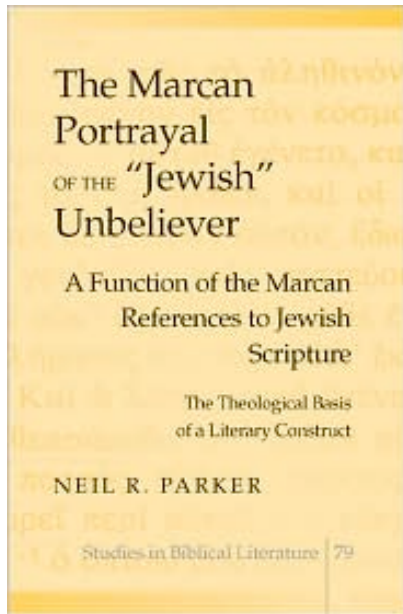


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Parker, Neil R.

The Marcan Portrayal of the "Jewish" Unbeliever: A Function of the Marcan References to Jewish Scripture: The Theological Basis of a Literary Construct

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In this project, Neil R. Parker offers a careful examination of the Marcan Evangelist's use of Jewish scripture. Through this examination, he seeks to understand how the Evangelist's hermeneutical activity informs his portrayal of Jewish unbelievers. At the heart of this investigation is the question of whether the Evangelist's portrayal of Jewish unbelievers is actually intended to be a historical representation. This review will proceed with a summary of each chapter and conclude with a brief critique and evaluation.

After a brief introduction that offers a cursory discussion of previous scholarship, chapter 1 provides methodological considerations for Parker's examination of Mark's use of Jewish scripture. Parker provides terminology for describing different types of scripture references, discusses the importance of establishing the manuscript history for the cited passage, identifies various ways in which New Testament writers apply Old Testament passages, and promotes redaction criticism as a viable method of identifying the Evangelist's intent. He concludes his chapter on methodology by examining the redactional influence on Mark 4:11–12 and Mark 1:2–8. Parker concludes that the former passage is entirely a Marcan creation, while the latter can be attributed to pre-Markan tradition.

In chapter 2, Parker provides two test cases in which he uses his methodology to examine Mark's use of Jewish Scripture. The basic method that Parker uses is as follows. First he provides tradition-historical analysis in order to determine what degree of a particular passage can be attributed to Markan redaction and what degree can be attributed to pre-Markan tradition. Second, he determines the nature of the Markan reference to Jewish scripture, (e.g., direct reporting, free indirect reporting, free direct reporting, etc.). Third, he establishes the meaning of the Markan passage. Fourth, he establishes the meaning of the Jewish scripture referenced in the Markan text. Finally, he pools the conclusions of the previous steps in order to characterize the Evangelist's hermeneutic activity in the examined Markan text.

Parker applies this method to both Mark 4:11–12 and 1:2–8. He concludes that Mark 4:11–12, a text that is largely the creation of the Markan Evangelist, uses a reference to Isa 6:9–10 in order to establish the divinely instituted spiritual blindness of “those outside”—a group that Parker identifies as Jews. Mark's hermeneutical activity, therefore, presents the unbelieving Jews in Mark's Gospel as people purposely blinded by God, a blinding that results in their obduracy. Regarding Mark 1:2–8, Parker concludes that the text, which is largely a part of pre-Markan tradition, demonstrates a positive attitude toward the Jewish people and reflects a time when the church articulated its identity through continuity with Judaism. Therefore, according to Parker's two test cases there is a contrast between the hermeneutical activity of the pre-Markan tradition and that of the Markan Evangelist. The former evidences a positive attitude toward Judaism and the Jewish people, while the latter evidences a negative attitude.

Before analyzing additional Markan texts, Parker makes a clarification regarding what appears to be a negative portrayal of the Jewish people by the Markan Evangelist. He argues that the Markan text has both a factual meaning (the facts expressed in the text) and a literal meaning (the author's intent in presenting facts). In light of this distinction, Parker claims that, while the factual meaning of Mark's text might place the Jewish people in a negative light, the literal meaning of Mark's text does not do so. This claim is based on Mark's intended readership, which Parker concludes is largely, if not entirely, Gentile. Thus, Mark is trying to communicate a message to Gentiles, a group for whom the unbelief of Jewish contemporaries of Jesus would be irrelevant. Because of this lack of relevance to the intended readership, Mark's factual reading (Jewish unbelief) cannot be equated with its literal meaning. Instead, Parker claims, the Evangelist is using the “unbelieving Jews” in his Gospel as a literary construct to represent the unbelievers in his own community. Therefore, despite how “anti-Jewish” Mark's Gospel might be in appearance, it is not so in fact, as the unbelieving Jews are only representatives of unbelievers in general.

The final chapter seeks to confirm the conclusions established by the text cases in chapter 2. Parker considers Mark 2:23–28; 7:1–23; 10:2–10, 17–22; and 12:1–12. Regarding Mark 2:23–28, Parker concludes that 2:23–26, verses attributed to pre-Markan tradition, contain no anti-Jewish sentiment, but 2:27–28, verses attributed to the Markan Evangelist, use Jewish scripture to present the unbelieving Jews in a negative light. Regarding Mark 7:1–23, a text almost entirely attributed to Markan redaction, Parker concludes that the Evangelist “satirizes, misrepresents, and ultimately debunks Jewish cleanliness prescription” (320). Again, Markan redaction presents Jews and Judaism in a negative light. Regarding Mark 10:2–10, another text largely influenced by Markan redaction, Parker again demonstrates anti-Jewish elements, including a direct claim of Jewish “hardness of heart” and an indirect accusation of Jews committing adultery. In contrast, Parker detects no anti-Jewish elements in Mark 10:17–22, a text that reveals little Markan redaction. In it, Jesus shows love to the rich man and affirms adherence to the Jewish law. Finally, regarding Mark 12:1–12, Parker concludes that the parable proper, which clearly contains anti-Jewish elements, does belong to pre-Markan tradition. However, he argues that Markan redaction has heightened the anti-Jewish sentiment in this parable and has used it to contribute to the negative portrayal of Jews and Judaism in the Gospel. Ultimately, these five examples confirm the conclusions of Parker’s test case in chapter 2: the Markan Evangelist’s hermeneutical activity is largely anti-Jewish, while the pre-Markan tradition is much less so.

Parker is clearly a careful reader of the Markan text, and his meticulous attention to detail in these various Markan pericopes is commendable. He has also addressed an extremely important issue in Gospel studies: how interpreters ought to address what often appear to be anti-Jewish elements in the canonical Gospels. Parker’s efforts to explain such elements are necessary and make a significant contribution to the ongoing discussion regarding this issue. Yet while these strengths must be noted in Parker’s study, it also suffers from significant weaknesses that must be addressed. The most significant of these—a shortcoming that is perhaps seminal to all of the others—is Parker’s interaction with secondary literature on Mark’s Gospel. His bibliography lacks even a single secondary source more recent than 1995, and the vast majority of sources that Parker interacts with date between 1960 and 1990. This is shocking in an academic monograph, and it makes one wonder how such a monograph met the standards of a reputable publisher. Parker’s failure to interact with any Markan scholarship from the past fourteen years (the volume and significance of which is enormous) pervades every aspect of his work, rendering it in need of substantial updating at best.

The impact of this failure is perhaps best demonstrated in Parker’s reliance on principles of form and redaction criticism to distinguish Markan redaction from pre-Markan tradition. Redaction-critical studies of Mark’s Gospel have been widely criticized in the

last fifteen years, as many interpreters doubt whether distinguishing between the Markan Evangelist and pre-Markan tradition is even possible. Even if Parker disagrees with such conclusions, his responsibility as a scholar is to address and rebut them. In the last ten to fifteen years, more and more Markan interpreters are focusing on the Gospel as a literary whole rather than speculating on the origin and meaning of its numerous parts. Because of Parker's failure to engage the recent research, he has relied on suspect methods and produced a monograph that is often irrelevant to or out of touch with current Markan scholarship.

A final shortcoming in Parker's work, one that is less closely related to his interaction with secondary literature, is his identification of "Jews" in Mark's Gospel. Too often Parker makes claims about the Markan Evangelist's treatment or presentation of "Jews" when his claims more accurately apply to Jewish leaders or authorities. There seems to be a distinction in Mark's Gospel between Jewish leaders and presumably Jewish crowds—a relevant distinction that Parker fails to make or even address. While Jewish leaders are often characterized quite negatively, the Jewish crowds are presented in a much more neutral light. Such a distinction might have an impact on Parker's ultimate conclusions about the Markan presentation of the Jews

Ultimately, this monograph needs significant bibliographic updating—updating that would have significant ramifications for its methodology and conclusions. Until such updating takes place, this monograph will unfortunately contribute little to the field of Markan research.