

Liberation FROM Empire

Demonic Possession
and Exorcism in
the Gospel of Mark

CHERYL S. PERO

Liberation from Empire investigates the phenomenon of demonic possession and exorcism in the Gospel of Mark. The Marcan narrator writes from an anti-imperialistic point of view with allusions to, yet never directly addressing, the Roman Empire. In his baptism, Jesus was authorized by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to wage cosmic war with Satan. In Jesus' first engagement, his testing in the wilderness, Jesus bound the strong one, Satan. Jesus explains this encounter in the Beelzebul controversy. Jesus' ministry continues an on-going battle with Satan, binding the strong one's minions, demonic/unclean spirits, and spreading holiness to the possessed until he is crucified on a Roman cross. The battle is still not over at Jesus' death, for at Jesus' parousia God will make a final apocalyptic judgment. Jesus' exorcisms have cosmic, apocalyptic, and anti-imperial implications.

For Mark, demonic possession was different from sickness or illness, and exorcism was different from healing. Demonic possession was totally under the control of a hostile non-human force; exorcism was full deliverance from a domineering existence that restored the demoniac to family, to community, and to God's created order. Jesus commissioned the twelve to be with him, to learn from him, and to proclaim the kingdom of God by participating with him in healing and exorcism. Jesus expands his invitation to participate in building the kingdom of God to all those who choose to become part of his new dyadic family even today.

The Rev. **CHERYL S. PERO** received her Ph.D. in New Testament from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), where she presently serves as Director of the Rev. Dr. Albert "Pete" Pero, Jr., Multicultural Center. Her awards and honors include: Dissertation Year Fellow (2007–2008), Fund for Theological Education, Atlanta, Georgia; Congressional Black Caucus Spouses Scholarship (2005–2006), 2nd Congressional District, Chicago, Illinois; North American Doctoral Fellow (2003–2004); and Fund for Theological Education, Atlanta, Georgia. Pero is also the author or co-author of several articles and book chapters.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Liberation FROM Empire

“This important volume by Cheryl S. Pero makes a contribution both to methodology and to exorcism studies. Pero roots her work in a unique combination of linguistic, narrative, and social science approaches set within the context of empire studies. The result is an innovative look at Jesus and unclean spirits within the larger imperial realities reflected in the developing plot of Mark’s Gospel. Students and scholars alike will be interested in the rich detail and thoughtful insights throughout this study.”

David Rhoads, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

“Cheryl S. Pero has performed the great service in this work of exploring for us the many layers that make up the Gospel of Mark and the richness of its meaning for us today. She focuses on the first-century text and context with twenty-first-century sensibilities—in such a way as to honor the integrity of the ancient work while at the same time she delivers a message that goes to the heart of our concerns today. This is nowhere clearer than her incredible success in showing how the often bizarre and misunderstood practice of exorcism functions to lay bare the bondages in which we humans live and point a way to liberation. Her sophistication in deploying narrative, social science, and post-colonial methodologies is a joy to behold. Thereby she sharpens our understanding of both the ancient text and the possibilities that the text opens up for contemporary readers. As a theologian who is not an expert in biblical exegesis, I find this work full of delightful surprises and exceedingly rich in its implications for contemporary understanding. Pero has changed the way in which I will read Mark.”

Philip Hefner, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

“Cheryl S. Pero offers a careful, compelling and comprehensive treatment of the complex subject of demonic possession and exorcism in the Marcan gospel. The exegetical fruits of her work derived through the application of narrative, social scientific and postcolonial analyses are informative, enlightening, and instructive for contemporary times. The book is a must for all within and beyond those communities who are keen to explore and understand the phenomenon and its many implications.”

Monica J. Melanchthon, MCD University of Divinity

Liberation FROM Empire

Studies in Biblical Literature

Hemchand Gossai
General Editor

Vol. 150



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pero, Cheryl.

Liberation from empire: demonic possession and exorcism
in the Gospel of Mark / Cheryl S. Pero.

pages. cm. — (Studies in biblical literature; vol. 150)

Includes bibliographically references and index.

1. Demonic possession. 2. Bible. N.T. Mark—
Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

II. Series: Studies in biblical literature; v. 150.

BS2545.D5P47 235'.4—dc23 2012026560

ISBN 978-1-4331-1749-7 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4539-0927-0 (e-book)

ISSN 1089-0645

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the “Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available
on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council of Library Resources.



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29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

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Printed in Germany

This book is dedicated to all those who struggle for liberation
from oppression and possession anywhere.

καὶ [Ἰησοῦς] προσκαλεῖται τοὺς δώδεκα
καὶ ἤρξατο αὐτοὺς ἀποστέλλειν δύο δύο
καὶ ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων.

And [Jesus] was summoning the twelve
and he began to send them out two by two
and he was giving them authority over the unclean spirits.

—Mark 6:7

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Series Editor Preface

More than ever the horizons in biblical literature are being expanded beyond that which is immediately imagined; important new methodological, theological, and hermeneutical directions are being explored, often resulting in significant contributions to the world of biblical scholarship. It is an exciting time for the academy as engagement in biblical studies continues to be heightened.

This series seeks to make available to scholars and institutions, scholarship of a high order that will make a significant contribution to the ongoing biblical discourse. This series includes established and innovative directions, covering general and particular areas in biblical study. For every volume considered for this series, we explore the question as to whether the study will push the horizons of biblical scholarship. The answer must be *yes* for inclusion.

In this volume, Cheryl Pero argues that Jesus' exorcisms of demonic spirits in the Gospel of Mark were not only real, but indeed were an integral part of the building of an Empire within the concreteness of historical geopolitical realities, that in themselves were in opposition to the inauguration of this kind of Empire. Thus, the recording of the exorcisms is a manner in which Mark pointed to the expansion of the Empire. Moreover Pero argues that exorcism is a critical means of restoration to both family and community of those who have been affected by demonic spirits. In so doing purity within the community is also restored. Thus, she concludes that Jesus' exorcisms in Mark are not to be equated with healing of illnesses and diseases, important as those might be, but a larger systemic issue that sought to establish and restore the Kingdom of God. This copious and extensive volume provides for the Church a platform for a renewed interest and commitment to the liturgical and theological importance of exorcism. This study will undoubtedly provoke a renewed discussion of the role of exorcism and the manner in which it might lead to richer understanding of the ministry of Jesus.

The horizon has been expanded.

Hemchand Gossai

Preface

By the grace of God I was able to investigate the topic of Demonic Possession and Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark in my dissertation. I have come to understand that there are a multiplicity of levels of oppression and possession from which Jesus is liberating people through exorcism in the Gospel of Mark. We, in the twenty-first century, explain demonic possession by means of psychology and medical pathology, in a post-enlightenment, rational, scientific manner. Mark's understanding was that demonic spirits were real and that Jesus' exorcisms were statements about building the Empire of God in historical geopolitical and spiritual circumstances that were antithetical to God's kingdom building directive. Demonic possession and exorcism in Mark serve to illuminate the conflicts with both human and nonhuman forces, empires, if you will.

By introducing Jesus Messiah as the Son of God at the very beginning of the gospel (1:1), the Markan narrator identifies the protagonist in this narrative as Jesus. The audience is drawn into the story in empathy with Jesus. Jesus' baptism was the pivotal empowering event for his own commissioning. Initially the plotline is straightforward: Mark's Jesus, inaugurating the kingdom of God, comes into conflict with nonhuman forces, representing the kingdom of Satan. This plotline becomes complicated very quickly when Jesus comes into conflict with human forces in the characters of scribes and the Jerusalem authorities, and sometimes even the disciples. Jesus calls and commissions a cadre of twelve men, passing on his own power and authority to them. Although he cannot change human behavior, Jesus' words and actions become his way of modeling resistance to all those who are struggling to think in divine ways as they too challenge empire.

With every exorcism, Jesus binds the strong one and Satan's minions, continually expanding the boundaries of God's empire. With every exorcism, the kingdom of God draws closer. With every exorcism, Jesus liberates those who are oppressed and possessed by forces beyond their control. Empire in this material is about both spiritual and geopolitical forces, non-human and human adversaries. Through the centuries since Jesus lived, audiences of every age have

been invited to participate in kingdom building. And the invitation is still there for those who have faith in the power of God to change the way things are. My hope is that this material contributes to our contemporary ecclesial discussions about baptism and the denunciation of the demonic that we make in that sacrament. Through our baptism we too have been given the power and authority to exorcize the demonic, to liberate the oppressed and the possessed, and to participate in Jesus' kingdom building activity.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Heidi Burns, Executive Editor at Peter Lang, for initiating this project by seeking me out. I would also like to thank Ms. Jackie Pavlovic, the Publishing Supervisor at Peter Lang, for her patience in overseeing my work during these very long months. These two women have worked with me to make sure that all was in order during the past year.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Lynn Kauppi, a colleague and a friend who took on the job of copyediting this book as a labor of love. Dr. Hemchand Gossai, the Studies in Biblical Literature editor at Peter Lang Publishers, brought a new set of eyes to the manuscript; thank you for your sharp observations and clear attention to the details. None of this would have been possible without my Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago colleagues and Dr. David M. Rhoads, my advisor in the PhD program at LSTC and the person who directed my dissertation writing.

Special thanks is also extended to my family members and friends who supported me in this enterprise. But very special thanks goes to my husband, Dr. Albert “Pete” Pero, Jr., without whose encouragement, affirming focus and persistent urging this project would not have come to fruition.

Abbreviations

Ancient Literature

Miscellaneous

LXX	the Septuagint
JPS	<i>JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS translation</i> . Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
NA ²⁷	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Based on the edition of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle. Edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland. 27th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001.
PGM	<i>Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> . Edited by Karl Preisendanz. Leipzig: Teubner, 1928.

Hebrew Bible

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Judg	Judges
1 Sam	First Samuel
1 Kgdms	1 Kingdoms

1 Kgs	1 Kings
1 Chron	1 Chronicles
Ps(s)	Psalms(s)
Isa	Isaiah
Hos	Hosea
Zech	Zechariah

Apocrypha

Bar	Baruch
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Pseudepigrapha

<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>

Dead Sea Scrolls

1QapGen	<i>Genesis Apocryphon</i>
1QH ^a	<i>Hodayot</i> (Thanksgiving Hymns)
1Q10	Psalms copy a
4Q201	<i>Enoch</i> , copy a
4Q202	<i>Enoch</i> , copy
4Q242 PrNab ar	Prayer of Nabonidus
4Q560 Exorcism ar	Exorcism
11Q5	Psalms
11Q13	Melchizedek fragment

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Rev	Revelation

New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
NHC	Nag Hammadi Corpus

Greco-Roman Literature

<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i>
<i>Morb. Sacr.</i>	Hippocrates, <i>De Morbo Sacro (The Sacred Disease)</i>
<i>Philops.</i>	Lucian, <i>Philopseudes (The Lover of Lies)</i>
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vita Apollonii (The Life of Apollonius)</i>

Modern Literature

AARSR	American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion
AB	The Anchor Bible
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
BDAG	Frederick W. Danker, W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by F. Blass and A. Debrunner. Translated and revised by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by George Arthur Buttrick. 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
SBLSP	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SNTMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
<i>TTJ</i>	<i>Trinity Theological Journal</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Introduction

Presuppositions

From the extremely enticing voice of the serpent in the Garden of Eden to a herd of pigs jumping off a cliff to their own demise in the sea to a little girl's swirling head spewing green vomit,¹ possession and exorcism have been intriguing, curious phenomena. Demonic possession has become equated with evil, and exorcism has signified the triumph of good over evil. The canonical Gospel of Mark presents contemporary Christian audiences with narratives describing demonic possession and exorcism in ancient Syro-Palestine. As I investigate these episodes in Mark, I shall demonstrate that while demonic possession leads to destructive domination, exorcism leads to liberation from the oppression and possession of empire. The most vivid picture of Jesus' ministry recorded in the Gospel of Mark is one of exorcism. In the biblical world, Jesus' exorcisms were holistic and powerful events. Jesus not only restored to wholeness and community² those who were broken and marginalized, but also, in the process, attempted to restore the broken community itself to wholeness, urging those whom he had exorcized to return home. In this manner, Jesus' exorcisms not only demonstrated that the kingdom of God had drawn near, but also gave individuals and communities an actual experience of God's empire.

Mark's understanding of "demonic" includes any force that dominates over others (see 10:41–44). In the Markan witness, the demonic is manifested in two basic forms: in the figures of Satan and the demons/unclean spirits³ who are Satan's minions; in the figures of the authorities, in particular, the rulers of the Gentile nations (the Roman Empire) and their collaborators in Palestine (the High Priests and other leaders). These characters dominate those whom they rule. The connection between the rule of Satan and the rule of Rome is made clear in several places in the Markan text because there is a parallel in Mark between the "empire of Satan"—which possesses, occupies, dominates people—and the "empire of Rome"—which possesses, occupies, dominates first-century Palestine. In both cases, the people are victims of possession. Just as we must take account of the influence of Satan and the demons, so we must

account for the full impact of the oppressive nature of the religio-political environment, in terms both of Roman imperialists and of the Judean authorities.

For Mark, God's people lived in fear of both Roman and Judean authorities, as well as other malevolent non-human forces that had the potential for tearing families and communities apart through, for example, isolation, enslavement, deportation, death, and purity regulations. For the ancients, malevolence was real and manifested itself in various ways, but especially in demonic possession. The demonic in Mark caused communities and families to become broken. Mark's Jesus addressed this brokenness tangibly by demonstrating that the kingdom of God was real and present. His use of authority and power allowed those who initially did not see Jesus as Messiah, including the twelve, or those who were demon possessed, to grow in faith and to experience liberation from God through Jesus. The very essence of God's salvation, liberation, was at stake in Jesus' ministry as he engaged Satan and the demonic in an ongoing cosmic struggle, as I will demonstrate in this investigation.

Where there is demonic possession, there must also be a method of becoming "unpossessed" by a demon. "Exorcism" is the technical term that describes the act of expelling the demonic. According to Eric Sorenson, there is a long and respected tradition of treating demonic affliction traceable back to the third millennium bce in ancient Mesopotamia and Persia, where the practice of exorcism most likely arose.⁴ There are some references to demons, demonic possession, and exorcism in ancient extrabiblical materials (e.g., Lucian's "The Lover of Lies," Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyana, the Greek Magical Papyri, and Hippocrates' *De Morbo Sacro*), but there are scant references to demons, demonic possession and exorcism in Hebrew scripture and intertestamental literature. What we see in contemporary extrabiblical materials is that popular folk healers' exorcisms followed a particular ritual and used particular language.⁵ Jesus' exorcisms, on the other hand, changed the ritual and formula because, unlike folk healers, he used no special secret ritual, and employed no charms, protective items, or magical incantations. Jesus simply commanded unclean spirits to leave their hosts. Because all of his exorcisms were successful, Jesus established not only the model for exorcism but also the name by which other exorcists/folk healers exorcized successfully, as in Mark 9:38: "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name...."

The canonical Gospel according to Mark records eight summaries of exorcistic activity, four exorcisms performed by Jesus, and the narration of the Beelzebul controversy, where Jesus is himself accused of being demon possessed. Yet Mark never uses the verb ἐξορίζω or ἐξορκίζω [to exorcize]. Mark uses particular nouns: τὰ δαιμόνια [the demons], τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ

ἀκάθαρτον [the unclean spirits], and ὁ Σατανᾶς or Σατανᾶν [Satan]. Mark's also uses particular verbs: Jesus ἐπετίμησεν [rebuked], ἐκβάλλων [cast out], and Jesus commanded the possessing entity ἔξελθε [to come/go out from/of] those whom they possessed.

The Markan narrator uses a combination of these nouns and verbs in three basic phrases to describe Jesus' exorcistic activity: ἐξέβαλεν τὰ δαιμόνια [he cast out the demons] in 1:34 and 1:39, and in 3:11–12 τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα...ἐπετίμα [the unclean spirits...he rebuked]. In 1:28 Jesus ἐπετίμησεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον [he rebuked the unclean spirits]. In 3:14–15, Jesus gives the disciples authority ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια [to cast out demons]. In 6:7 the Markan narrator refers to Jesus conferring authority on the twelve over τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων [the unclean spirits]. In 6:13 Mark tells his audience that the disciples δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλλον [cast out many demons].

Mark's third phrase is found first in 5:8, where Jesus uses a form of ἔρχομαι when he commands: ἔξελθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου [Come out of the man unclean spirit!]. In 7:29 the Markan narrator has Jesus tell the Syrophoenician woman: ἐξελήλυθεν...τὸ δαιμόνιον [the demon has gone out...]. In 9:24 Jesus ἐπετίμησεν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ [he rebuked the unclean spirit] saying: “ἔξελθε [come out]” and the unclean spirit ἐξηλθεν [came out of] the young boy. The combination of these nouns and verbs in the Markan narrative establish the parameters of the passages and episodes that I will be examining more thoroughly later.

In his foundational 1968 article, “The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories,” Howard Clark Kee undertakes a thorough examination of Mark's language of exorcism beginning with the connection between the Semitic root נָצַח [meaning “the exercise of power over the forces that stand in the way of the fulfillment of God's purpose”] and its New Testament equivalent ἐπιτιμᾶω [to rebuke⁶] by way of an examination of texts from Qumran (especially 1QapGen, XX, 28–9), Hebrew scripture, intertestamental literature, the LXX, rabbinic miracle stories, and literature contemporaneous with the New Testament. He concludes: “One significant factor which binds [Jesus' exorcisms] to that specific form of [eschatological] hope as it was expressed in literature of sectarian Judaism is the term נָצַח (= ἐπιτιμᾶν), by which was meant the word of command that brought the hostile powers under control.”⁸

Ethelbert Stauffer also connects Hebrew Scripture with the LXX, understanding נָצַח as God's “reproving Word which calls down destruction....”⁹ He continues: “ἐπιτιμᾶω becomes a technical term for the powerful divine word of rebuke and threat.”¹⁰ The New Testament builds on this tradition limiting the word of rebuke to usage by God and Jesus, as God's

agent. “He is also Lord over the demons and bends them to his will. He is the Stronger who penetrates into the house of the strong man and drives out demons.... Mark graphically depicts the way in which Jesus, proclaimed by God as the Son, takes up the struggle against the demon... Thus the unconditional lordship of Jesus is powerfully revealed in this ἐπιτιμᾶν.”¹¹ And, although Jesus rebukes unclean spirits in much the same way that he rebukes sickness/illness and nature, my examination is restricted by the nouns in the accusative (and sometimes the dative) that identify the objects of Jesus’ exorcisms.

The first definition of ἐκβάλλω in the BDAG entry is to “force to leave, drive out, expel...—Used esp. of the expulsion of spirits who have taken possession of a person...”¹² Illuminating this definition, Friedrich Hauck asserts that there is a sense in which expelling/repelling/casting out is particularly associated with “demons, who have settled into men [sic] as in a house...into which they have unlawfully penetrated.”¹³ Because Jesus has authority over demons, demons cannot ignore him, and he needs no special rituals to expel them, as did exorcists contemporaneous to Jesus. Jesus’ exorcisms are “a sign that the kingdom of God is being inaugurated.... He thus engages in exorcism in conscious connection with His preaching of the coming of the kingdom of God. Hence He charges His messengers...to exorcise as part of their commission.”¹⁴ And Jesus’ exorcisms are so successful that eventually others will exorcize in Jesus’ name (9:38)!

Finally, Mark uses forms of the verb ἔρχομαι [to come, to go] as imperatives in Jesus’ direct speech to unclean spirits and demons (5:8, 9:24) as well as in the pluperfect and the perfect in his descriptive summaries of Jesus’ exorcistic activity in the exorcism episodes proper (7:29, 9:24). What emerges is that Mark’s language of exorcism included ἐκβάλλων τὰ δαιμόνια [casting out demons], ἐπετίμα τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον [rebuking unclean spirits], and forms of ἔρχομαι with both spirits/unclean spirits and demons, an expansion of Kee’s analysis of Mark’s language of exorcism.

The three Markan summaries of Jesus’ ministry all use two of the nouns and two of the verbs that I have discussed: Jesus both “casts out demons” and “rebukes unclean spirits.” In the passages where the twelve are commissioned and sent out, they are “given authority to cast out demons.” The incident with Peter demonstrates how Satan can influence humans; Jesus’ rebukes Peter for acting Satan-like. The unknown exorcist is “casting out demons in Jesus’ name.” The Beelzebul controversy not only frames the meaning of exorcism, but also fits into Mark’s language of exorcism; Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus’ exorcism episodes proper include all three nouns and verbs related to exorcism in Mark.

Whenever Jesus performed an exorcism, he gave the people a glimpse of God's kingdom, God's empire. When Jesus broke boundaries and reformed community, he subverted the authority and power of Rome and the Jerusalem religious establishment. When he proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God, he was modeling resistance to empire and the toppling of the kingdom of Satan, offering as a substitute to Satan's authority and power, the authority and power of the kingdom of God.

The Markan eschatological and cosmological constructions of the world—very different from that of the Roman Empire—were intertwined. Implicit in Mark are the competing claims of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Caesar, and the kingdom of Satan. In Mark's eschatology, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan were engaged in a war for authority and power over the creation where Satan seeks to control God's creation. Jesus, according to the will of God, is commissioned to eliminate Satan's minions, the unclean/demonic spirits, in order to prove that Satan can never win God's creation over to Satan's purposes. Mark demonstrates that the kingdom of God does overcome Satan. However, Jesus' struggle with human powers of malevolence is more complex than his struggle with Satan and the demonic. Jesus seems to lose battles with human powers because he has no power to control other human beings, in contrast to his power to control demons. In each exorcism, creation is, in some sense, restored to its original wholeness. The ultimate eschatological end remains unwritten, though, because audiences in every age are invited to participate in the spread of the kingdom of God.

A Brief History of Interpretation

First-century CE Mediterranean peoples presupposed the presence of an active spirit world inhabited by both good and evil spirits.¹⁵ During the period described in Hebrew scripture, the existence of a spirit world was acknowledged and spirits were understood as relatively benign beings.¹⁶ This most likely was a result of the practice of theocracy with YHWH as the head of state combined with "the development of monotheism" where the ideas of "daimons and spirits tend to become subordinated to the central figure and regarded as his ministers or 'angels'."¹⁷ Eric Sorensen reports that some approved magical acts, e.g., the interpretation of dreams and divination of signs, were performed within the Yahweh cult; these were in contrast to magical acts that were not approved, i.e. e., predicting the future, practiced in the surrounding cultures.¹⁸

Although the Israelites interacted with other cultures, during the postexilic and intertestamental periods the impact of Persian culture¹⁹ evolved into collective thinking about the spirit world that differentiated between two distinct and opposed realms reflecting good and bad.²⁰ If good things happened

one could attribute one's good fortune to the presence of good spirits; if bad things happened it was due to the influence of bad spirits. This dualism became the norm during the New Testament period.²¹ The life struggle of individuals, communities, and even the cosmos itself was perceived to be a battle between the forces of good and bad. Interestingly, disease was attributed to the presence of the demonic in both the second temple and New Testament periods.²² But demonic possession is different from sickness/illness and exorcism is different from healing for the Markan narrator, as I intend to demonstrate.

Graham Twelftree's interest in the new quest for the historical Jesus led him to examine the Jesus of the Gospel writers through the lens of exorcism to rediscover and gain a clearer picture of Jesus. He found that *1 Enoch*, Tobit, *Jubilees*, the Qumran Scrolls, Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, the magical papyri, Lucian of Samosata, Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*, and rabbinic literature can help to reconstruct ancient "understandings of spirits, demons, possessions, magic, healing, healers, exorcism and exorcists".²³ He concludes that Jesus was an exorcist, that exorcism was a unique, important part of Jesus' ministry, and that the early church "remembered Jesus as an exorcist."²⁴ These above-references writings, in addition to the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, are relevant to the Gospel of Mark for understanding the "cosmo-spiritual" context of Jesus' exorcistic ministry.

There are two references in Hebrew scripture to demons, Deut 32:17 and Ps 106:37, both of which address the Israelites' idolatrous sacrifices to demons. There are three citations²⁵ referring to Satan in Hebrew scripture: Num 22:22–35; Job 1:6–12, 2:1–7; and Zech 3:1–2. Numbers 22:22 describes the angel of the Lord²⁶ standing in the road in order to guide Balaam: "But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the Lord placed himself in his way as an adversary" (*JPS*). In vs. 34 Balaam acknowledges that the angel of the Lord was present on his journey to oppose him from disobeying God. The Hebrew common noun used to identify the angel of the Lord, "as an adversary," is שָׂטָן (šāṭān), a satan.

In Job 1:6–12 (repeated in 2:1–7), the satan is identified as a tester of Job, one who "advises Yahweh to test him by stretching out his hand against him. Yahweh gives the satan power over all his goods...."²⁷ Zechariah 3:1 says: "Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him" (NRSV). Hebrew Scripture texts depict the satan as an adversary, an opposer, a tester of humans related to God. Eric Sorenson adds that references to possessing entities in the Hebrew Scriptures "appear as non-possessing figures in the service of God."²⁸ He explores incidents of exorcism and includes 1 Sam 16:14–23 among his