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 140.

<sup>43</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 4.

theology being developed in the story and the function of the text within the narrative. These characteristics are setting (time, place, and environment the story takes place), plotting (sequence of events), characterization (development of characters), and intertextuality (relationship with other passages in Scripture). The following chart provided by Brown aids in understanding of the impact of a text from a theological viewpoint:

Interpretive Questions from Story to Theology		
Plotting	Characterization	Intertextuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does an evangelist's plotting of his story contribute to his theology?</li> <li>• Does attending to narrative development add nuance to this theology?</li> <li>• How do plot and theme interact to contribute to the Gospel's theology?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does an evangelist develop his characters across the story, and how does this development contribute to his theology?</li> <li>• How do key characters interact, and how does this interaction illuminate theology?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the evangelist's use of the Old Testament provide a "backstory" or a "back-theology" for his own story and theology?</li> <li>• How are Old Testament categories employed to illuminate a Gospel's settings, characters, or events?</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Interpretive Questions from Story to Theology. Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels As Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 156, Figure 8.1.

By understanding the narrative's theology and how the more miniscule details of the text develop, one gains deeper insight into what message and themes the author is trying to convey through a story. Through these characteristics of the text the author conveys meaning; this meaning is understood as the rhetorical impact. The rhetorical impact of a text is the author's intended response the readers are to have because of the text.<sup>44</sup>

Through examining the rhetorical function of Mark 13, this thesis will provide an interpretation of the text that considers the impact the text has on its readers. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie note, "...the composer has told the story in order to transform the audience and to be

<sup>44</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 127.

a means to help bring about the rule of God...As a whole, the story seeks to shatter the customary way of seeing the world and invites hearers to embrace another, thus impelling them to action.”<sup>45</sup> The purpose of Mark’s story is to impact the lives of the readers of text. This brings the discourse of Mark 13 alive and shows how stories have tangible impacts on those who read and hear them. With this understanding of narratives and the Gospel of Mark, the next chapter will provide an understanding of Mark 13 that is cognizant of the development of the story of Mark as a part of the overall purpose of displaying the good news of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to set out a foundation for readers to understand the context and impact of Mark 13 within the larger framework of Mark’s gospel. It began by discussing the common categorization of Mark 13 as an apocalypse as this view propagates the idea that Mark’s narrative is incoherent and that Mark 13 is to be interpreted outside of its narrative context. By examining the genre of apocalypse, it is clear that Mark 13 does not fit the framework but does contain apocalyptic characteristics. With Mark 13 now seen to be a part of the larger narrative of the story, the coherency of the narrative was discussed to understand the implications this has on the text’s genre. Mark falls into the genre of *euangelion* and functions to reveal the good news of Jesus Christ. From here, it is understood that the author of Mark has constructed the narrative purposefully to depict an image of Jesus and understanding of his identity. Mark being a story begs the necessity of a narrative approach to the text, as that is just what a story is, a narrative. From this approach this thesis will wrestle with Mark 13 using the narrative context, historical context, grammatical structure, and overall rhetorical function of the

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<sup>45</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, 1.

passage to determine its meaning and purpose to provide an informed and faithful interpretation of Mark 13.

### III

## A Renewed Interpretation of Mark 13: What Does it All Mean?

In the last chapter, it was demonstrated that to read Mark 13 properly, one needs to be mindful of the larger story of Mark. With this approach to the Gospel of Mark and more importantly the Olivet Discourse, it is necessary for readers to be cognizant of the interwovenness of Mark's narrative scenes and the skillfully embedded themes and elements within them. By reading it in this way the text can tangibly impact the lives of its readers. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie say, "The composer of this story has used sophisticated storytelling techniques, developed the characters and the conflicts, and built suspense with deliberateness, telling the story to generate certain insights and responses in the audience."<sup>1</sup> The goal of this thesis is to understand the insights being developed and the expected responses to the Jesus's revealing of the things to come in Mark 13.

Chapter one of this thesis gave an overview of Mark 13 and its history of interpretation. The chapter showed that the Historicist and Futurist approaches to Mark 13 interpret the text separately from the wider gospel narrative. By doing this, the interpretations lose sight of the rhetorical impact that the author is aiming to achieve in Mark 13 and the gospel as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 1.

These readings uproot this chapter of the narrative, thus removing instrumental developments in different themes that are being built throughout the story of Mark and especially Mark 13.

Chapter two revealed that Mark 13 should not be interpreted apart from the rest of the Mark's narrative, and rather that the passage is key to understanding the overarching purpose of the story of Mark. By understanding Mark as a coherent narrative, it then outlined the hermeneutical approach that will now be employed.

This chapter will begin by providing the narrative and thematic context of Mark 13 that has been developing throughout the narrative to display the good news of Jesus Christ. It will examine the author's development of the themes of apocalypse, the kingdom of God, and discipleship. It will next analyze the closer literary context of Mark 13 to comprehend the passage's relationship to the narrative scenes in which it is situated between and how the story of Mark is being shaped through the larger narrative section. Following this, the passage will be analyzed exegetically to reveal the intimate details of the Mark 13 to gain a richer understanding of its meaning. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the theological and rhetorical impact of Mark 13. It will argue that this passage is not concerned with predicting specific dates, times, and fulfillments of prophecies. Rather, it will be argued that Mark 13 functions as an exhortation and encouragement to the disciples to remain watchful, ready, and unwavering in their faith, revealing a typology of discipleship for its readers to embody.

### **The Story of Mark – Narrative & Thematic Context**

To approach Mark as a story and from a narrative-critical method, it is necessary to understand where Mark 13 is situated within the larger narrative and thematic context. Brown articulates that in the gospels, the authors are developing plot lines, themes, and characters,

through a narrative.<sup>2</sup> This is all done to communicate meaning through a story, and the question for this thesis is: What is the meaning being communicated through Mark 13? This section will analyze three key themes that are developed throughout the Gospel and in Mark 13. Through this analysis of the narrative and thematic context, Mark 13 will be properly situated for this thesis to interpret of the meaning of the text faithfully.

When examining the Markan narrative, there are multiple approaches to dissecting the story. For example, the narrative of Mark can be broken down into three sections from a geographical perspective. Tan provides a geographical outline of the text: “The Gospel in Galilee – The Mighty acts of the Messiah (1:14-8:21), On the Road to Jerusalem – The Gospel and the Suffering Messiah (8:22-10:52), and The Climax of the Gospel – The Messiah and Jerusalem (11:1-16:8).”<sup>3</sup> However, Strauss notes that this method for condensing the narrative does not consider the two-stage Christological presentation that Mark develops.<sup>4</sup> Strauss articulates that the author of the Gospel presents the character and person of Christ in the first half of the Gospel (1:14-8:21) through recounting the mighty deeds of Jesus and his Messianic authority. In the second half of the Gospel (8:22-15:47), the author presents the way of the suffering Messiah.<sup>5</sup> This framework is preferred as Jesus proclaims on three separate accounts of His coming suffering (8:31, 9:30-32, and 10:32-34). Spivey, Smith, and Black note, “The second half of Mark centers on Jesus’ suffering. The passion story includes his decision to go to Jerusalem (10:32-34), events of the last days in Jerusalem (11:1–14:72), and finally his death on the cross

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<sup>2</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels As Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Huat Tan, *Mark: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, 45.

(15:1-47).”<sup>6</sup> In this section of the gospel, the author also presents the theme of discipleship through the narrative scenes of the disciples’ continual misunderstanding of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Spivey, Smith and Moody argue that this section weaves together the themes of messiahship and discipleship to reveal through Christ’s suffering what it means to be his disciple.<sup>8</sup> By developing this christological portrait, the author of the Gospel presents its message through many different themes and methods. Three themes that are important for understanding Mark 13, are the themes apocalypse, the kingdom of God, and discipleship.

Throughout the narrative, the author employs apocalyptic *topoi*. Meaning that, apocalyptic themes and motifs are used to convey a part of Jesus’s person and mission within the gospel. The last chapter discussed how Mark 13 is not an apocalypse by genre but uses apocalyptic themes and language to reveal truths for the readers. However, this use of apocalyptic language and themes does not only occur within Mark 13.

Elizabeth Shively presents an overview of the apocalyptic discourse that takes place throughout Mark. Shively concludes that in Mark, Jesus is characterized as being empowered by the Holy Spirit, and through examining the prologue of the gospel (1:1-13), that Jesus has come to destroy the rule and kingdom of Satan on earth.<sup>9</sup> Shively notes that the Markan narrative is set in this framework. She says, “Mark reveals the nature of a cosmic battle between heavenly beings. The characters inhabit a world in which the human struggles of the righteous correspond to a supernatural struggle between two opposing sides of good and evil.”<sup>10</sup> This theme continues throughout Mark as Jesus continually receives opposition from the scribes and the powers of

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<sup>6</sup> Robert A. Spivey, C. Clifton Black, and D. Moody Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning*, Eighth edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Spivey, Black, and Smith, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Spivey, Black, and Smith, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth E Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22-30* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 154.

<sup>10</sup> Shively, 148.

Satan. For example, in Mark 3:22-30 the scribes assert that Jesus is of Beelzebub, to which Jesus responds by noting that Satan could not drive out Satan. Then in a parable Jesus says, “But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered” (3:27). Shively argues that this narrative scene, “...refers to the inauguration of a task of judgment that continues through the course of Jesus’ ministry and culminates in the future.”<sup>11</sup> Within Mark’s story, this narrative scene in 3:27 is only one example of the apocalyptic discourse that takes place. Other examples of these apocalyptic *tcpoi* at work within the gospel are seen through Jesus performing exorcisms (e.g. 1:21-27; 5:1-20; 9:14-29), healing the sick (e.g. 1:29-34; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 5:21-43), and through his mighty deeds performed over nature (e.g. 6:45-52; 8:1-10; 11:12-14).

Shively argues that this representation of Jesus’s mighty deeds over spirits, sickness, and nature are commonplace features of apocalyptic literature.<sup>12</sup> Another example of the apocalyptic *tcpoi* at work in the narrative of Mark is seen through Jesus’s transfiguration. Macaskill notes, “The account of Jesus's transfiguration is one of the blocks of Markan text that connects most obviously with the apocalypses, reflecting a pattern of texts in which humans are transformed in some way as part of their experience of heavenly realities.”<sup>13</sup> The transfiguration of Jesus is the unveiling of his divine character, much like Jesus’s baptism where God proclaims him as his son.

Mark 13 specifically participates in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition as it includes many different common motifs such as persecution, perseverance, suffering, and the revealing of unknown knowledge. Although not an apocalypse itself, it participates in an apocalyptic

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<sup>11</sup> Shively, 149.

<sup>12</sup> Shively, 156-157.

<sup>13</sup> Grant Macaskill, “Apocalypse and the Gospel of Mark,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought*, edited by Benjamin E. Reynolds and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 67.

discourse which is embedded into the Markan narrative. Shively concludes that, “Mark engages in apocalyptic discourse in order to interpret and offer solutions for the oppression of the righteous. Specifically, Mark employs apocalyptic discourse to interpret the ministry, suffering and death of Jesus, and the suffering of those who follow him.”<sup>14</sup> It is through this thematic lens that Mark 13 must be interpreted, but this is not the only theme at play.

Interwoven into this apocalyptic discussion of Jesus’s opposition to the rule of the kingdom of Satan is the revelation of the kingdom of God. In 1:15, Jesus announces that the kingdom of God has arrived and that the hearers of this proclamation are to repent and believe the good news. Hays, Duvall, and Pate say, “The first half of Mark’s Gospel is devoted to demonstrating that the kingdom of God was present in Christ’s words and works (1:1 – 8:21).”<sup>15</sup> It is through Jesus’s words and works that the kingdom of God is revealed. This theme is interwoven into the apocalyptic *topoi* that are employed in Mark as it is through Jesus’s mighty deeds over spiritual powers, sickness, and nature that the kingdom of God is revealed and established. Not only this, but in Christ’s words the kingdom of God is proclaimed as seen in the parables taught in 4:1-34. Jesus reveals the nature of the kingdom of God and what the responsibility is for those who hear it.<sup>16</sup>

There is a shift in the second half of Mark of how the kingdom of God is revealed. In this half of Mark, the kingdom of God is revealed as not being of this world and through Jesus’s identity as the suffering Messiah. In 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34, Jesus reveals that he is to suffer, die, and be resurrected which reveals that the kingdom of God will be established and ushered in

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<sup>14</sup> Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel J. Hays, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 267.

<sup>16</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 267.

through suffering and the ultimate vindication to come.<sup>17</sup> The passion predictions are the revelation of how God's kingdom will overcome the other powers at work in the world and bring God's redemptive plan to fruition. Mark 13 mirrors the Messiah's role in the kingdom of God as a suffering servant and further reveals that the disciples must endure this same persecution and suffering (13:3-23) but ultimately will also be vindicated with the Son of Man (13:24-27).

In Mark 13, there is also a deep concern for discipleship. In 8:31-38, Jesus reveals that his messianic identity is one of suffering that will lead to vindication, and in this same discourse he teaches, "... If anyone want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." (8:34). Jesus continues to reveal a typology of discipleship through the misunderstandings of the disciples. In 9:33-37 Jesus teaches the disciples that whoever desires to be first must consider themselves last and least of all. A second example of this is seen in 10:35-45. Jesus once again teaches the disciples that if they want to be great, they must drink the cup Jesus drinks and must be a servant of others, which correlates to his own identity as "...the Son of Man [who] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (9:45). The theme of discipleship is revealed in the second half of Mark and Mark 13 adds much insight to this theme. Tan says, "... the discourse is chiefly about discipleship: how they are to be discerning when the Jewish world is awash with speculation about the arrival of the end, and how they are to have fortitude and commitment to the gospel in spite of persecution."<sup>18</sup> This revelation of the discipleship that Jesus desires is not demonstrated by the actions of the disciples but is rather exemplified through Jesus himself as in the passion narrative following the Olivet Discourse. He endures the persecution, suffering, and trials that he predicts his disciples will face

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<sup>17</sup> Hays, Duvall, and Pate, 267.

<sup>18</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 173.

in Mark 13.<sup>19</sup> The theme of discipleship will inform the reading of Mark 13 to reveal that the discipleship desired is not seen in the actions of the disciples, but of Jesus.

### **The Closer Literary Context of Mark 13**

To continue to build an informed understanding of Mark 13, the closer literary context of the passage must be analyzed as Mark 13 is deeply interwoven into what precedes and follows the chapter. This chapter fits into a more intimate subsection of the second half of Mark during Jesus's time in Jerusalem preceding his death that runs from 11:1-15:47. Mark 11-12 recount Jesus's entry into Jerusalem and subsequent controversies within the temple. Following Mark 13, the passion narrative begins in chapter 14, and the author tells of the last supper, Jesus's anguish in Gethsemane, and his arrest, trial, and death.

When looking at chapters 12-14 from a narrative perspective, Mark 13 evidently functions as a hinge teaching. Shively argues, "...Jesus' speech serves as an important hinge connecting what precedes and what follows. It both develops key themes of the Gospel and prepares the reader for the account of Jesus's arrest, trial and crucifixion."<sup>20</sup> Mark 13 functions as a comment on what has happened in the preceding chapters (11-12) and foreshadows what is to come in the following chapters (14-16).<sup>21</sup> This pattern is first witnessed through Jesus's denouncement of Jerusalem because of its faithless leaders compared to the call to faithfulness that Jesus's gives his disciples in Mark 13. Strauss notes that Mark 13 is conceptually linked to the preceding narrative scenes in 11:12-25 (cursing of the fig tree and clearing of the temple) and 12:1-12 (parable of the wicked tenants). He notes that in these sections Jesus displays that the

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<sup>19</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark*, 184.

<sup>21</sup> David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*, edited by Andreas Köstenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 511.

temple and Jerusalem have been rejected due to their wicked leadership.<sup>22</sup> In chapters 14-15, Jesus endures the same type of suffering and persecution that he foretells of in chapter 13 for his followers.<sup>23</sup> It is evident that Mark 13 in its closer literary context reveals a contrast between the unfaithful religious leaders and faithful discipleship Jesus desires of his followers. Further, Mark 13 is a prelude of the suffering that Jesus will experience. With this understanding of what precedes and follows the discourse in Mark 13, this thesis will now address the content of Mark 13.

### **Exegetical Analysis – Mark 13:1-37**

#### ***The setting – Mark 13:1-4***

*“<sup>1</sup>And as he was departing from the temple one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look! What stones and what buildings!” <sup>2</sup>And Jesus said to him, “You see these great buildings? Nothing will be left here, not a stone upon another which will not be destroyed.” <sup>3</sup>And as he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite of the temple, Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup>“Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be completed?””<sup>24</sup>*

The narrative scene of Mark 13 begins with Jesus leaving the temple with his disciples, following his controversies and denunciations of its authorities in Mark 11-12. As they were departing from the temple, an unnamed disciple marvels at the wondrous stones and buildings behind them. Tan notes that the remarks made by the disciple is warranted as the temple complex was regarded as one of the most beautiful buildings in all of Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> The temple building itself when viewed from a distance would glisten in wondrous colors due to it being constructed of gold and marble.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Jewish temple had gone under great revisions that began

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<sup>22</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 562.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth E. Shively, “What Type of Resistance? How Apocalyptic Discourse Functions as Social Discourse in Mark’s Gospel,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37, no. 4 (2015), 394.

<sup>24</sup> All translations provided in this exegetical analysis are the work of the author and are translated from the UBS5 Greek Text.

<sup>25</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 176.

<sup>26</sup> Tan, 176.

during the reign of Herod the Great from approximately 20 B.C., ending a few years before 70 A.D.<sup>27</sup> The stones themselves would have been magnificent in size and the retaining wall stones of the temple complex would have been standing 80ft to 175ft above the road level.<sup>28</sup> All this historical context validates the disciple's reaction, but reveals that they misunderstood Jesus's actions in chapters 11-12 of denouncing the temple.

In 13:2, Jesus responds to the disciple's amazement with a prophetic announcement of the destruction of the temple. The double negation of *οὐ μὴ* shows that Jesus is speaking with complete certainty of his claim as the double negative adds emphasis. Strauss notes that the idiom "stone upon stone" is an allusion to Haggai 2:15 LXX, which recalls the construction of the second temple.<sup>29</sup> Jesus here reverses the nature of the phrase in Haggai not speaking of its construction but of its destruction. In 13:3, the narrative continues with a change in its geographical setting as Jesus and his disciples are now outside of the city walls opposite of the temple complex, eastward across the Kidron Valley, on the Mount of Olives.<sup>30</sup> Tan articulates, "From the Mount of Olives, which offers a magnificent view of the Temple and has eschatological significance itself (Zech 14:1–4), Jesus's disciples ask questions about his prophecy. Their questions may be understood as referring to one event, although two aspects of it are being asked."<sup>31</sup> The unexpected response of Jesus in v. 2 sparks the question of the disciples that follows in vv. 3-4. Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask a two-part question: when will these things happen and what will be the sign for them? The *ταῦτα* in v. 4 poses an interesting complication to the scene. *Ταῦτα* is a plural demonstrative pronoun which translates to "this" in

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<sup>27</sup> Tan, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 27a. (New Haven: YUP, 2021), 868.

<sup>29</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 570.

<sup>30</sup> Strauss, 571.

<sup>31</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 177.

the singular, but the plural nature denotes that the disciples are asking of multiple things (these). Tan notes that the destruction of the temple could not have been a singular event, so the plurality of the demonstrative pronoun is fitting.<sup>32</sup> This scene sets the stage for the following answer given by Jesus in the discourse that follows.

### ***Rumours of the End – Mark 13:5-8***

*“<sup>5</sup>Then Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name saying that ‘I am he’ and they will lead astray many. <sup>7</sup>And when you hear wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed, it must be, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes throughout places and there will be famines. These are the beginning of the birth pains.”*

The narrative scene continues with Jesus’s response to his disciple’s question. Jesus’s answer in v. 5 begins with the imperative βλέπετε, the imperative form of the verb βλέπω, which means “to see” or “to watch.” This command is repeated three more times throughout the discourse (vv. 9, 23, 33) and is the introduction of the theme of watchfulness.<sup>33</sup> Tan argues that this command to see or to watch also carries a deeper significance. He says, “The Greek *blepō*, as used here, means both discernment (seeing beyond appearances) and alertness (being ready to take proper action). This word sets the tone for the whole discourse...”<sup>34</sup> The need for watchfulness is delineated further as Jesus begins to describe what the disciples must watch for. Jesus notes that there will be false messiahs, wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, and famines, but these signs must be measured against Jesus’s statement that the end is still not yet. Strauss rightly notes that this first statement to watch for messianic pretenders forms an *inclusio* structure with v. 21 and demonstrates the significance of the danger that false messiahs will pose to the disciples.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tan, 177.

<sup>33</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 572.

<sup>34</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 572.

These signs are often regarded throughout Scripture as heralds of the coming day of the Lord and these images are common within the Jewish apocalyptic tradition.<sup>36</sup> These events would have traditionally garnered an expectation that the end is near, but Jesus reveals that this is not the end, but only the beginning. The emphasis of this passage is not that when these signs appear that one is to expect the end but rather that this is only the beginning of what is to come. The description of these events is checked by the command to watch in the beginning of the section. These events will pose as potential harms to one's faith and well-being, but they must occur, and one must be on guard when they do. The phrase, “*δεῖ γενέσθαι*,” translates as “must happen” and reveals the sovereignty of God in the midst of such trying events. Strauss notes, “That such events ‘must happen’ means that God is in sovereign control and is leading history to its proper end.”<sup>37</sup> The events pose as threats to believers and serve as a source of great fear, but Jesus assures his disciples that they are necessary.

Jesus describes these events as birth pains, which is common within Jewish eschatological imagery. France says, “There is a birth to be looked forward to, but the wars, earthquakes, and famines of vv. 7-8 show only that it is coming, not when it will come.”<sup>38</sup> These events show only that the eschatological birth is coming but not when it is. This heightens Jesus's command to see or watch in v. 5 and pushes back against the Historicist and Futurist interpretations of this discourse. This section shows that the text is not about when these things will be fulfilled, but rather that the disciples are to remain watchful and on guard during these trying times.

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<sup>36</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 880.

<sup>37</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 573.

<sup>38</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 489.

### ***Persecution and Betrayal – Mark 13:9-13***

*“<sup>9</sup>But you must see! They will deliver you to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before rulers and kings because of me to testify to them. <sup>10</sup>And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations. <sup>11</sup>And when they bring you, delivering you over, do not worry beforehand what you are to say, but speak whatever is given to you in that hour, for it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup>And brother will deliver brother to death, and father their child, and children will rebel against parents and will have them put to death. <sup>13</sup>And you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”*

Following Jesus’s statements about the ensuing events, Jesus then describes the trials that the disciples will face in vv. 9-13. In v. 9, Jesus states that they will be delivered over to councils, beaten in synagogues and will testify before authorities because of him. Strauss notes that the councils mentioned here do not refer to the Sanhedrin, which was the highest religious court in Judaism. Instead, these councils refer to the local Jewish councils in Israel.<sup>39</sup> Jesus continues to reveal the coming persecution that his followers will face because of their faith in him. The statement that the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations in v. 10 is understood to be an authorial insertion. This insertion from the author or genuine claim of Jesus, has been interpreted as a prophecy that needs fulfillment before Jesus’s return. Strauss argues against this, articulating that during the composition of the Gospel of Mark this standard would already have been fulfilled as the gospel had reached the ends of the known world at the time, which would have been the Roman Empire.<sup>40</sup>

In 13:11 the description of the persecution in v. 9 continues, and Jesus tells the disciples that they need not fret about what they are to say in front of the councils when they are handed over; rather, they are to say whatever the Holy Spirit gives them in that time. This promise would have brought great comfort for the first hearers of this claim as many of the first Christians were unlearned people who would not have had the skillset to respond articulately in court

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<sup>39</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 574.

<sup>40</sup> Strauss, 575-576.

questionings.<sup>41</sup> Jesus brings those first hearers comfort as he reveals to them that it is not their duty to prepare but rather rely on the Spirit's working in them to boldly proclaim the gospel. Strauss comments, "Significantly, the promise here is for the right words to speak, not for physical protection or escape. The apostles are to follow the lead of Jesus, proclaiming the gospel boldly whatever the cost."<sup>42</sup> This claim develops the theme of discipleship. The model of this type of boldness that is to be had when handed over to courts is revealed through the passion narrative as Jesus embodies this boldness and courage when he is on trial. Within Mark the perfect model of discipleship is not exemplified by the disciples. Instead, it is through the example of Jesus that believers are to learn what true discipleship is.

This section is capped with Jesus's assertion that there will be a great deal of betrayal because of his name. However, it is the one that endures all of this persecution that will be saved. The graveness of the situation being described extends to the fragmentation of families, which alludes to Micah 7:6, where the same type of betrayal among fathers and sons, and daughters and mothers is described.<sup>43</sup> The claim, "And you will be hated by all because of my name..." in v. 12 refers back to v. 9, in that these events will occur because of Jesus himself. Furthermore, it also recalls Jesus's teaching in Mark 8:35 where believers are instructed to suffer in a sacrificial manner as a witness to Jesus.<sup>44</sup> This section is closed with the encouragement to endure and to remain steadfast to the end so that they will be saved. The emphasis is revealed not be on the events themselves, but once again on the response that the disciples are to have to them.

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<sup>41</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 306.

<sup>42</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 576.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Evans Shively, "Israel's Scriptures in Mark," in *Israel's Scriptures in Early Christian Writings: The Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by Matthias Henze, and David Lincicum (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 209.

<sup>44</sup> Shively, "Israel's Scriptures in Mark," 219.

### ***The Abomination of Desolation – Mark 13:14-23***

*“<sup>14</sup>But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it must not (let the reader understand) then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains, <sup>15</sup>then let the one who is on the housetop not go down nor enter to take anything out from his house, <sup>16</sup>and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. <sup>17</sup>And woe to those who are pregnant and those who are nursing infants in those days. <sup>18</sup>And pray that it may not happen during winter. <sup>19</sup>For in those days there will be a tribulation such as this as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until now and never will be. <sup>20</sup>And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no flesh would be saved at all. But for the elect, which he chose, he shortened the days. <sup>21</sup>And if anyone says to you, ‘Look, Christ is here! Look there!’ Do not believe it. <sup>22</sup>For false Christs and false prophets will arise and they will give signs and wonders to mislead, if able, the elect. <sup>23</sup>But you, be on guard, for I have told you all things beforehand.”*

As the dialogue continues, Jesus then provides what seems to be a more specific answer to the disciples’ questions, but in actuality remains greatly ambiguous. In vv. 14-23, Jesus says that when the abomination of desolation (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως) is standing (ἑστηκότα) where it should not, all those within the region of Judea should flee. Furthermore, he gives insight into the turmoil and tribulation that will be present in that time. Jesus begins with a description of the sign of when to flee and then describes how grave the situation will be during that time.

An important aspect of this passage that is necessary to address is the use of the phrase “the abomination of desolation” and the following authorial insert of “let the reader understand.” The use of the phrase “the abomination of desolation,” evokes Danielic imagery and is derived from Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11.<sup>45</sup> To understand the Markan use of this phrase, one needs to first understand the use and understanding of this phrase in the book of Daniel. Marcus says, “This mysterious phrase originates in the OT book of Daniel (11:31; 12:11; cf. 9:27), where it refers to an idolatrous statue, an ‘abomination,’ that makes God’s Temple ‘desolate’ by defiling its holy space and thus causing pious worshipers to avoid it.”<sup>46</sup> It is widely agreed upon that the

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<sup>45</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 577.

<sup>46</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 889.

fulfillment of the Danielic prophecy regarding “the abomination of desolation” took place in approximately 167/168 B.C.E. when Antiochus IV Epiphanes erected a statue of the Syrian god Baal Shemayin and sacrificed a pig upon the altar within the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> Mark’s usage of this phrase needs to be further inspected as many scholars propose that this prophetic word given by Jesus speaks to a second fulfillment.

The first view of this phrase is the Futurist perspective. Scholars within this view determine that the prophecy regarding “the abomination of desolation” has not historically been fulfilled and will be fulfilled during the end-times.<sup>48</sup> This perspective lends to the belief that “the abomination of desolation” is synonymous with the Johannine “beast/anti-christ” or the Pauline “man of lawlessness.” Furthermore, the view asserts that “the abomination of desolation” would desecrate a rebuilt (third) temple in Jerusalem. This interpretation raises the question of why would Jesus tell this to the disciples and command be watchful if it were not meant for them? Henceforth, if the warning was only meant for the last generation of Christians who will witness “the abomination of desolation,” the passage loses all sense of impact and rhetorical force for all other generations of Christians.<sup>49</sup>

A second view of the fulfillment of this passage is the Historicist interpretation. This view asserts that the prophecy regarding “the abomination of desolation” was fulfilled in the historical past in close proximity to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Within this view there are multiple options put forth as the fulfillment of the prophecy. These include Pontius Pilate (when he ordered Roman soldiers to surround the city bearing images of Roman gods),

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<sup>47</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 608; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 889; Strauss, *Mark*, 577. The fulfillment of this prophecy is not described within the book of Daniel, but in 1 Macc. 1:54 and Josephus’ *Antiquities*, 12.5.4 §253 it describes this historical event with Antiochus “Epiphanes” IV as the fulfillment of the Danielic prophecy.

<sup>48</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 579; Strauss provides an overview of these views not an argument.

<sup>49</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 181.

Caligula (when he ordered for a statue of himself to be erected in the temple), a general reference to the events leading up to the destruction of the temple, Titus (when he entered the temple sanctuary at its destruction), or the Jewish zealots (who desecrated the temple through appointing a man high priest who had no priestly training and had him perform sacrifices in the temple).<sup>50</sup>

None of these fit the description given by Jesus in this discourse. The first option given occurred before Jesus's discourse on the Mount of Olives therefore does not fit the framework for the phrase.<sup>51</sup> The second option also does not work as Caligula's statue was not erected.<sup>52</sup> The third option proposed by the Historicist view also falls short due to the grammatical nature of the phrase. Within this phraseology the direct object of the sentence, βδέλυγμα, is neuter in gender where the perfect participle linked to it, ἐστηκότα, is masculine. This creates some ambiguity regarding its reference being an individual/thing or a series of events preceding the temples destruction. Witherington argues that it refers to an individual rather than something or a series of events, which nullifies the third proposition.<sup>53</sup> The view that Titus or the Jewish Zealots were the fulfillment of this prophecy fall short as they would have taken place too close to the destruction therefore not fitting the framework of people having enough time to flee from the region. Irrespective of any of these proposed fulfillments, none of them fit the frame given by Jesus in Mark 13:14-23. Watts notes, "All these suggestions fail because the events did not take place, or were too soon or too late, and/or did not result in the temple's desolation."<sup>54</sup> Evidently, the Historicist perspective on this prophecy does not suffice either.

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<sup>50</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 578-579.

<sup>51</sup> Strauss, 578.

<sup>52</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 180.

<sup>53</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 298.

<sup>54</sup> Rikk E. Watts, "Mark," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 224.

The last view taken of this passage is the Symbolic interpretation. The symbolic view of this passage sees that Jesus was not alluding to a specific individual or event as “the abomination of desolation,” but was rather utilizing the Danielic tradition of the phrase and its fulfillment (which the disciples would have remembered) to allude to the grave danger that will take place during this time.<sup>55</sup> Kiel argues, “One would analyze this portion of the discourse (13:14–23) differently if one does not assume that Mark intended to connect the phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως with any specific historical occurrence. One might suggest, for example, that the symbols are meant to be multivalent and not coordinated with specific events.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus provides a temporal marker signifying a visible sign for the disciples but through the mismatched grammar remains obscure in his description, offering no other temporal references that the disciples could discern.<sup>57</sup> Kiel explains that this section as a whole (vv. 14-23) builds the rhetorical force of the previous parts of the discourse by continuing not to provide a specific and clear answer to the disciples’ question of what sign will be given when these events are about to take place.<sup>58</sup> Kiel importantly notes, “The imperative βλέπετε concludes this section of the discourse, forming an *inclusio* with its beginning (v. 5) by prescribing an identical course of action: ‘Keep watch!’ ... The tribulations are meant to engender the more consistently advocated watchfulness.”<sup>59</sup> Kiel here accurately describes the purpose of the discourse and notes that Jesus is less concerned with providing the sign which the disciples asked for, than providing them with a description of the cost of discipleship.

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<sup>55</sup> Micah D. Kiel, “The Open Horizon of Mark 13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (2017): 152.

<sup>56</sup> Kiel, 152.

<sup>57</sup> Kiel, 154.

<sup>58</sup> Kiel, 154.

<sup>59</sup> Kiel, 156.

Here Jesus is not providing solely a prophetic word relating to a single fulfillment, but rather through the *inclusio* formed in v. 5 and v. 23 to watch (βλέπετε), provides a paraenesis to his disciples.<sup>60</sup> He instructs them to keep watch, remain faithful, and endure hardship in trying times by providing context through calling upon their remembrance of the horrific fulfillment of the Danielic prophecy.

### ***The Coming of the Son of Man – Mark 13:24-27***

*“<sup>24</sup>But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling out from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup>And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with much power and glory. <sup>27</sup>And then He will send out the angels and will gather His elect from the four winds, from the end of earth until the end of heaven.”*

The next section of the text begins with a strong adversative conjunction (ἀλλά) which signals the beginning of a new subject being discussed.<sup>61</sup> The previous subject discussed the vague temporal sign that signals when those in Jerusalem and Judea must flee because surely Jesus’s prophetic words in v. 2 will come to fruition. In this section Jesus provides a description of events that will unfold, and visualizes a new phase of God’s redemptive plan that is separate from the destruction of the temple.<sup>62</sup> The section begins with the phrase “Ἀλλ’ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις,” which translates as “But in those days,” which is a common introduction for passages of eschatological significance (e.g. Jer. 3:16; Joel 2:28; and Zech. 8:23).<sup>63</sup> In vv. 24-25, Jesus proceeds to state that following the tribulation described in vv. 14-23, the sun and moon will no longer give light, stars will fall out from heaven, and the powers within heaven will be shaken. Watts notes that these references to the state of the cosmos echo OT passages such as Ezek. 32:7;

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<sup>60</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 894.

<sup>61</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 299.

<sup>62</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 299.

Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Isa. 13:10 LXX; and Isa. 34:4 LXX.<sup>64</sup> In vv. 26-27 Jesus states that the Son of Man will come in the clouds and send out his angels to gather his people. These verses are also verbal allusions to OT passages. The passages alluded to here are Dan. 7:13-14 (the Son of Man coming in the clouds) and a combination of Zech. 2:6 and Deut. 30:4 (the gathering of the elect from the four winds).<sup>65</sup> The reference in Mark 13:27 to the “four winds” (τεσσάρων ἀνέμων) is a verbal allusion to the re-gathering of exiled Israelites in Zech 2:6 and more literally refers to generally the entirety of the known world; however, in this usage it is not the Israelites that are being gathered but rather God’s chosen people.<sup>66</sup>

It is necessary to view this section in light of its prophetic OT allusions as it is from this context that Jesus’s words are being drawn.<sup>67</sup> As Tan notes, this section of the discourse is saturated with metaphorical language, but to what end is its usage?<sup>68</sup> When this section is examined against the preceding statements in the discourse regarding false messiahs, it becomes evident that here Jesus displays who it is that the disciples are to be waiting for. Macaskill says, “Instead of looking for such figures in the midst of catastrophe, the followers of Jesus should wait ever more expectantly for the arrival of the true Messiah, the Son of Man who is at the gates (13:26, 29).”<sup>69</sup> When viewed in light of the previous discourse in Mark 13 and the Markan narrative as a whole, it is evident this passage functions to show the disciples that against all the other calamities that take place and imposters that arise, it is the Son of Man who comes in glory and power that they are to be awaiting. In the midst of the trials and tribulations that will spark eschatological fervor and speculation, the disciples are commanded to watch, keep guard, and

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<sup>64</sup> Watts, “Mark,” 225.

<sup>65</sup> Watts, 227.

<sup>66</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 185; Watts, 227.

<sup>67</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 505.

<sup>68</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 183.

<sup>69</sup> Macaskill, “Apocalypse and the Gospel of Mark,” 73.

persevere in their faith, and that this in vv. 24-27 is how the true Son of Man will return.<sup>70</sup> The title of the Son of Man has been used previously in the Markan narrative (8:31) describing the suffering and death that he will endure, and in that same idea throughout the Olivet Discourse Jesus reveals that his followers will also endure great suffering, but are to keep watch for the Son of Man who will return and gather his chosen people.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Lesson from the Fig Tree – Mark 13:28-31***

*“<sup>28</sup>And from the fig tree learn its parable: when its branches become tender and puts out its leaves you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>Thus, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near at the gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly, I say to you that this generation will not pass until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass, but my words will never pass.”*

Following Jesus’s eschatological statement regarding the coming of the Son of Man, he then begins a new section within the discourse with a penultimate parable of fig trees. The fig tree has been used previously within the Markan narrative as a parable relating to the eschatological fate of Israel in Mark 11:12-14, 20-21.<sup>72</sup> In 13:28-29, the fig tree is now being used to illustrate how the previous discussion regarding the trials that Jesus’s followers face, like the leaves budding on a fig tree, display that summer is near, and summer in this case relating back to Jesus’s prediction of the destruction of the temple in v. 2. As previously explained, the discourse follows the ABA’B’ pattern as vv. 5-23 relate to the destruction of the temple (A), vv. 24-27 relate to the coming of the Son of Man (B), vv. 28-31 relate back to the destruction of the temple (A’), and vv. 32-37 now back to the coming of Son of Man (B’).<sup>73</sup> The fig tree for this illustration is an adept analogy as the tree is one of the only deciduous trees in Israel, meaning that it changes with the seasons.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 185.

<sup>71</sup> Shively, “What Type of Resistance,” 188-189.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 915.

<sup>73</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 175.

<sup>74</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 511.

In v. 30, Jesus then proclaims, “Truly, I say to you that this generation will not pass until all these things have happened” (Mark 13:30). This verse has often been misconstrued as a failed prophecy due to unfulfillment of “these things” in 13:4 (referring to the entirety of the preceding discourse vv. 5-27) in the generation present for the saying of the prophecy. However, Strauss notes that this reading of the text does not prove viable and the reference to “this generation” is in relationship to those present with Jesus during this teaching.<sup>75</sup> This view would see the prophecy as fulfilled as a biblical generation was considered to be approximately 40 years, and if this discussion took place in roughly 30-33 A.D. those hearing these words would have been alive during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.<sup>76</sup> This view of the generation relating to the disciples hearing Jesus’s statement as the generation that will not pass away until these things are completed fits with Tan’s structuring of the discourse and its different subjects of relevance. Nonetheless, the message of Mark 13 is not primary concerned with the fulfillment of these events, but how the disciples are to live in the midst of them. In v. 31, Jesus then asserts that his words are everlasting even surpassing the lifespan of heaven and earth. This claim attests to the validity and permanence which Jesus speaks with.<sup>77</sup>

### ***The Unknowable Hour – Mark 13:32-37***

*“<sup>32</sup>But concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not the angels in heaven, nor the son, except the father. <sup>33</sup>Be on guard, be watchful, and pray. For you do not know when the time will be. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey. He leaves home and he gives his servants authority, each with his work, and he commands the gatekeeper to keep watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep watch! For you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. <sup>36</sup>Lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup>And which I say to you, I say to all, keep watch!”*

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<sup>75</sup> Strauss, *Mark*, 594.

<sup>76</sup> Strauss, 594.

<sup>77</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 513.

The last section of the Olivet discourse closes with another parable now concerning the coming of the Son of Man as discussed in vv. 24-27. In this parable Jesus uses the analogy of a man who goes away on a journey and his servants do not know when his return will be. Nonetheless, irrespective of their unawareness regarding his return, Jesus displays that the duty of the servants is to be prepared at all times for their master's return, continuing to complete the work set out before them by their master.

Before addressing the rhetorical impact and purpose of this parable as Jesus's final statement in Mark 13, it is necessary to address v. 32 and the seemingly denigrating claim Jesus makes about himself. Here, Jesus claims that no one – no man, no angel, nor even the Son – knows the hour of the Son of Man's return except God the father. The claim that the Son does not know the hour of his return poses as a threat to Jesus's divinity. If the Son is one with the Father, would the Son not share the same knowledge and therefore know when his return will be? Although alarming, it is not outside of reach to harmonize this claim made by Jesus. France articulates, "The focus of v. 32 is not on Christology, but on eschatology...Even the Son himself, who might most have been expected to share the secret, does not know. The situation calls, therefore, not for calculation of dates or careful observation of signs, but for constant readiness."<sup>78</sup> France rightly notes that this assertion is not speaking to Mark's Christology or the identity of Jesus but rather it functions in respect to the eschatological significance of the coming day and displays that the disciples should not speculate about when it will come. Macaskill notes that the job of the disciples is not to know the day when Christ will return; rather, it is to know and differentiate who he is compared to the false messiahs that will come in Jesus's name and lead many astray (vv. 5-6, 22).<sup>79</sup> As the parable shows, the disciples are to be concerned with

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<sup>78</sup> France, 516.

<sup>79</sup> Macaskill, "Apocalypse and the Gospel of Mark," 74.

remaining steadfast in their faithfulness to God and persevering throughout the ensuing trials and tribulations.

### Conclusion

The rhetorical thrust of this final parable delivered by Jesus must be read in light of this word: βλέπετε. Kiel notes, “The word βλέπετε runs like a refrain throughout the discourse (in vv. 5, 9, 23, and 33). At the beginning, this word seems best translated as “watch out” or “guard (yourselves).” By the end of the discourse, it becomes almost synonymous with the need simply to stay awake (γρηγορεῖτε).”<sup>80</sup> This places the final parable within its context of watchfulness. Jesus here illustrates that regardless of the state of affairs of the world, the conduct of the disciples is not to change. The disciples are to remain watchful and attending to their duty to be faithful to God. Tan articulates that this parable is deeply concerned with discipleship.<sup>81</sup>

Within its narrative context, the theme of discipleship becomes even more paramount as the disciples will soon be tasked by Jesus to remain awake and watchful in the garden of Gethsemane. However, in this case the disciples fail to remain awake and watchful, and rather it is Jesus who displays these attributes and thus once again, as seen all throughout the Markan narrative, exemplifies the ideal typology of discipleship. Jesus closes the Olivet Discourse with the final command to remain watchful and alert, highlighting not the speculation of when these things will be fulfilled, but rather the disposition of the disciples in the midst of the times to come. The call here given by Jesus to his disciples and to readers throughout all history is to remain courageous, watchful, prepared, and faithful to God while His sovereign plan for the cosmos unfolds. With the focus of this passage now set on the type of disciple believers are to be in difficult times, and away from prophecy fulfillment, one can now read Mark 13 from an

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<sup>80</sup> Kiel, “The Open Horizon of Mark 13,” 157.

<sup>81</sup> Tan, *Mark*, 187.

informed perspective in conjunction with the rest of the narrative and understand the passages great importance for the gospel narrative and explicate its rhetorical impact.

By taking into consideration the genre, the narrative and thematic context, the development of plotlines, characters, setting, and the overall story readers are enabled to view the text with the correct lens. The Historicist and Futurist interpretations of the text do not suffice in adequately interpreting the story of Mark 13 as some readers are always left with the text not meaning much to them. However, the interpretation provided above reveals the meaning of Mark 13 through a narrative-critical approach by which all readers across all times and generations can understand that Mark 13 is important for them. It is evident that Mark 13 encourages and teaches believers that in the face of trials and tribulations they are to remain steadfast, courageous, reliant on the Holy Spirit, watchful, and ready for the return of the Son of Man, Jesus.

## Conclusion

This thesis began by displaying how the traditional isolating interpretative approach to Mark 13 not only misleads readers to focus on the wrong aspects of the text but can even lead to adverse effects on individual's mental and spiritual health. The dominant approach to reading Mark 13 consists of uprooting the text from its narrative context and reading it as an apocalyptic or prophetic handbook to things that have already come or are still yet to come. This approach to the text is primarily taken as Mark 13 has often been treated as an insert in the story of Mark or even as a completely different genre compared to the rest of the gospel. This thesis proved that this isolating approach to the text is flawed as it neglects the intrinsic interconnectedness of Mark 13 to the rest of the story of Mark. By examining Mark 13 from a narrative-focused perspective, this thesis proved that Mark 13 is less concerned with what will come and more profoundly concerned with who is coming and the type of disciple believers are to be amid the waiting.

Chapter one of this thesis began by providing a brief overview of Mark 13 and its reception history. The purpose of chapter one was to provide a layout of Mark 13 from a literary and interpretative standpoint. This examination of the passage's history of interpretation provided a framework for understanding why a renewed reading of the text is needed. The examination of the different interpretative approaches displayed how the Historicist and Futurist interpretations of Mark 13 remove the passage from the narrative and lose sight of the rhetorical impact the author aimed to achieve. Furthermore, these readings uproot this chapter out of the

narrative, thus impeding one from recognizing the instrumental developments in different themes that are built throughout the story of Mark and, more importantly for this thesis, Mark 13.

From this understanding of interpretative landscape of Mark 13, chapter two examined the literary claims made about Mark 13, namely, that it is a part of the apocalypse genre. The main theory concerning Mark 13's genre asserts that the text is better categorized as a "Little Apocalypse" within the larger gospel narrative. Thus, this conclusion has functioned as the catalyst for scholars to interpret the text separately. However, after examining the apocalyptic genre and comparing it to the contents of Mark 13, it is evident that it contains characteristics similar to those of the apocalyptic genre. Still, there is insufficient evidence to assert that it is a different genre than the rest of the gospel.

How this apocalyptic nature of the text functions still needed to be understood, but with the understanding that Mark 13 is intrinsically connected to the rest of the gospel, the question of the genre of Mark needed to be addressed. This was necessary as a text's genre speaks directly to how the text is functioning and thus how it should be interpreted. The traditional genre applied to the Gospel of Mark is a type of biography called *bios*. Upon further examination, it was concluded that the Mark better fits into the genre of *euangelion*. In this genre, texts are understood to function as a pronouncement of the good news concerning God's redemptive plan for the world through the life and ministry of Jesus. The Gospel is centred around the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to reveal the redemptive story of God. Therefore, from viewing this as the functioning of Mark, it was necessary to understand the proper interpretative lenses needed to interpret the story of Mark. Based mainly on the work of Jeannine Brown, David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, it was shown that to read Mark as a story, a narrative-critical lens is essential. This section established how to read Mark as

a story and the methodology used to interpret Mark 13 in chapter three. This chapter established that Mark 13 is deeply connected to the rest of the story of Mark. Therefore, it was shown that Mark 13 needs to be interpreted from a narrative-critical lens to understand how meaning is communicated through the narrative.

From understanding the overall function of the genre of the Gospel of Mark and the methodology that is needed to interpret it, this thesis then applied the narrative-critical approach to Mark 13 to provide a renewed understanding of the passage that views it in light of the artistry of the author and the story as a whole. From this interpretative method, it became glaringly evident that the Mark 13 is not chiefly concerned with the connecting of prophecies to specific times and dates throughout history. All the more, the text was shown to be heavily concerned not with the events described but with the one who the disciples are to watch for when the events pass; it reveals that Jesus is the Son of Man who the disciples are to keep watch for. Mark 13 reveals the characteristics that the disciples are to embody during this time of suffering, persecution, and waiting. The repeated command given by Jesus to “watch” throughout the discourse highlights that the disciples are to be always ready for his return. Jesus reveals that the disciples are to persevere through the trials, remain steadfast in faith, reliant on the Spirit, and keep watch for Jesus’s return.

When read through the narrative lens, this passage becomes alive and applicable to Christians from all generations. By understanding the genre of Mark as *euangelion*, one can clearly see that the story of Mark functions to reveal the good news of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1) and all that it encompasses. It was highlighted that stories are not merely meant to only be read, but they serve as conduits, imparting teachings that have tangible impacts on readers’ lives. From this view, interpretations and readings of Mark 13 should not be overly focused on the events

described and their fulfillment. The passage is rather focused on the disciples knowing the identity of the true Messiah and Son of Man, and the type of disciple believers are to be while waiting for Jesus's return. This is shown through the repeated command to "watch" throughout the discourse. Essentially, the disciples are not to focus on events and times to come, but rather to know the one who is coming, the Son of Man. From this viewpoint, the passage is rhetorically charged, and when Mark 13 is read, observed, and absorbed, the discourse can breathe life into readers across all times. The rhetorical impact this passage should have on its readers is that they are to watch, keep guard, remain steadfast, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, and persevere through times of suffering, persecution, and waiting. This is the typology of discipleship that followers of Jesus are to model as they wait for his return and the culmination of God's redemptive plan for all creation. This thesis highlights the importance of a hermeneutic that is faithful to the nature and context of a passage. A flawed hermeneutic, as shown in the introduction, can lead to fear, anxiety and hurt, but a faithful hermeneutic, like the one exemplified in this thesis, can bring to the readers of a text strength, courage, faith, and hope in God.

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