

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ΤΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΟΝ IN MARK 13:4

W. A. Such

1.1. Introduction

Exegesis of Mark 13:4 has tended to bypass το σημειον while concentrating on the double question in the parallel clauses joined by και, in particular: whether the destruction of Jerusalem alone is found or whether the *Endvollendung* appears, and on the two ταυτα words. Commentators have given it no substantial weight in the interpretation of v.4¹ -- perhaps because of its supposed familiarity as a well known introduction to signs phenomena.² Two fundamental senses of το σημειον need exploration: its titular sense as a heading introducing information on end-time conditions, and its linkage with v.14.

2.1. The Context of "Sign" in Verse 4.

The carefully constructed introduction to ch.13 (vv.1-4)³, based on a saying of Jesus in v.2, is determined by the Markan Sitz im Leben. The emphatic pronouncement in vv.2f. is a clue to a preoccupation of Mark: the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The saying draws attention to the temple's demise and launches a long and complicated discourse far removed it appears from the orbit of the saying's initial

¹ E.g., Rengstorff on το σημειον, "... the immanence of events which are then described in greater detail... In Mark... the concept and formulation reflect apocalyptic expectation" TDNT Vol 7 p.232..

² For example, Lars Hartman pointed out the paucity of references to the term, which is confined to 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and two passages in the Sibylline Oracles, and neglected it in his comments on 13:1-4, Prophecy Interpreted (Lund: Gleerup), 1966, pp. 219-222.

³ K.L.Schmidt, Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu: Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur Altesten Jesusüberlieferung (Berlin), 1919 p.290.

meaning. In v.4 το σημειον is the interpretive key for unlocking the meaning of the saying in v.2.

2.1.1. Το σημειον is strategically placed in the parallel clauses joined by the conjunction in v.4. In sharp contrast to the intentionally vague double use of ταυτα, σημειον stands as the bridge between the two nondescript adjectival nouns, providing a definiteness otherwise lacking in the sentence (Pesch, "Die Frage der Jünger zielt auf ein bestimmtes Zeichen für ein bestimmtes Ereignis⁴"). The linking of σημειον and ὅταν accomplishes this by bringing a focus into an otherwise clouded exegetical conclusion due to surmizing the meaning of the twice used ταυτα in v.4. By failing to perceive the significance of σημειον for both clauses Brandenburger errs in positing a clarity only to v.4a ("ist klar und nicht umstritten" ⁵). (Cf. Pesch, "Die Doppelfrage der Jünger lässt eine Antwort auf das "Wann" erwarten wie eine Antwort auf die Frage nach "dem Zeichen"; beide Frageformulierungen zielen auf ein "Wenn" [hotan]. Die Struktur der Rede erschliesst insofern klar den Sinn der Antwort! "⁶). The bridge word σημειον unites the temporal specificity demanded by the coordinate ποτε with the indirect interrogative τι which pinpoints a specific event and a particular location. The alignment of these two words and what they represent is accomplished through σημειον, which can be understood in several ways.

2.2. "It is noticeable that the disciples do not ask for a mapping out of the events of the end-time but for a single sign in their midst that God's purpose is about to be consummated." For Anderson the single sign

⁴ Rudolf Pesch, Naherwartungen (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag), 1968 p.101.

⁵ Egon Brandenburger, Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik (Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht), 1984 p.95.

⁶ Pesch, Naherwartungen, p.106.

⁷ H. Anderson, The Gospel According to Saint Mark

is found in v.14. Though the words "mapping out" are vague (event by event, sequentially, chronologically, a general panorama or detailed canvas?) Mark does what Anderson negates, as vv.6-8,9-13,15-27 show. The singular "sign" may refer to a particular event (v.14) without excluding a number of sayings in the chapter from being "signs" -- all existing under the rubric "sign" (v.4). In fact, a certain ambiguity about the term in v.4 permits this, which is seen in Cranfield's translation of Schrenk's article on "sign" in TWNT: "The destruction of the Temple would therefore be a "token" (Zeichen) of judgment as well as a foretoken (Vorzeichen) of the Parousia." For E. Schweizer "sign" in the singular in 13:4 "stands in contrast to the kind of curiosity which is interested in a series of different signs." Again, although the one sign points to a unique sign (v.14), "which will serve as an indication of things which have or not happened yet" -- noticeably, a series of signs is given, admittedly carefully qualified by Mark in relation to v.14 (see v.8), but given nevertheless. Cousar incidently establishes this point by saying Mark tries to delineate the end by listing in vv.7-8 elements "which could be interpreted as apocalyptic signs."¹⁰ Even with the end curtailed (v.8), the events are still signs, meaning that το σημειον cannot be confined to v.14. Thus το σημειον in v.4 is a catchword in a sense for all the following sayings. Occurring at the beginning of a section full of many signs, the singular το σημειον is a unifying word interrelating all the phenomena displayed after it.

(London: Oliphants), 1974 p.291.

⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," SJT 7 (1954) p.191.

⁹ Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark (Richmond: Knox Press) 1970 p.268.

¹⁰ Charles B. Cousar, "Eschatology and Mark's Theologia Crusis", Int 24 (1970) p.323. Also, Desmond Ford, The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology (University Press of America), 1979 p.69.

3.1. "Sign" as a Title or Heading

The term "sign," when it heads a narrative, prepares the reader to assimilate a certain kind of information different from that previously given. It unlocks a door through which the reader enters, into a room devoid of the mundane, a room of foreboding, containing warnings and "deep" things laden with meaning. The word needs no predicate or explanatory clause/s. It stands absolutely, introducing a narrative that combines notions of poetry, (in the symbolism of words), drama (in the scope and depth of its subject-matter), and perhaps theatre (in its entertainment value i.e., its ability to arrest and engage the attention of the reader). Thus the singular notion "sign," occurring at the beginning of a narrative, is a key component of an easily recognizable structure (cf. 4Ezra 5:1; 2Bar 25:1-2; SibOr 3:596) which influences the interpretation of the following details. Specifically it jolts the reader into an awareness that a bout of preliminary turmoil will soon begin which will culminate in the consummation.

Heading a narrative, "sign" conveys to the reader the notion that a special type of knowledge unattainable by unaided human reason is now introduced¹¹. For Adela Yarbro Collins the referential aspect of language is not necessarily the primary means of communication in an apocalypse; rather commissive language is more prominent because the intent of the narrative is to evoke certain feelings and to generate a call to action¹². Certainly "sign" in v.4 helps the

¹¹ Narratives containing signs create an impact when read as a whole. John Sweet, Revelation (London: SCM Press), 1979 p.13.

¹² Adela Yarbro Collins, Crisis and Catharsis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1984 p.144. Because much of the type of material in Mk 13 (vv.7-9,12-13,14-27) is found in apocalypses (e.g. 4Ezra 5:1-13, Rev 6), Collins' comment can be applied to ch.13.

reader to evoke a certain awareness about the state of things, but more importantly it aims to alleviate concern over the confusion existing in the potential or actual calamitous situation at hand, as it would in the calamitous period immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. The factual or informative aspect of language is a primary concern of the evangelist. Hofius correctly asserts: "The signs of the end are partly concerned with horrible and frightening portents, which indicate the last days are dawning. In so far as these portents are convulsions of a cosmic nature, they announce the transformation of the world -- the dissolution of the old creation and the reconstitution of the whole of nature."¹³ A description of particular signs connotes a recognition in the mind of the reader that a *certain type of information* is being given, so functioning as a key word, setting the reader up to expect that what follows from the word will deal with the end-time. The placement of το σημειον in the introductory remarks leading into the main body of Mk 13 assists the reader to divide mentally what was previously read (chs. 1-12) from what follows (13:4f.). The word "indicates" or "announces" (Hofius) that something new is to be stated -- in a sense, like a title on the front cover of a book entices the reader to read on, specifically to ponder *information* on the end-time. This function appears in 4Ezra, 2Baruch, and the Sibylline Oracles e.g., 4Ezra 5:1 "Now concerning the signs: Behold, the days are coming when those who dwell on earth shall be seized with great terror, and the way of truth shall be hidden and the land shall be barren of faith."; 2Bar 25:2-3 "This then will be the sign: When horror seizes the inhabitants of the earth, and they fall into many tribulations and further, they fall into great torments."¹⁴

¹³ Hofius, "σημειον" in DNTT Vol 2 p.629.

¹⁴ As a general heading it indicates the type of material that is to follow ie., few or many sayings on signs concerning the end-time, which are frequently connected by temporal connectives and conjunctions existing in

Thus, arriving at το σημειον in v.4, the reader is set up to receive a particular type of information. The placement of this term generates a mindset that focuses upon the end-time.

4.1. The Connection between "Sign" in V.4 and V.14

In the context of ch.13 the singular σημειον in v.4 immediately spotlights an event of special import. It continues the impact of the saying in v.2 by pinpointing both the time and event, or series of events initiating the temple's destruction. Mark achieves this by shaping vv.5-13 so that το σημειον in v.4 is targeted towards what is said in v. 14 -- in particular, to the two clauses in v.14 introduced by ὅταν δε and τότε, which provide an unmistakable exactness that stems from v.4. "When" this happens "then" this is that time. Because they deal with the same subject-matter the two questions together in v.4 are connected ("The question is two-fold, (a) as to the times when (πότε) the temple is to perish, (b) as to the signal (το σημειον) for its approach"¹⁵. Mark carefully constructs the first question from the perspective of the "sign" that is to occur. The second question expands the first by rooting it in a particular event. This particularization, stated in v.14, provides a transition from v.4 to the series¹⁶ of occurrences that precede the specific sign in v. 14.

various configurations. Mk 13: 1-27 contains much of the content found in these sayings e.g., cosmic phenomena: sun/moon/stars vv.24-27, natural phenomena: earthquakes/famine v.8, depiction of particular persons/events vv.6,14,22, filial relationships: divided families/pregnant women vv. 12,17, phenomena involving political/social groups in a state of turmoil: nations/rulers etc., v.8, the time of tribulation and its characteristics: war etc., v.7,19f.

¹⁵ Henry Barclay Swete, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (London: Macmillan.), 1913 p.297.

¹⁶ W Marxsen, Mark the Evangelist (Nashville: Abingdon), 1969 p.162.

In ch.13 then, a particular saying in v.14 is the specific reference point for το σημειον in v.4, and all the other signs are subordinated to, and themselves point to, this specific sign as the temporal connectives πότε . . . τότε in v.14 make plain. One particular sign is το σημειον par excellence, the prime focus of attention, or specific Angelpunkt from which the various thematic signs receive their coherence.

4.2. The existence of that specific sign in a broader context of signs makes the *whole* narrative containing signs sayings indispensable for recognizing the intended connection of v.14 with v.4.¹⁷ However, there is a sense in which the specific thing referred to in 13:14 is *alone* the direct fulfilment of το σημειον in v.4, something the context demonstrates because at v.14 an initial climax in the narrative is reached. Tension has been created by the specified warnings leading up to the appearance of the sign in v.14 (note vv.6,9,13). Mark builds the structure, moving from disturbances created by false prophets to the turmoil of unrestrained nations, natural calamities, persecution of the faithful, and division among families. By using temporal coordinators and conjunctions, he punctuates the narrative with appropriate brake-points to stop the flow of the narrative from accelerating from informed speculation to the rash certainty of concluding that the significant point in the end-time schema has been reached.

¹⁷ Jaques Dupont, Les Trois Apocalypses Synoptiques Marc 13; Matthieu 24-25; Luc 21 (Paris:Les Editions du Cerf), 1985. "A en juger donc par la formulation de la question du v.4 comme par la description des vv.14-20 et la declaration du v.23b, la perspective de la destruction du Temple annoncée au v.2 est spontanément située dans le contexte plus large des catastrophes qui doivent marquer la fin de ce monde." p.16.

4.2.1. However in v. 14, several pointers indicate something of great import is about to occur. The adversative δὲ and the verb ὄραν provide a contrast to what has been previously said. The nearness of the end is brought into focus with the knowledge that a particular event is about to be mentioned. The narrative builds from a description of events initially heard about (ἀκούειν v.7), to experiences of persecution (v.11), to a unique event inaugurating an especially severe unavoidable period of persecution. Lambrecht correctly shows how the narrative reaches the highpoint in v.14. "Auch aus einem Vergleich mit V.7 erhellt, wie V.14 ein *crescendo* vorliegt. Die Anzeichen dafür sind:

- "sehen" besagt mehr als nur "hören";
- der Befehl greift mehr ein als ein Verbot;
- auch ist das, was gesehen wird, erschrecken
- der als das, was geehrt wird;
- das τότε, welches nur in V.14 steht, erhöht die Spannung."¹⁸

Conversely, Anderson fails to give v.14 its due weight by relegating vv.14-20 as only "a sign of the approaching end,"¹⁹ while Cousar passes over it altogether in his comments on vv.14-20: "They simply become incidents which must take place before the parousia of the Son of Man (13:24, 'after that tribulation'). They may be labelled preliminary events, but as such they are not signs of the end itself."²⁰ The climatic point is reached in v.24 with "the one apocalyptic event which cannot be historicized..."²¹

¹⁸ Jan Lambrecht, Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse (Rom: Papstliches Bibelinstitut), 1967 p.148. See also Dupont, Trois pp.17-18, Brandenburger, Markus p.133, Zenji Kato, Die Völkermission in Markusevangelium (New York: Peter Lang), 1986 p.140, Ford, Abomination p.145.

¹⁹ Anderson, Mark p.295.

²⁰ Cousar, Int p.324.

²¹ Ibid..

Certainly the narrative from v.14 continues to build, creating a further tension which is only resolved in v.24, but the *crescendo* reached in v.14 is important precisely because it is the outstanding event which indicates the nearness of the horizon of the parousia of the Son of Man -- and so it functions as a sign *without* precedence.²² The definite article το in v.14 makes this apparent.²³ Also, the reader is urged to "see" i.e., not only to look for a single specific event, but to *understand*²⁴ its significance in relationship to the end-time²⁴. In contrast to the notion of distance implied in "hearing" about wars and rumours of wars, the repetition of the temporal marker ὅταν (v.7) in v.14, this time with ἴδητε, conveys a *notion of something near, definite, and observable*. The verb ὄραν occurs in 9:4,13:26, 14:62,16:7 in conjunction with weighty revelatory events perceived by the elect. In v.14 it targets a momentous end-time event which Jesus' disciples must heed. "Seeing" is further defined by the parenthesis ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω which interrupts the flow of the protasis apodesis construction; the two verbs ἴδειν and νοεῖν signify a cognizance going beyond simple observation, denoting a *marking of what is seen*,²⁵ that is, a *realisation of its import*. In 7:18 and 8:17

²² Ford, Abomination, p.146.

²³ Pesch, "Das wird dadurch angezeigt, dass gegenüber V.7 (πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων) das Objekt in V.14 durch den Artikel determiniert ist: τὸ Βδᾶλυμα. Dies Feststellung wird nicht durch die andere entkräftet, dass der Artikel nach Dan 12,11 mit zu einem Zitat gehört. Durch den Artikel erhält die Wendung eine eigenartige Bestimmtheit, welche durch die nachfolgende Genitivergänzung της ἐρημώσεως noch unterstrichen wird." Naherwartungen p.139.

²⁴ Werner Kelber, The Kingdom in Mark (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1974. p.120.

²⁵ David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (University of London: Athlone Press), 1956 p.423.

voείν appears in the sense of a penetrating understanding, that is, a weighing up and a gaining of insight beyond the level of appearances. Such is the meaning here. In contrast to events in vv.5-13, which by the qualification in v.8 Mark has pointedly held back from correlating with the end-time, *no such caveat is supplied at v.14 and at this point the reader must exercise insight.*

Thus v.14 is a climactic point in the narrative developed from v.5. A crescendo is reached as the previous temporal markers (vv.7,11,) binding the text together receive a relief of tension in the ὅταν δέ ἴδητε/τότε clauses. The adversative force of δέ is prominent as the temporal coordinator τότε v.14b brings to a halt the unfolding structure of events. Translating the particle as an adversative anticipates the force of τότε. However, ironically an anomaly is created through the juxtaposition of definiteness, implied by the temporal markers, and the ambiguously couched description that follows, that is, τὸ βδέλυγμα της ἐρημώσεως, which is found in LXX Dan 9:27,11:31,12:11 and there alludes to the profanation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes. For Mark, a similar but worse situation than that described in Daniel is about to develop -- one triggering events of the end-time (13:15,19-20. Note 13:4 συντελεισθαι, and v.24 -- the abomination of desolation brings about the end-time timetable cf. Dan 12:11).

4.3. Mark gives his own clues regarding the nature and significance of this manifestation of evil in v.14. The grammatical abnormality between the neuter τὸ βδέλυγμα and the masculine participle ἐστηκότα is hardly coincidental²⁶ -- such appalling desolation²⁷ is understood by Mark "in terms of a personal power." The

²⁶ Marxsen, Evangelist p.181.

²⁷ Kelber, Kingdom p.119. Beda Rigaux, L'Antéchrist et l'Opposition au Royaume Messianique dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament (Paris: Gabalda et fils), 1932 p.245.

participle denotes certainty of existence (lit. "standing") as well as an arrogant existence contravening all things holy, a standing in the sanctuary (ἵπου οὐ δεῖ). The preposition ἵπου leaves unsaid where he is standing, but according to indications in Daniel and historical reconstruction from that text, the place is the temple. In other words, the temple has been profaned by an individual, whose *standing* is an act of desecration, polluting the holy place and causing the removal of the Holy presence. As the intervening verses from v.2 through v.13 make no mention of the temple, we conclude that the question in v.4b, and especially the nature of τὸ σημεῖον -- is answered in v.14.²⁸

4.3.1. Of the interpretations that attempt to identify who or what the abomination of desolation is²⁹, the one

²⁸ Marxsen, Evangelist "Verse 4 contained the question as to the time of the temple's destruction predicted in vs.2. But only in vs.14 is the temple spoken of; that is, this verse must somehow be an answer to the question." p.180. Cf. Ford, ". . . v.14 is indeed the answer to the specific request of the disciples for a sign of the coming destruction of the temple and the end of the age. . . ." Abomination p.145. He comments on the specificity of the sign in the context of ch.13. "It is clear that the mysterious βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως must be something very specific, for it constitutes a signal, and a signal of no mean importance." Therefore v.14 stands alone among the previous verses because of its significance for the disciples. Thus from the genuine saying in v.2 Mark has weaved a narrative that in particular draws attention to the significance of the Danielic τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως for his community.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.160-175, and George Raymond Beasley-Murray, A Commentary on Mark 13 (London: Macmillan.) 1957 pp.50-72.

most applicable to Mark's situation is that dealing with the circumstances surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under the leadership of Titus. The disciples asked for *one particular sign* signalling the end of the temple (v.4). That sign is given in v.14. On the historical plain Vespasian's son Titus was the only individual accomplishing that destruction: whoever or whatever else the mysterious τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως points to, it must include his pollution of the temple and pillage of the city³⁰. The purposely

³⁰ Contra Gerd Theissen, whose position is weakened by associating Greuel der Verwüstung primarily with Vespasian in a sense *in absentia*. Theissen marshals an array of prophecies from Josephus (Wars 3:8.9,6:5.3; Tacitus Hist 2:78;5:13.2; Suetonius Vesp 5,7; De Cass. 65:1.4), to the effect that the long expected Weltherrschaft from the East was understood by Christians in Palestine/Syria to be not Titus but Vespasian, whose elevation to Emperor, desecration of the Temple and destruction of Jerusalem could only mean for Mark the Anfang der Wehen (ibid., p.272, p.284). Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien NT et Orbis Antiquus 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht), 1989 p.271. And contra Hengel who balks at Titus being associated with the one "standing" because, "the masculine perfect participle ἑστηκότα with its unusual construction *ad sensum*, points more to the beginning of a permanent state of affairs associated with a specific person. By contrast, Titus left the burnt-out sanctuary, which later served as a camp for prisoners, and indeed Jerusalem, soon after the final victory." Studies p.18. This objection assumes that for Titus to be the one *standing* he has to remain in Jerusalem, and as the Antichrist (p.19), direct his reign of terror from there. But Titus' *standing* indicates his act of desolation and authority. Christians would not have discounted Titus being the abominable one in view of what he had accomplished in Jerusalem, his barbarous exploits in the months following the sack of the city, and his triumphant return to Rome. Titus was evil personified and his power to inflict terror throughout

vague reference to Titus, coupled with the proceeding context from v.14, has inclined Cranfield and Wenham among others to see in v.14 a further figure whose appearance and evil exploits surpass even those of the Roman commander³¹. Thus Titus is a harbinger of one who is to come, the Antichrist. The destruction of the city under the Roman military leader forewarns of a coming crisis that will envelop the entire earth and be unprecedented in the annals of suffering and warfare among mankind. According to this view, Kelber's attempt to capture the magnitude of the events surrounding the destruction of the city and to connect the abomination of desolation with Titus fails, because it limits the extremity of what is portrayed in vv.19ff³². Mark underdepicts the horrors of the devastation of the city by Titus (cf. Jos. Wars 5:10.12.13; 6:1.3.9), though he hints at them by the injunctions to flee and the warnings of the ensuing turmoil (vv.14-16,17-18); but these are only the preliminaries in terms of the suffering and devastation that is to come. Though underplaying the horrors of the destruction of the city, Mark leaves to the imagination what the horrors of the end-time proper will be like. Only the Antichrist can cause devastation on such a global scale. The unholy devastation that has desecrated Jerusalem will soon engulf the entire world.

However, against this view, nowhere is the Antichrist phenomenon clearly described in the New Testament; rather isolated pieces of information from various texts are drawn together, surmised to be referring to one individual, and combined with various strands of information in post-New Testament literature,

the world would increase through his influence in Rome. After all, his father was ruler of the civilised world, and he was next in line. For Christians Titus' exploits in Palestine/Syria were a foretaste of what was to come.

31 Cranfield, SJT p.300. David Wenham, "Recent Study of Mark 13: Part 1" TSF Bulletin 71 1978 p.8.

32 Kelber, Kingdom p.119.

produce this awesome figure "Antichrist", who has supernatural power and challenges the dominion of God (e.g. cf., Did 16 "Then the Deceiver of the World will show himself, pretending to be a Son of God and doing signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning." cf. ApEl 3:5-9). The maze of Jewish and Christian traditions documented by Bousset, and the fragmentary material in the New Testament, make it questionable whether Mark is referring to such a individual in 13:14.³³ Rather he leaves it open-ended: whatever the form evil takes in the end-time *it begins with the trigger event mentioned in v.14 which will lead to a situation unparalleled in severity in the history of mankind.*

4.4. Summing up: the enigmatic phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως in v.14 is the hinge on which the discourse turns. Verses 5-13 build to v.14, at and from which point the narrative abruptly changes. Instead of a delineation of future events the narrative is

³³ Wilhelm Bousset, The Anti-Christ Legend (trans.) A.H. Keane, (London: Hutchinson and Co.), 1896. Beda Rigaux, L'Antechrist. Grundmann's comments show the difficulties in the use of this term. "The term ἀντιχριστός occurs in the NT only in John's Epistles and is very rare in the first teachers of the early Church. The author of 1Jn can speak of the awareness of the community that antichrist will come 2:18;4:3. Antichrist is here a coming apocalyptic figure. The figure is connected with the opponent of God in Jewish Apocalyptic, which for its part is found elsewhere in the history of religion. The opponent of God increases his power and dominion on earth just before the apocalyptic end; he is then judged and destroyed. In primitive Christian apocalyptic, confession of Jesus as the Messiah gives antichrist the features of a counter-christ (cf. Rev.13 etc.; 2Th. 2:3-10; Mk 13:14-27), though the term ἀντιχριστός is not used until we come to John's epistles." TDNT Vol 9 p.571.

suddenly punctuated with an injunction for the reader to recognize the import of one particular event and to act immediately upon it. The two temporal markers ὅταν and τότε form a parallelism introducing that event and proscribing a course of action. The influence of the co-ordinator τότε stretches through all the events up to v.24, where the prepositional phrase μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ushers in a further dimension of the end-time schema. Thus two trajectories appear up to v.24: the series of events culminating in the awful sacrilege of v.14a, and the consequences of that event from v.14c. Verse 14 functions in connection with "sign" in v.4 by assisting the reader to recognize that the destruction of the city by Titus is the key that inaugurates the beginning of the end-time proper. Thus this event heralds the imminent arrival of the great onslaught of the dark forces of evil. In vv.5-13 Mark attempts to show that the initial period of turmoil in the existence of the church i.e., the recent past of Mark's time of writing, is only preliminary to the end-time proper. With the coming of Titus a linkage occurs with the advent of the consummation. Readiness is the appropriate response.

5.1. The Dual Significance of the Sign in V.14

It is noticeable that following the introduction of τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως the tenor of the narrative becomes more ominous than in the previous section vv.5-13; not just in terms of the immediacy of what is signified in v.14, and by Mark's "holding back" of the end-time (vv.7,8), but by the change of tone in vv.14f. The rumours of wars that do not essentially affect the disciples give place to the direct injunction to flee and the dire warnings of consequences for those caught unawares. Similarly, the heightened tone of the extent of the end-time horrors in vv.19f. indicates that between vv.5-13 and 14-23 a great transition occurs in the focus of the narrative.

5.1.1. The difficulty in unravelling the significance of v.14 for vv.5-13,15-23 is compounded by the placement of the sayings on signs in the chapter, which follow a loose chronological sequence. This sequence when rigidly adhered step-by-step causes problems in

interpretation. For example, Bo Reicke dismisses an identification of the figure in v.14 "with the occupation and destruction of the Temple by Titus in A.D. 70," because "this military event signalled the final act of the war and did not imply any further persecution"³⁴. The flight of believers from the city occurred before the war. Thus Mark's outline of events is at variance "from what is known about the war". Some of the difficulties that surface when taking vv.14f. in a literal chronological sense are: the contrast in vv.9-13, which deals with the persecution Christians will face, and the horrors mentioned in vv.14-23, which seem much more severe than those in vv.9-13. In the latter verses the impression is of the first serious outbreak of intense opposition. The necessity of flight from the city in such haste is hardly compatible with the 18 months siege of the city by the Romans, whereby in the latter stages of the assault, flight was impossible. If the phrase in v.19 ἔσονται γὰρ αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκείναι is allied with v.14 as the time the abomination takes place, then the tribulation of v.19f. does not involve Christians who have already abandoned the city. Yet v.20 mentions the shortening of days due to the severity of the persecution on the elect or Church. Christians appear to be escaping and being persecuted in the same tribulation. Similarly the severity of the θλίψις in v.19 is incompatible with the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the city³⁵. The arena of one persecution involves the destruction of the city (v.14, cf. vv.2,4), while the arena of the other covers the entire earth (vv.20,27). Why should the days be

³⁴ Bo Reicke, "Synoptic Prophecies of the Destruction of Jerusalem," Studies in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (ed. David Aune) (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1972 pp.125-6.

³⁵ V. Taylor "This assertion is much too emphatic for a siege; it is clear that the thought of v.19 is eschatological." The Gospel According to Saint Mark (London:Macmillan), 1963 p.514.

shortened if the elect are safe (cf. vv. 14bf.) -- which also contradicts v. 20? Far from fleeing to safety, the elect are caught up in the struggle, facing persecution and the possibility of being lead astray by false prophets (vv. 21-22). Anderson³⁶ inadvertently highlights the problem: "Verse 19 is an almost exact replica of the great tribulation prophesied in Dan 12:1 (cf. Jer 30:7; Rev 7:14), and has the effect of enlarging the relatively restricted Judean crisis portrayed in verses 14-18 into a great act in the apocalyptic drama of the end-time". This disharmony in the narrative is an indication of the situation Mark is grappling with in ch. 13.

Could not these difficulties stem from Mark trying to hold together two related events -- the destruction of the city as a *fait accompli* and the anticipation of a period of an onslaught of evil heralding the end-time woes proper. *The crucial verse for this interpretation is v. 14.* Not only does Mark build the tension from v. 2 up to v. 14, but in v. 14 ("the hinge upon which the sayings of chap. 13 turn"³⁷) he "enters" the text itself and interposes with a statement of such import that its significance needs to be brought before the reader. The obtrusive manner Mark does this shows that the thread of the argument previously constructed lacks pointedness in communication. What it has to say is so weighty that the omniscient narrator no longer remains the impersonal scribe, but "loses" his objectivity and "intrudes" into the text. This device stops the reader and compels him to abandon the passivity of receptor and mimic the narrator, that is, as the narrator could not remain the impassive describer of events but was constrained to enter the text, so the reader must abandon the relative passivity of reading and take special cognizance about what is said in v. 14. In the after-math of the destruction of the city Mark wisely

³⁶ Anderson, Mark p. 296.

³⁷ Marxsen, Evangelist p. 183

avoids any direct reference to the Emperor's son³⁸, instead he gives "a dark hint" (V. Taylor) and leaves the reader to make the necessary connection based upon the perception that an individual in the tradition of Antiochus Epiphanes has invaded the inner sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, we know that historically this act of desolation by Titus already had a recent precedent in the failed attempt by Caligula to erect a statue of himself in the temple in C.E. 39-40. Now though, the act of desecration *had* occurred and such an abomination could signify only one thing -- the Messianic Woes were about to begin. "Thus years before the Gospel of Mark was written, the Antichrist concept was a familiar one to the Christian church. Caligula's threat had added fuel to the eschatological fire. It is probably impossible now for us to conjure up in imagination the intensity of excitement which must have prevailed in Jewish and Christian communities as the word spread of the mad Emperor's intended blasphemy. The coming event would inevitably have been interpreted as a sign of the end."³⁹ Though we dispute that the concept of Antichrist had the universal recognition in the church, the valid point by Ford is that if Caligula's failed attempt to desecrate the temple encountered such trenchant opposition, which known from the book of Daniel would have been interpreted as a possible sign of the nearness of the end, *then how much more would the actual destruction of the temple and city by Titus convince many that this time the end really was at hand.* Thus Mark's pointed reference in v.14 is to stir the reader into apprehending the gravity of what has recently happened. By using the phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως Mark connected the events perpetrated in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. with the blasphemy of Antiochus Epiphanes mentioned in Daniel, thereby establishing from sacred scripture the advent of the beginning of

³⁸ S.G.F. Brandon, "The Date of Mark's Gospel" NTS 7 (1960-61), p.134.

³⁹ Ford, Abomination pp.162-3.

the end-time -- ". . . in Dan 12:11 the setting up of the abomination of desolation⁴⁰ marks the beginning of the count-down to the End." The sign in v.14, for those who are prepared to understand the "deep" things of God, is the harbinger of the appearance of the full onslaught of supernatural⁴¹ evil that is about to be unleashed on the world.

5.2. Thus in Mk 13 a much wider meaning of "sign" is indicated than simply confining the word to designate the one specific sign (as in associating it

⁴⁰ M. Hooker, "Trails and Tribulations in Mk 13," BJRL 65 (1982-83) p.90.

⁴¹ Contra Timothy Gedderd, whose view on the secrecy of the kingdom in the gospel is incompatible with Mark communicating any historical event that would enable readers "to chart out an eschatological time-table" (p.203). See ch.8, Watchwords: Mark 13 in the Context of Markan Eschatology JSNT Suppl Ser 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press), 1989. If the disciples were "thinking" without faith (13:1-4a) it seems strange that Jesus goes ahead and gives an outline of the end-time situation along with a demand for vigilance instead of correcting the disciples by eschewing all end-time information on particular crises (which would be expected according to Gedderd's view). Jesus corrects apocalyptic speculation (v.7f.) by incorporating it into an end-time schema and not by abandoning all schemas. No indication is apparent in vv.2-4 or 5f. that the disciples' question was essentially "misguided" (p.224). Also, Gedderd fails to make sense of the way Mark uses events like wars, famines, earthquakes etc. as signs heralding the demise of Jerusalem. In our view, only the one event mentioned in v.14 can be pinpointed to an exact situation and it is this event which clues the believer into realizing that the Messianic Woes are beginning. Vigilance in discipleship is hardly made unnecessary by revelation of the significance of this event but, in view of the times, is encouraged.

in v.4 with v.14). As well as indicating the ruination of the city by Titus, in a titular sense the word "sign" encompasses the entire narrative to v.26 by heading an outline of events that will culminate in the appearance of the Son of Man at the consummation. This dual understanding of "sign" in v.4 solves the quandary in ascertaining the meaning of the double question in v.4. Gaston appraises rightly: "It is assumed by the disciples, according to Mark, that the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world are related, even simultaneous events."⁴² So, as well as having a fulfilment in the destruction of the temple (v.14), the ταυτα πάντα in v.4, "points forward to the eschaton."⁴³ The double question has a double reference -- the first question to the destruction of the temple in v.14, and the second to the consummation. Thus, "Die beiden Fragen, . . . sind keine Umschreibungen ein und derselben Frage, sondern unterscheiden sich."⁴⁴ Brandenburger is correct: the second question is the decisive question⁴⁵. Admittedly, the fact that prophecies dealing with the destruction of the temple and the consummation "are mixed up in a strange fashion"⁴⁶ and this seems incongruous, but the evidence points to the intertwining of subject matter; because if the material in v.4 is confined to the destruction of Jerusalem alone, the significance of much of the language in vv.7-8,19-22,24-27 is minimized.

6.1. Conclusion

From the catastrophe of 70 C.E. Mark has selected a highly emotive purposely enigmatic phrase to depict the significance of the destruction of the

⁴² Lloyd Gaston, No Stone on Another Suppl NT 23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 1970 p.12.

⁴³ Kelber, Kingdom p.113.

⁴⁴ Kato, Völkmission p.136.

⁴⁵ Brandenburger, Markus p.97.

⁴⁶ Eduard Lohse, Mark's Witness to Jesus Christ (London: Lutterworth Press), 1955 p.75.

temple and city of Jerusalem, and around it has constructed a complex narrative based upon a saying of Jesus in v.2 connecting the destruction with the time of Jesus. This saying is the "peg" from which the narrative hangs. Mark has successfully weaved together signs sayings that exist simultaneously in relatively separate contexts in ch.13 -- the carefully shaped question in v. 4 means that an understanding of the function of signs in the chapter is complicated by the recognition that two events are portrayed: the destruction of Jerusalem and the consummation. He achieved this by superimposing two elements together (the two elements are narratives complete with signs on the destruction of Jerusalem and on the consummation). In a sense, he placed the narratives on top of each other; by making signs *precede* the destruction of Jerusalem he intimated that the city was connected with the end-time, and then by reinterpreting the abomination of desolation in Daniel so as to refer to Titus' desolation of the city, he made the destruction of Jerusalem a sign of the consummation. At the heart of this construction is v.14 which unites both elements. Thus we can understand how v.14 is the real fulfilment of το σημειον in v.4, and yet, at the same time, see how that term functions as a general heading that introduces all the signs on both the destruction of the city and the consummation.

W. A. Such