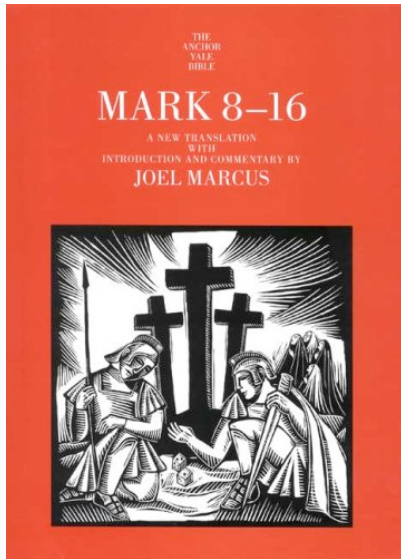


RBL 06/2010



Marcus, Joel

Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

The Anchor Yale Bible

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pp. lx + 608.
Hardcover. \$55.00. ISBN 0300141165.

William Telford
Durham University
Durham, United Kingdom

It was a decade ago (1999) when the first volume (*Mark 1-8*) of Joel Marcus's excellent commentary on the Gospel of Mark in the Anchor Bible Series was published. I reviewed it for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (see *JTS* 53 [2002]: 191-96). Since then, his second and final volume has been eagerly anticipated. In these intervening ten years, the Markan commentary industry has been in full production, with English-, French-, and German-language commentaries being published at the rate of almost one a year (e.g., those by É. Trocmé, É. Cuvillier, J. R. Donahue and D. J. Harrington, J. R. Edwards, R. T. France, F. J. Moloney, C. Focant, C. S. Rodd, L. Schenke, M. E. Boring). Given the competition, then, as well as the dedication, perseverance, consistency, and informed scholarship that such a long-term project entails, it is a great pleasure to report that this concluding volume by Marcus, now Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Duke Divinity School, lives up to all expectations, preserves its place as one of the foremost English-language commentaries on this fascinating but enigmatic Gospel, and commendably carries forward the aims of the prestigious series in which it appears. Under the wing of Yale University Press since 2007, and with John J. Collins as general editor, the Anchor Yale Bible series seeks to bring the most recent biblical scholarship to as wide an audience as possible, and academics, pastors, and general readers are unlikely to be disappointed with this, the latest volume in the series. Scholarly in its content and

judicious in its treatment, Marcus's commentary can be read with profit by anyone from a Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or nonreligious background.

As in the first volume, Marcus offers his own translation of each individual section of the Gospel; Notes that explain translation choices, highlight exegetical problems, and convey technical information; and separate (though sometimes overlapping) Comments that place each passage in its literary, historical, and theological context, separates Mark's own contribution from the tradition(s) he received, and explains what the text would have meant for its first-century readers—or hearers. In the front matter and back matter, the reader is again supplied with a useful supporting apparatus, comprising a preface, list of figures, principal abbreviations, bibliography, appendices (on "The Jewish Leaders in Mark," "The Meaning of Christ = Messiah," "History-of-Religions Backgrounds to the Transfiguration," "The 'Son of David' Title," "The Sadducees," "The Youth Who Ran Away Naked," "Historical Problems in the Markan Sanhedrin Trial," "Crucifixion," "The Empty Tomb," "Markan Redactional Vocabulary"), a glossary, and three detailed indices (commentators and modern authors, subjects and scripture, and other ancient references). In the first volume, the main text was clearly delineated into a prologue (1:1–1:15) and three major sections (1:16–3:6; 3:7–6:6a; 6:6b–8:21), a division that would be found uncontroversial by most Markan scholars. In this second volume, the proposed structure is again conventional, comprising three further major sections (8:22–10:52; 11:1–13:37; 14:1–15:47), and an epilogue (16:1–8), followed by a "Postscript: The Markan Ending," which deals with the secondary endings.

While they are reflected in the commentary itself, the reader will need to go to the sixty-five page introduction supplied in the first volume to find a systematic statement of the author's key ideas and positions on the various issues surrounding the Gospel as well as an excellent account of the state of current research on it. For Marcus, the date of composition is estimated at around 70 C.E., the Markan community having lived in the wake of the Jewish revolt against Rome and the Gospel having been composed in close geographical and temporal proximity to the war in Palestine (66–73 C.E.). Arguments for this proposed date and setting are reinforced in the current volume by what Marcus has to say in particular in the fifth main section (11:1–13:37) and especially on the eschatological discourse in chapter 13. Palestinian Jews' refusal to pay their imperial taxes was a trigger for the war, and this is the issue taken up in the question about tribute (12:13–17), for example (826). "The phrase 'wars and rumors of wars' [13:7] fits the presumed time and circumstances of the Gospel's composition" (875–76), he claims, and the deceivers of 13:6 and 22 "join the crowded field of sign prophets, 'messiahs' and other religious enthusiasts in Palestine and its environs in the years leading up to and including the Jewish War" (879–80). The councils and synagogues to which believers will be turned over (13:9) are equated with the kangaroo courts instituted by Zealot leaders during the

revolt (882), the “abomination of desolation” (13:14) is “the occupation of the Temple by the Zealots near the beginning of the war (winter of 67–68 C.E.)” (890–91) or a revolutionary leader such as Eleazar son of Simon or Phanas, the high priest appointed by the Zealots (891), and the flight urged upon those in Judea is the Jerusalem community’s (historically disputed) flight to Pella (895).

A second distinctive feature of Marcus’s understanding of the Gospel, and one that follows on from his earlier book, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster Knox, 1992), is the notion that the Markan text reflects “the Deutero-Isaian conception of God’s ‘way,’ his triumphal progress up to Jerusalem in a saving act of holy war that will liberate and enlighten his elect people and demonstrate his gracious sovereignty over the world” (591). The influence of this new exodus theme, along with the apocalyptic eschatology that informs it, is seen especially in the fourth main section (8:22–10:52) of the Gospel, where Jesus’ journey to suffering and death in Jerusalem is the true fulfillment of Isaian prophecies, not revolutionary struggle against the Romans. Here, as evidenced by the “way motif” (e.g., 8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 52), the passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34), the ransom saying (10:45) or blind Bartimaeus’s cure from blindness and subsequent following of Jesus “on the way,” the Evangelist’s narrative is seen to display the influence of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant songs (esp. Isa 52:13–53:12), as does the sixth major section (14:1–15:47), the passion narrative, and especially Jesus’ later (demonic) cry of dereliction from the cross (15:34).

There is much to be gained, then, from this commentary and from the approach that Marcus takes. Since his is an exposition of the Markan text, not a reconstruction of the life and thought of the historical Jesus, he is cautious about what might go back to Jesus himself, recognizing that the Gospel is the product of someone who was active in shaping, to a greater or lesser extent, the traditions about him. Marcus is sensitive, therefore, to the Evangelist’s contribution to the developing tradition and hence to the tensions that arise in the narrative between pre-Markan tradition and Markan redaction, to the aporias or narrative inconsistencies that may reflect the attempt both to represent the Markan community’s past while at the same time addressing its present and future. “The basic point of view adopted,” he declares of his approach, in particular, to the passion narrative, “is middle of the road. The Markan passion narrative, like the Markan Gospel in general, is a mixture of memory and theological insight, a ‘two-level drama’ [in the words of his own teacher, J. Louis Martyn]” (927).

Attuned to source and redaction, he is thus quick to point the reader to typical Markan vocabulary, or common redactional themes, or even to alert us to what the Evangelist does *not* say. Of the so-called “rich young ruler” in 10:17–22, for example, we are

reminded that “[i]n Mark, however, the man does not seem to be young ... and there is no indication that he is a ruler” (720), or, in the case of the eschatological discourse (13:1–37), the “punishment of the nations” motif, an apocalyptic Jewish commonplace, is absent, a state of affairs that may reflect either an emphasis of the historical Jesus or the rejection of his message by Jews in the Markan situation, but its subsequent embracing by the Gentiles (cf. 13:10 and 907).

Among other things, readers look to commentaries to supply the kind and quality of background that will enable them to situate what they are reading appropriately within the world out of which the ancient text springs, and here, it should be said, Marcus’s commentary excels. The Old Testament, early Judaism, nascent Christianity, as well as the wider Greco-Roman world are all invoked to illuminate the relevant Markan passages, as, for example, in the case of 9:41–42 and the widespread ancient motif of the Two Ways (694), or in the case of the Markan Jesus’ appeal to “the beginning of creation” (10:6), where Marcus’s parallels for this “return to paradise” or Edenic motif range widely through Jewish and Christian history, including the patristic period, the Middle Ages, and even, with Joni Mitchell’s song “Woodstock,” our more contemporary times. Ancient cultural information highlights textual language that may seem perplexing to our own age, as, for example, the choice of *telaugos* (“clearly”) in the description of the healing of the blind man (8:25), where we are told that “[i]ts usage here reflects the most common ancient theory of vision, according to which sighted creatures see by means of light beams that come out of their eyes rather than into them” (596), or the examples of inexplicable opposition to Jesus (e.g., 5:17; 6:2–3) for which he offers a demonological explanation, tracing these cases to the influence of malignant spirits (cf. 1:23–24, 26; 5:6–7; 8:33; 9:26; and 10:36).

Marcus’s nuanced knowledge of early Judaism leads him to correct some common misconceptions, for example that Jewish delimitation of days began *exclusively* from sundown and that Jews could not *sometimes* reckon days from sunrise (see 14:12 and Mark’s alleged un-Jewishness, 944); or that Jewish men did not carry water in earthenware jugs but only skins, a misguided commonplace that he traces only to the turn of the twentieth century (see 14:13 and 945); or that “the Davidic Messiah [was] invariably a ‘this-worldly’ character” (1105–6); or that “the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch” (1122). The Old Testament provides important background in particular for Mark, and frequent reference is made to suggestive passages that are claimed to illuminate the Markan text, especially its exodus traditions, as already mentioned (see, e.g., 615), or the “Righteous Sufferer psalms” that are “echoed throughout the Markan passion narrative” (983).

Though more rarely cited, parallels within the Hellenistic world are also appealed to, such as Homer, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Sallust, Cicero, and Xenophon for the 8:35 “losing one’s life” saying (626). The most effective of his arguments relate to the background provided by ancient rituals of accession to kingship for the Markan portrayal of Jesus’ mockery (see, e.g., 1046–47 and the paradigmatic example given by Alexander the Great), or with respect to crucifixion as parodic enthronement (1133), or with regard to the transfiguration (9:2–8), for which he supplies an excellent appendix.

The results of archaeology, too, are freely drawn upon, with informed comments, for example, on the high priest’s house (14:53, possibly the Palatial Mansion, a large Herodian structure on the eastern slopes of the Upper City, 1001), the inscription of Pontius Pilate (15:1, prefect or governor—not “procurator,” 1026), the ossuary of Alexander, the son of Simon (the Cyrenian?) (15:21 and 1041), and the cave-tombs in and around Jerusalem, “only four of the nine hundred-plus tombs so far discovered [being] sealed with circular stones” (15:46 and 1072).

Above all, the reader looks to the commentator for sound evaluation of the text and its many vagaries and perplexities, and Marcus, in this respect, proves an able and sophisticated guide to the many historical, exegetical, textual, literary, and even moral problems that are raised by the Gospel of Mark. Passages such as 10:18a (“Why do you call me good?”), for example, are recognized for the difficulties they engender, this particular crux being “more than a fossil left over from an early, pre-Markan stage in tradition history” but, although “probably a historical memory,” reflective, at the same time, of the Evangelist’s own apocalyptic pessimism (724, 726). Tensions between the fifth commandment (10:19), the honoring of father and mother, and the blessings pronounced by the Markan Jesus on those who abandon them (10:29–30) are clearly acknowledged and discussed (737ff.). Sometimes a middle road is taken between alternate scholarly views, such as Marcus’s willingness to entertain *both* a royal, messianic *and* an exorcistic, Solomonic dimension to Mark’s use of the “Son of David” title (10:46–52 and 762–63), a title toward which he seems to have such ambivalence when applying it to Jesus (cf., e.g., 12:35–37). While adopting a normal view with respect to the aporia in 10:46 (Jesus’ arrival in Jericho and just as abrupt departure), seeing it as a gap later to be filled rather than a lacuna created by omission (758), he is not above recommending, at other points, a bold textual emendation, as, for example, in 15:16 (“into the courtyard—that is, *of* the praetorium,” emphasis added), where no manuscript offers the genitive. Interesting literary observations on the text are given, such as the alternation between simple and compound linkage of sentence components (*parataxis* and *hypotaxis*) in two-part controversy stories such as 12:13–17 or 12:18–27, where Jesus’ reply follows his opponents’ challenge (822, 830–31, 832). Where Markan ideology raises ethical concerns, as, for example, with the issue of the text’s anti-Jewishness, Marcus offers gentle direction

to the reader (“Our parable [12:1–12] thus moves in the direction of supersessionism ... but that does not mean that present-day Christian readers are required to follow it there,” 814), or provides background that relates the Evangelist’s thought to his historical context and hence relativizes it (see, e.g., 814).

Given the distinctiveness of Marcus’s approach, his tradition and redaction-critical perspective, his choice of a Palestinian origin and setting for the Gospel, and for a Jewish apocalyptic background, it is not surprising that elements of his treatment of the Gospel will prove controversial. My review of the first volume drew attention to these: the insufficiency of evidence for the persecution of Christians during the Romano-Jewish War, the relative paucity of emphasis on those Hellenistic elements that make the Gospel distinctive, the tendency to downplay elements that distance the Gospel from a purely Jewish or even Palestinian environment (e.g., the faulty knowledge of Judaism or of regional geography), the mitigation of the Evangelist’s harsh treatment of the original followers of Jesus, his tilting against “corrective Christology” approaches, the uneasy tension between the text’s putative Jewish apocalyptic outlook and its interest in Gentiles and the Gentile mission, or its Isaianic Christus Victor thrust alongside a more Hellenistic “Son of God” Christology, and so on. The nature of Markan Christology (as well as soteriology) is clearly a matter of continuing dispute among scholars, and some would question Marcus’s reiterated suggestion that the Markan Jesus “is not just a new David but a new Adam” (851; cf. also 636, 640), and hence a more Jewish and less Hellenistic “Son of God.” The Evangelist does have reservations about the title “Messiah,” however, and particularly the “Son of David,” and Marcus himself admits that “we are left with the impression that Mark has a genuinely ambivalent attitude toward the Davidic image” (1119).

One wonders, too, if the male disciples’ miscomprehension is being downplayed in 9:10, when their “questioning what the rising of the dead meant” is taken to refer to Jesus’ resurrection as opposed to the general resurrection of the dead (643, 648), or whether the ostensible foolishness of their womenfolk in asking who would roll away the stone (16:3) is viewed as a lament rather than a question (1084), or the explanation for their silence “to be sought on the level of the Markan community, where fear of persecution is creating a temptation to squelch the gospel message (cf. 13:9, 11–13)” (1087).

Views will differ over Markan sources and redaction. Marcus joins those who argue for the independence of Mark and John, for example, and hence for a pre-Gospel passion narrative. Such a view is defensible but difficult to sustain with respect to the considerable overlap that exists between such passages as Mark 14:3–9 and John 12:1–8 (see 926, 934). Marcus’s claim that “there was probably a preexistent account of Jesus’ trial before Pilate,” which the independence theory also leads to, is undermined by its numerous

implausibilities, as well as by the assertion that it also formed “the basis for the construction of the Sanhedrin trial as well” (1032).

Anyone who reads this commentary will come away with a very strong impression of the influence of the Old Testament on Mark. Here Marcus’s moderate position may cloud his judgment where the generative power of these texts is concerned. While he confesses to the probability that “in some instances, the Gospel writers or their sources did historicize prophecy, creating narrative features out of OT motifs” (928), he thinks that “Crossan’s dichotomy between ‘history remembered’ and ‘prophecy historicized’ ... is a false one; at certain points in the passion narrative, rather, we are probably dealing with ‘history scripturized’ ” (928–29).

Historical judgments are difficult to make, and while Marcus usually proceeds with proper caution, there are times when this reviewer paused over his evaluations. While the second of the passion predictions (9:30–32) “is probably not a historical reminiscence but a piece of Markan theology” (669), the first (8:31) is deemed to go back to Jesus in some form and has not been created by Mark or a Christian predecessor (606). Despite abundant evidence for the fictional character of 11:1–6 (the finding of the colt) and 14:12–16 (the finding of the upper room), two similar stories that emphasize, Marcus notes, Jesus’ clairvoyance, the claim is made that “[t]his judgment ... is not a necessary one; in both cases there may have been prearrangement between Jesus and some confederates in Jerusalem” (946). Many, including myself, would also have reservations with the notion that Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in 13:1–2 was not a *vaticinium ex eventu* (871), that the Markan Jesus’ self-designation as “Son” (13:32) might be authentic (914), that the incident of the youth who ran away naked (14:51–52) may be historical (as well as symbolic) (1000), and especially with the view that “it is also possible that [Jesus’ body] was missing on the third day for the reason implied by the Gospels themselves—because Jesus had risen bodily from the dead” (1137).

While Marcus’s treatment of the apocalyptic discourse is one of the highlights of this second volume of his commentary, his exegetical judgment that “[t]he overall purpose of Mark 13 is not to dampen eschatological enthusiasm but to awaken it” is one that others have disputed (876). His textual judgments (text-critical or translational) are invariably sound, although his choice of “dominion of God” for “kingdom of God” throughout seems to me to be unfortunate, with renderings such as “before they see the dominion of God fully come in power” (9:1 and 573) producing a jarring note on what is otherwise accurate, fluent, and restrained translation. A few other small choices left me unconvinced, however, such as his treatment of the awkward statement in 9:12b (“Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things,” NRSV) as a question (647), or his adoption of the longer reading of 14:62a (“You have said that I am” in place of “I am”), despite its

poorer attestation (1006). A few small corrigenda, moreover, need to be made in a future edition in what is otherwise, from a typographical point of view, an immaculate text: “Withered Fig Tree” should read “Withered Tree” (lvi line 28); “describes” should read “describe” (815 line 6); insert “be” after “may” (1006 line 3). After these few final minor points, let me reiterate my major appreciation for the quality of this second and final volume of the commentary. Joel Marcus is to be congratulated for his achievement. Together with the first volume, it will make an enduring contribution to Markan studies, and all its readers, scholars or laypersons alike, have cause to be grateful to him for opening up the Gospel to them in this way.