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Secrets and Watchers: A Markan Demonology

Abstract

Mark's use of a secrecy motif is well known to commentators. This article explores the messianic secret by analyzing its most common violators, the demons of the Gospel of Mark. Mark's various exorcism accounts function to provide a working demonology of the Evangelist, and this biblical theology is correlated with other extant Second Temple Period Jewish literature, primarily *1 Enoch* and its Watchers tradition. Mark relies upon both Leviticus and the Book of Watchers to describe the function and identity of demons, explaining their own supernatural knowledge of the identity of Christ, knowledge which necessitates his commands to keep silent. This article analyzes each exorcism account in Mark, places them in their larger literary context, and provides a synthesis of Markan demonology and its relationship to the secrecy motif of the Gospel.

Keywords

Mark, demon, Watchers, Enoch, messianic secret

Cover Page Footnote

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Secrets and Watchers: A Markan Demonology

For the Gospel of Mark, a long-discussed subject related to its unique content and rhetorical style is the so-called Messianic Secret, the way Jesus seemingly hides his identity as the Messiah throughout the Gospel. First posited by William Wrede, the Messianic Secret functions as a motif in Mark's Gospel, a filter through which the life and ministry of Jesus is to be understood – and it is understood by Wrede and his followers as the concealment of Jesus's true identity as the messiah and Son of God until the climactic moment of the resurrection.¹ This secrecy is closely connected to Jesus's miracles and the exorcisms and power encounters in particular. While these stories of deliverance draw on various Jewish traditions, both canonical and noncanonical, to form their respective demonologies, they uniformly serve as a primary means of revealing to the perceptive reader the true identity of Jesus as the Christ throughout the first nine chapters of Mark's Gospel. In short, Mark borrows from Second Temple Period Jewish literature, specifically *1 Enoch*, to portray Jesus's encounters with the demonic in such a way as to challenge Wrede's concept of the Messianic Secret and to reveal the supernatural qualities possessed by the demons defeated by Christ.

Markan Exorcism Accounts

The Gospel of Mark contains an abundance of exorcism accounts. Indeed, this is the most common form the healing ministry of Jesus takes in the Gospel.² Some of these accounts are specific, but others are more general statements noting Christ's activity as an exorcist as part of his combined healing and teaching ministry. Their importance is not to be underestimated; indeed, deliverance begins almost immediately following the start of Jesus's public ministry in Mark 1. Of particular importance are the explicit exorcisms and general statements of deliverance in the life of Christ: Mark 1:21–28, 32–34; 3:10–12; 5:1–20; 7:24–30; and 9:14–29.

In the first account, Jesus encounters a man possessed with an unclean spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum. Mark's description of the encounter is short: the demon recognizes Jesus and questions him; Jesus commands silence and performs the exorcism; and the people are amazed (Mark 1:21–28). His ability to command

¹ Sandra Huebenthal, "Suspended Christology," in *Christology in Mark's Gospel: 4 Views*, ed. Anthony Le Donne (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 27.

² Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study," *JAAR* 49, no. 4 (December 1981): 568.

demons without using any exorcism formula is cause for astonishment among the witnesses in the synagogue (v. 27).³ Mark L. Strauss notes, however, that the people are astonished first at his teaching and only secondarily with his power over the demonic, thereby displaying Mark's own view of the kingdom ministry of Jesus: first is teaching and obedience, and only second are signs and wonders.⁴ This account is shortly followed by a general statement concerning the prevalence of healing and exorcisms in Jesus's ministry in Capernaum, including Jesus's command to the demons to remain silent due to their knowledge of his identity (Mark 1:32–34).

The second account comes two chapters later. Mark 3:10–12 is a more abbreviated story than that of Mark 1, and it is attached almost as a postscript to a larger pericope detailing the crowds following Jesus (vv. 7–12). In these verses, Jesus performs multiple exorcisms among those in the multitude surrounding him near the Sea of Galilee. The exorcisms here follow the shape of the first: those possessed come to him, the demons cry out his name, Jesus orders them to be silent, and he exorcises the afflicted individuals. This establishes a pattern of healing and secrecy which will pervade the remainder of the Markan exorcism accounts.

Ironically, shortly after this, the teachers of the law accuse Christ himself of being possessed (Mark 3:22), and Jesus answers the charge with a lesson on demonology (3:23–30). In it he details a key truth of the supernatural realm: demons cannot cast out demons, for a divided kingdom will not stand (vv. 23–26). This is taught in a parable (v. 23), and so the careful reader will look for a deeper meaning here. The lesson truly concerns the power of God; after all, who could be more powerful than Satan in the first-century Jewish mind?⁵ Only God possesses such ability, and thus Jesus, by rebuking the idea Satan could cast out Satan, shows the teachers of the law that he has the power of God.

The divine power of Jesus is seen most dramatically in the third Markan exorcism account, the tale of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1–20. There is much to be said of the story of Legion; there has been no end to study of the tale, and its

³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 76. Lane also notes the naming of Jesus by the demons here and elsewhere is perhaps an attempt on their part to gain power over him in a reversal of the common exorcism formulae of the day, consisting as they did of using a true name of an individual to acquire authority over him/her (74).

⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 2* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 94. Undoubtedly, however, the veracity and importance of the teaching was reinforced in the minds of Jesus's audiences by the miraculous power he displayed in conjunction with his teaching ministry.

⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 157-58.

various layers continue to offer fertile ground for scholars.⁶ The outline of the story runs along similar lines as the other exorcisms: Jesus encounters a man possessed, is recognized by demons, dialogues with them, and exorcizes them. However, Mark 5 contains a number of features not found in other Markan exorcisms.

First, the demons themselves are named, the only time this occurs in Mark, and their name “Legion” carries obvious Roman connotations.⁷ Under the emperor Tiberius, a typical Roman legion was comprised of 6,000 soldiers, divided into approximately 5,300 infantry and 700 cavalry/specialist troops; often, however, the legion was much smaller.⁸ While a legion was a great showcase of military might, it could also be used to perform civil functions, most notably the construction and maintenance of roads.⁹ One of the twenty-five legions extant during the reign of Tiberius was stationed in Syria, and this could easily be the referent for the demons in Gerasa.¹⁰ Regardless, the legion was nothing if not a sign of Rome’s military and political dominance of its empire, and the association between the name of the demon and the lived experiences of those subjugated under Rome forms the basis for certain non-supernatural interpretations of the account (see below). If the name is to be taken literally instead of simply as a hyperbolic political reference, then it is possible that the Gerasene demoniac is possessed by upwards of 6,000 individual demons – though note that the herd of swine which is destroyed following the exorcism numbered only 2,000 animals (Mark 5: 13).

Second, and most notably, this account varies from other Markan exorcisms in that Jesus grants a demonic request, allowing them to enter into a nearby herd of swine (vv. 12–13). Both the request and its result are steeped in irony. Andrew Burrow notes several layers to this Markan irony, beginning with the location of the request itself. The demons comprising Legion, in essence, ask not to be driven from among the tombs. Adela Yarbro Collins believes Legion to be the spirits of the dead in the tombs, and so their plea is to simply remain in their own homes, so to speak.¹¹ While Mark only alludes to possible origins for demons, and while

⁶ Andrew Burrow, “Bargaining with Jesus: Irony in Mark 5:1–20,” *BibInt* 25 (2017): 234-36.

⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 268-70.

⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Collins, *Mark*, 267; Burrow, “Bargaining with Jesus,” 245-46.

Collins' hypothesis is contrary to this allusion, the request nevertheless remains ironic: the demons ask Christ to be concerned with their own comfort despite their hideous treatment of the possessed man.¹² That Jesus grants their request should not be seen as concern for demonic wellbeing; instead, Jesus grants them that which will be their destruction.

Mark 5 offers a first glimpse into the origin of demons through two key allusions. Contra Collins, neither of these allusions deal with spirits of ordinary dead humans freely roaming the earth; rather, they are echoes of ancient Jewish traditions concerning demonic nature. The first of these allusions references the Old Testament, in particular a rite established in the Torah. The casting of pigs into swine recalls the scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16:21–22, 26.¹³ Aaron was to place his hands on the head of a goat and confess the sins of the people, thereby transferring them to the animal. Afterwards, the goat was released into the wilderness, carrying the evil out of the camp and away from the Israelites. In this fashion, sin was removed from the people before Aaron made an atonement offering on their behalf. In similar fashion, the evils present in the Gerasene demoniac were transferred into animals – here a herd of swine – and removed from his presence. In both the Markan account and Second Temple scapegoat practice, the animal(s) was/were destroyed by being thrown off a cliff.¹⁴ The vicarious removal of evil via an animal proxy in both the scapegoat ritual and the Gerasene exorcism link the traditions strongly, and it is possible Mark relates the story in this way to deliberately allude to Leviticus, strengthening the connection between his Gospel and Jewish law.

However, the greatest allusion in Mark 5 refers to an extracanonical text, *1 Enoch*, specifically the Book of Watchers.¹⁵ Both the language and events of the exorcism echo the Watchers tradition, and they hint at a shared belief concerning demonic origins.¹⁶ In terms of language, *1 Enoch* 10:11 refers to the Watchers as

¹² Burrow, "Bargaining with Jesus," 246.

¹³ Hans M. Moscicke, "The Gerasene Exorcism and Jesus' Eschatological Expulsion of Cosmic Powers: Echoes of Second Temple Scapegoat Traditions in Mark 5.1–20," *JSNT* 41, no. 3 (2019): 371–373. A second OT allusion, namely to that of the exodus, is seen by Burrow (248–49).

¹⁴ Moscicke, "The Gerasene Exorcism," 372.

¹⁵ Nicholas A. Elder, "Of Porcine and Polluted Spirits: Reading the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1–20) with the Book of Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1–36)," *CBQ* 78, no. 3 (July 2016): 431.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 434–45.

having “defiled themselves . . . in all their uncleanness.”¹⁷ Similarly, Mark 5:2 refers to the demoniac as one “ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ.” Instead of simply referring to them as demons, then, Mark also describes them as “unclean spirit[s],” echoing the Book of Watchers.¹⁸ Moreover, both the Watchers and Legion use the title “ὑψιστος” for God (*1 Enoch* 9:3–4; Mark 5:7).¹⁹ As Michael S. Heiser notes, this is a common designation for God in the Book of Watchers, and it particularly highlights his role as judge in *1 Enoch*.²⁰ For Mark, it shows the demons’ recognition of God’s power residing in his Son, Jesus. There are, then, linguistic echoes of the Watchers tradition in Mark 5.

In addition, Mark 5 echoes events and thematic material from *1 Enoch*. A primary theme is that of binding the demonic. In both texts, demons are bound by another party – or fail to be so. Azazel is bound and cast into darkness awaiting judgment, after which he will “be cast into the fire” (*1 Enoch* 10:4–6).²¹ The Gerasene demoniac, in contrast, is incapable of being bound, shattering his fetters every time someone managed to subdue him (Mark 5:3–4). Such a contrast shows the power of God over the demonic precisely because he succeeds where humans fail. Other, more minor, shared thematic elements include living among tombs and swearing oaths on mountains.²²

While the precise nature of demons goes unspoken in Mark, its affinity with the Watchers tradition may speak to a belief, not in rebellious angels, but in the active spirits of the dead. It is common today to speak of demons as fallen angels, the third of the heavenly host which sided with Satan in a war against God and consequently were punished with him. This view stems in part from a preterist interpretation of Revelation 12:7–9 which sees the pericope as having occurred in the pre-existent past. However, Revelation comes from the early 90s C.E. – far too late to have been a source for the author of Mark’s Gospel. It is more helpful to turn instead to Second Temple interpretations of *1 Enoch*. Early exegetes accepted the

¹⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *A Companion to the Book of Enoch: A Reader’s Commentary, Vol. I: The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36)* (Crane, MO: Defender, 2019), 96.

¹⁸ Elder, “Of Porcine and Polluted Spirits,” 434.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 438.

²⁰ Heiser, *A Companion to the Book of Enoch*, 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 96. This theme will appear in the shared material of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, both of which likewise echo the Watchers tradition; see also Heiser’s comments on *1 Enoch* 10:4–5 (98-101).

²² Elder, “Of Porcine and Polluted Spirits,” 439-42.

notion of fallen angels, in accordance with the traditional view of Genesis 6; the sinful angels became known as Watchers.²³ However, demons were not these angels, but, rather, the disembodied spirits of their offspring. Following the Noahic flood, the giants who resulted from the sexual union of angels and humans in Genesis 6 lived on as pure spirits, as their physical forms were destroyed in the deluge.²⁴ *I Enoch* 15:8–9 refers to them as “πνευματά ισχυρά,” “powerful spirits,” usually glossed as “evil spirits” (as given in both another Greek manuscript and the Ethiopic text).²⁵

If Mark follows the Watchers tradition in 5:1–20 – which seems likely given both the linguistic and thematic echoes in the Gospel itself as well as the prevalence of the tradition throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Second Temple period literature – then it is entirely possible the Evangelist shares this view of the origin of demons.²⁶ For Mark’s Gospel, then, the demonic possibly originated in the antediluvian world and became active following the Flood as the disembodied spirits of dead giants maliciously roamed the earth. These spirits were privy to supernatural knowledge such as the identity of Christ and possessed the ability to influence and afflict humans.²⁷ With that said, it is a soft conclusion and tentative only; any firm contention as to demonic origins in Mark is speculative at best since the Evangelist gives no explicit description of those events.

The fourth (7:24–30) and fifth (9:14–29) Markan exorcisms deviate from the pattern established by the first three. In Mark 7:24–30, Jesus performs an exorcism without first encountering the possessed, providing deliverance instead based on the faith of the girl’s (Gentile) mother. This is unique in Mark’s Gospel in several ways. First, the involvement of faith in an exorcism is seen only here in Mark. No other demons are cast out based on the faith of the possessed or his/her loved ones; instead, all that is seemingly required is the power of Christ in response to his recognition of the presence of the demonic. Second, this is an exorcism conducted without Christ meeting the demon(s) face to face. No exorcism formula

²³ Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1–4 in Early Jewish Literature*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 20–21.

²⁴ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; Heiser, *A Companion to the Book of Enoch*, 145.

²⁶ Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits*, 169–93. This potential link is reinforced if one accepts Petrine authorship of 2 Peter as well as Peter’s influence on the writing of Mark. This area remains unexplored at present.

²⁷ Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels*, 15.

is used; the demon does not identify Jesus; and Christ gives no consequent command of silence. Rather, the demon is removed from a distance, so to speak, without visible action on the part of Jesus. Third, this is the only Markan exorcism Jesus seemingly resists conducting. The Syro-Phoenician woman is initially rebuffed by Jesus, and it is only after she pleads with him, demonstrating her faith, that he acquiesces and removes the demon from her daughter.

Likewise in Mark 9:14–29, Jesus heals a boy suffering from epilepsy only after his disciples have already tried and failed to perform the exorcism – another unique situation in Mark. His explanation for his success and their failure is that the type of demon involved is only capable of being removed “ἐν προσευχῇ.” The power of Christ is sufficient to remove all demons when Jesus himself wields it directly, but the Apostles are unable to conduct the exorcism because they do not pray as part of the ritual. As in the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter, the demon does not speak the name of Jesus, and thus Christ does not command its silence. Instead, he simply performs the exorcism.

The Messianic Secret and Demonic Knowledge of the Divine

Of these exorcism accounts, several directly contribute to the concealments of Jesus’s true identity and are thus part and parcel of the theme of the Messianic Secret in Mark: Mark 1:21–28, 32–34; 3:10–12; and 5:1–20. As John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton write, while some exorcisms are matters of healing, some directly establish the identity and mission of Christ, for even the demons know who he truly is.²⁸ Interestingly, it is the demons exclusively who seem to possess this knowledge in Mark; the most common human appellations for Jesus in his Gospel are “Διδάσκαλε,” “Ραββί,” and “Κύριε,” with the last being the most common address.²⁹ Demons, in contrast, use vocatives which include the name of Jesus and a reference to his status as the Son of God, knowledge initially hidden from humans (with the singular exception of John the Baptist).³⁰ Each time they demonstrate that knowledge, Jesus commands silence before continuing with the exorcism; such is the importance of secrecy in Mark’s Gospel. Indeed, Jesus’s first command to secrecy regarding his divine/messianic status coincides with the first exorcism

²⁸ John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology: Reading the Biblical Text in Its Cultural and Literary Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 241.

²⁹ David J. Clark, “Provocative Vocatives in the Gospels: Part I, Mark,” *The Bible Translator* 70, no. 2 (2019): 150-52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 152-53.

account in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. In Mark 1:21–28, Jesus is found teaching in the Capernaum synagogue, and a possessed member cries out to him, calling him “ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ.” This is first way demons in Mark display their supernatural awareness of the true identity of Jesus: a recognition of his holiness and status as the sent messenger of God.

These demonic designations for Jesus change throughout the Gospel of Mark, each adding a layer to his identity. As noted, first he is simply “the holy one of God.” In Mark 3:10–12, various unclean spirits call him “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.” In the account of the Gerasene demoniac two chapters later, Jesus is identified by demons as “Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψίστου.” This is the beginning of the final recorded dialogue between Christ and demons in Mark, and it is also the most dramatic – and the most revelatory of Jesus. Throughout these dialogues, Jesus has been first “the holy one of God” and then “the Son of God,” but now he is recognized in his fullness: “Jesus, Son of the Most High God.” It is evident, then, that in Markan demonology, demons possess supernatural knowledge.

Regardless of names used, at each juncture, and as a result of this knowledge, Christ commands silence regarding his identity. As noted by David Wenham, several theories have been offered as to why Jesus makes this demand and keeps a “messianic secret.” First, some see it as simply a literary device of Mark in order to build mystery in his Gospel. Second, it is theorized to be an explanation for the allegation Jesus never saw himself as the Messiah. Third, still others see the secrecy motif as Pauline influence, finding parallels with material in the Pauline Epistles, particularly Romans and the Corinthian correspondence.³¹ Finally, some deny the Messianic Secret as originally posited by William Wrede completely, seeing it as contradicted by the very existence of a Gospel.³²

With Wenham, however, one should consider the best explanation for the Messianic Secret to be simply that Jesus could not have his identity revealed before it was time.³³ His ministry would have been severely hampered by those clinging to him as Messiah, and his public ministry, both teaching and miracles, would have suffered as a result. Instead, Jesus commanded silence regarding his identity in order to accomplish God's purposes on earth before the crucifixion. That the

³¹ Heidi Wendt, “Secrecy as Pauline Influence on the Gospel of Mark,” *JBL* 140, no. 3 (2021): 586-97.

³² Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 74-75. Interestingly, and in potential support of this denial of a secrecy motif, it is only in Mark 8:30 that the title of “ὁ Χριστός” is applied to Jesus, and it appears there on the (very human) lips of Peter; see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 330-31.

³³ David Wenham, *Jesus in Context: Making Sense of the Historical Figure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 128.

demons held such secret knowledge established them in opposition to the ministry of Jesus over and above even their usual evil interference – and demonstrates once again their membership in the supernatural realm.

Synthesis: A Markan Demonology

With this in mind, several conclusions may be drawn concerning the nature of demons in Mark's Gospel. First, and foundationally, their origin is left open to debate. Mark draws from *1 Enoch* as well as Leviticus, and both traditions are evident throughout Mark 5 in particular. Mark uses several terms to name the entities, including both “δαιμόνιον” and “πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτω,” leaving their exact origin open to interpretation. Critically, they are only explicitly connected with Satan in a single text (3:22–30), and it is parabolic in nature. Second, and most obviously in Mark over the other Gospels, they possess supernatural knowledge, specifically of the identity of Jesus. Whether this is a result of their previous coexistence with Jesus prior to Satan's rebellion or their own spiritual recognition of a present reality is unknown, and to firmly prefer one possibility over the other is to invite more speculation than the text permits. Third, demons may grant supernatural strength and physical abilities while robbing the possessed of mental faculties (consider especially the Gerasene demoniac). Fourth, demons may cause physical ailments as well as mental problems. Seizures appear to be most common, but deafness and muteness also occur.

Mark also offers insight into the relationship between the demonic and believers. Significantly, and in addition to his own exorcisms, Christ gives the Twelve the same power and authority over demons he himself has, and they put this to immediate practice in their own ministry (6:7–13). Moreover, if one accepts the long ending of Mark as authentic, Christ extends this ability to all believers (16:17–20). This portion of divine power thus resides in all who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is also explicitly linked in the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (7:24–30), which is carried out in direct response to faith in Christ. Faith may be insufficient, however. The final Markan exorcism (9:14–29) demonstrates the need for prayer as well. Christ states that “Τοῦτο τὸ γένος” can be removed only by prayer (v. 29), indicating that prayer is necessary for certain exorcisms. This also posits the existence of various types of demons, some of which may be more resistant than others to the ministrations of believers. Such an inference is merited by the text, but Mark does not offer additional information on a hypothetical “demonic hierarchy” in any fashion.

These conclusions have been contested in scholarship throughout the last century. As higher critics like Rudolph Bultmann sought to “demythologize” the Bible, texts dealing with the overtly supernatural were explained away in purely

rational terms. In this vein, the Markan exorcism accounts have been evaluated through the lens of trauma theory, and various scholars have reached the conclusion that while demonic possession is impossible, internalized stress resulting from socio-political realities which then manifests in external ways is both possible and even likely. This then becomes the means of explaining the nature of the demonic in the Gospels.³⁴ Both Paul W. Hollenbach and Albert Hogeterp apply trauma theory to the various contextual strata of the account of the Gerasene demoniac, for example, and see the man's "possession" as the outworking of mental trauma caused by Roman occupation and social isolation.³⁵

Such "scientific" psychological/psychosomatic causes are ultimately unsatisfactory, however, for two main reasons. First, the Evangelist behind the Gospel of Mark expresses a thorough belief in the supernatural throughout the text, not confining his metaphysic to a single genre of literature (namely exorcism accounts). The reality of the supernatural, both heavenly and hellish, pervades the work, and it is inseparable from the purposes of Mark. To remove the supernatural elements would gut the Gospel entirely. Second, only the account of the Gerasene demoniac features blatantly political elements which may be indicative of traumatic experiences (e.g., "Legion" as the name of the demon(s) and his status as an unclean outcast living among the tombs). Other exorcism accounts are devoid of these elements, and some portray possession as resulting in strictly physical, not mental, illness (Mark 9:14–29, for example). As such, there is no textual reason to discount the exorcism stories as simply the results of lived trauma due to foreign influences or mental illnesses.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Mark contains a demonological theme from its first chapter to its last. While it offers only sparse information concerning the origins of demons – and that gleaned from textual echoes of and allusions to both canonical and noncanonical works – it showcases the work of the demonic in the biblical world and offers no hints that such activity will cease at the close of the canon. Demons have been active since the days of Noah, and their work in Mark is to afflict and torment human beings in keeping with their own unclean nature. Mark makes use of both Old Testament and noncanonical sources in his treatment of these unclean

³⁴ See especially Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities," 572-80; Albert Hogeterp, "Trauma and Its Ancient Literary Interpretation: Mark 5,1–20." *ZNW* 111, no. 1 (2020): 24-32.

³⁵ Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities," 573-580; Hogeterp, "Trauma," 26-29.

spirits, and such traditions help point the reader to continuity across the Testaments: just as the OT contains traditions found in the Gospel, it also directs its readers to the coming Messiah, the Messiah who is now recognized in Mark as Jesus.

Ironically, the nature of Jesus as the Son of God – and more generally as a supernatural entity in his own right – is highlighted by the demonic forces present in the Gospel. Demons know Jesus for who he truly is, exposing the secret of his identity, and he must command their silence repeatedly throughout the Gospel in order to accomplish his mission on earth and avoid both a burdensome following and a premature death. This, however, is a secret demons cannot keep: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Most High God, and he is come into the world on a mission from his Father in heaven. The exorcisms he performs in that mission demonstrate a critical truth: no evil force, no power of hell, no fallen angel, no disembodied spirit can withstand the power of Almighty God. For Mark, that power is incarnate in Jesus Christ – healer, exorcist, and Son of God.

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