NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
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EDITORIAL BOARD FOR 1981-82

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Vol. 28
AUGUST 1982
No. 2

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022
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MARK 1.14-20: AN INTERPRETATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF JEWISH AND GRAECO-ROMAN TRADITIONS*

A deeply-rooted affliction plagues our commentaries on the Gospel of Mark. The problem is this: no contemporary commentaries systematically cite traditions in Graeco-Roman literature as well as traditions in Jewish literature to explicate the text of the Gospel of Mark. There should be no misunderstanding. The interpreter must not forsake intricate analysis of Jewish traditions in order to turn to Graeco-Roman literature. Rather, interpreters should glean insights from Graeco-Roman literature as well as Jewish literature to explain features that usually are not explored in the text.

The interpretative steps in this paper position the Gospel of Mark at one of the points of intersection between Jewish and Graeco-Roman culture during the first century of the Christian era. The goal is to exhibit the structure and meaning of Mark 1. 14-20 by exploring the merger of Jewish and Graeco-Roman conventions and traditions in the passage. The approach presupposes that the Gospel of Mark contains a mixture of religious and cultural traditions similar to other literature written during the Hellenistic period. A major challenge for the interpreter is to observe dimensions of the text that usually are unexplored when Israelite, Jewish, and Christian texts, but not secular Greek and Roman texts, are used as a hermeneutical base for commentary.

MARK 1.14-20 AS A THREE-STEP RHETORICAL UNIT

The literary structure of Mark 1. 14-20 provides the first clue to the intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions in the passage. The unit contains three parts (1. 14-15, 16-18, 19-20) within a temporal framework that refers to the arrest of John the Baptist at the beginning of the unit (1. 14) and a sabbath day in Capernaum at the end of it (1. 21). The three parts within this framework present a three-step rhetorical sequence characteristic of other units in the Gospel of Mark. Spatial movement is cited during the three-step progression, but there are no references to

duration of time. The unit functions as an interlude in the narrative determined by spatially-conditioned rhetorical dynamics rather than spatio-temporal dynamics. In other words, during the three-step unit time gives way to summons. It is not clear to the reader how much time transpires between the arrival of Jesus in Galilee (1. 14) and the sabbath day in Capernaum (1. 21). Perhaps the time period is a day, perhaps it is a week. The exact time period is unimportant. It is a span of time in which Jesus encounters people and gains a response from them. The kind of time supersedes the length of time. Since the narrational progression of the Gospel of Mark includes movement through time as well as space, however, a specific temporal statement occurs immediately after the unit (1. 21) to resume the temporal dimension of the narrative.

The rhetorical interaction in Mark 1. 14-20 represents a merger of the itinerant prophetic activity characteristic of Elijah and Elisha and the teaching activity characteristic of wandering preacher-teachers during the Hellenistic period. The reader is presented with a peripatetic educational context which perpetuates a system of values that emerges from Jewish prophetic circles. Written in Greek language influenced by Semitic idiom, the unit portrays action and thought that represents a particular blending of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions. The first step in the unit (1. 14-15) features Jesus moving into a new area and announcing a summary of his message that establishes the setting for his activity. The second step (1. 16-18) features Jesus interacting with two people in a manner that creates special dynamics for the call to discipleship in the final portion of the unit. The third and final step (1. 19-20) brings the summoning activity of Jesus to a highpoint. This step is the hallmark of the unit, and it exhibits the socio-cultural role of the Mediterranean preacher-teacher in dramatic literary fashion. An itinerant preacher-teacher comes into a situation and challenges people to adopt a system of thought and action that he himself espouses, i.e. to become a disciple in either a primary or secondary relationship.

A systematic search through Mediterranean literature has uncovered only partial manifestations of the Marcan three-step sequence in biblical and Jewish literature but complete manifestations of the sequence in Graeco-Roman literature featuring philosopher-teachers and their disciple-companions. Partial manifestations of the sequence occur in settings featuring Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, but none of the settings calls forth all the steps of the sequence. The closest parallel to Mark 1. 14-20 in Graeco-Roman literature appears to exist in Xenophon's Memorabilia IV.1.5-11.39. In both Mark and the Memorabilia, the summary of the teacher's message leads directly into a portrayal of the teacher going to one or more people to convince them to become his disciple-companions. In Mem. IV.1.5, a summary of Socrates' teaching is placed on the lips of Socrates much like

* Short paper read at the S.N.T.S. meeting in Toronto, August 1980.
the summary of Jesus' teaching occurs in Mark 1. 14–15. Then, Mem. IV. ii.1–40 contains a three-step progression (ii.1–2, 3–7, 8–40) that ends with the conclusion by Euthydemus:

that he would never be of much account (οὐκ ἄν ἄλλως ἀνὴρ ἄξιος γενέας) unless he spent as much time as possible with Socrates (εἰ μη δι αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἑαυτὸν σωθεὶς) [IV.ii.40].

In Mem. IV.ii.1–2, Socrates goes to the sadder's shop near the market place to challenge Euthydemus to become a disciple-companion much like Jesus goes to the Sea of Galilee to challenge Simon, Andrew, James, and John. In Mem. IV.ii.3–7 Socrates again challenges Euthydemus to become his disciple-companion, then in IV.ii.8 Socrates succeeds in getting Euthydemus to sit beside him and begin to answer questions. As the three-step progression in Mark leads to the disciples' accompaniment of Jesus throughout a series of events (Mark 1. 21–3. 6) that exhibits Jesus' mission to call not the righteous but sinners (Mark 2. 17), so the three-step progression in Xenophon's Memorabilia leads to Euthydemus' acceptance of Socrates' leadership on a dialogical journey that explores wisdom, justice, and the good in daily life.

Mark 1. 14–20 is, therefore, a three-step rhetorical unit that calls forth the essential dynamics of the itinerant preacher-teacher in Mediterranean culture. The first step presents Jesus as a travelling prophet-teacher who announces the kingdom of God and commands people to respond to his teaching through repentance and belief. The second step shows Jesus encountering two men with a command and promise that defines the end result of discipleship in terms of 'becoming fishers of men'. The third step shows Jesus immediately calling two more men who leave boat, nets, father and hired servants to go away with him. This kind of sequence, written in Greek influenced by Semitic idiom, has its closest parallel in Xenophon's Memorabilia about Socrates. Such a literary sequence is at home in a Graeco-Roman context featuring teachers and their disciple-companions.

In the Gospel of Mark the sequence emerges in a context where Graeco-Roman socio-cultural dynamics intersect with Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic traditions.

MARK 1.14–15: JESUS AND THE GOSPEL OF GOD

While the three-step procedure exemplified by Mark 1. 14–20 has its closest parallel in Xenophon's Memorabilia, the individual parts of the unit intermingle themes, conventions, and traditions in a manner characteristic of much literature written during the Hellenistic period. The first part of the unit, Mark 1. 14–15, introduces a summary of Jesus' teaching in the context of spatio-temporal narration - 'after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus entered into Galilee'. While the spatio-temporal comment is part of the Marcan narrative program, the essential socio-cultural ingredient is the direct statement by Jesus in v. 15 that sets the stage for his words and deeds throughout the narrative. This verse contains the first statement on the lips of Jesus in the Marcan narrative and introduces the dynamics of assertion and command that accompany Jesus throughout it:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.

A similar literary unit occurs at the beginning of the Elijah/Elisha cycle in the Hebrew Bible. Elijah is introduced to the readers by means of direct speech that characterizes the role of Elijah in the socio-cultural setting:

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word' (1 Kings 17. 1).

This announcement by Elijah introduces the basic role of Elijah in the narrative. Elijah will announce the word of the Lord to various people, and this announcement will exhibit itself as an authoritative communication of the Lord God himself (cf. Amos 1. 1–2; Zephaniah 1. 1–6).

An even closer parallel, however, exists in Xenophon's Memorabilia IV.1.5. This passage contains a summary of Socrates' teaching at the end of the introduction to book IV. The summary functions much like Mark 1. 15 at the end of the introduction to the Gospel of Mark. Like the Gospel of Mark, the summary is preceded by narrational comment ending with λέγων δε, and the summary constitutes the first statement of the protagonist in the book:

Only a fool can think it possible to distinguish between things useful and things harmful without learning; only a fool can think that without distinguishing these he will get all he wants by means of his wealth and be able to do what is expedient; only a simpleton can think that without the power to do what is expedient he is doing well and has made good or sufficient provision for his life; only a simpleton can think that by his wealth alone without knowledge he will be reputed good at something, or will enjoy a good reputation without being reputed good at anything in particular (Mem. IV.1.5).

This statement by Socrates introduces the mode of action undertaken by him in the rest of the book. He goes to people and engages them in conversation. The conversation inaugurates a relationship with him that provides the opportunity to learn a unified system of thought and action that will direct their words and deeds in an integrated, beneficial manner.

Elijah's statement makes it clear that the Lord is the originator of the word which he announces. In contrast, Socrates makes his pronouncement on his own authority. Jesus' statement in Mark stands somewhere between these two modes. On the one hand, Jesus' statement is prophetic. The authority of the Lord God stands behind it. On the other hand, the statement
is an announcement of a system of thought and action that resides within Jesus so fully that God does not continually encounter him to tell him the next thing to do. In other words, the gospel resides in Jesus in a form more like wisdom resides in a preacher-teacher. A preacher-teacher is overseen by God or the gods, but he is a more autonomous person than a biblical prophet. Immediately after Elijah’s announcement, the word of the Lord directs him to go away to the brook Cherith east of the Jordan (1 Kings 17. 2-4). In contrast, Jesus goes both into Galilee and into Capernaum without instructions from God (1. 14, 21).

An awareness of the parallels to Mark 1. 14-15 in both Israelite and Greek literature aids the interpreter not only in describing the mode of Jesus’ teaching but also in delineating the function of Mark 1. 14-15 in the Marcan narrative. Recent interpreters have debated whether Mark 1. 14-15 functions as a conclusion to the introduction (Mark 1. 1-15) or as an introduction to the first major section of the narrative (Mark 1. 14-3. 6). The presence of εὐαγγέλιων in both 1. 1 and 1. 14-15 represents one of the strongest arguments that vv. 14-15 conclude the introduction, since the term εὐαγγέλιον then provides a frame for the introduction. When Mark 1. 14-15 is compared with Xenophon, Memorabilia IV.1.5, this argument appears to have the upper hand. Both the beginning of the Gospel of Mark and the beginning of Memorabilia IV are constructed so that a major theme is expressed in a narrational comment at the beginning of the introduction and then repeated in the direct speech of the protagonist at the end of the introduction. Therefore, while the framework of Mark 1. 1-15 contains:

(1. 1) . . . τοῦ εὐαγγελίων Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱὸν θεοῦ . . .
(1. 14-15) τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ . . . λέγον τῷ . . . ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ,

the framework of Memorabilia IV.1.1-5 contains:

(IV.1.1) . . . Σωκράτης . . . πράγματες . . . ὄφελμος . . .
(IV.1.4-5) . . . ὑφελμομέτροι . . . πράγματα . . . ὁφελεῖ . . .

In both instances the introduction is framed by themes contained in narrational comments in the opening verses that recur in narrational comments and direct speech at the end.

Nevertheless, an interpretation of Mark 1. 14-15 at the intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman literary culture reveals that these verses have a dual function in the Marcan narrative. Mark 1. 14-15 functions not only like Mem. IV.1.4-5 which draws the introduction to a close but also like 1 Kings 17. 1 which opens the Elijah/Elisha cycle in the Deuteronomic history. In other words, in Mark 1. 14-15 the impulses from a memorabilia account that organizes basic teachings and actions into thematic sections intersect with impulses from a narrative biblical account that presents a sequential progression of action directed by God. Mark 1. 14-15 not only contains references to ‘the gospel’ but also contains a temporal reference that separates the unit from the previous episode (μετά δὲ τοῦ παραδοθηκέα τῶν Ἰωάννης) and Jesus’ name as the subject of the verb of action that introduces a new section in the narrative (ἡλθεν δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν). The impulses at work in the placement and composition of Mark 1. 14-15 produce a transitional scene that provides a thematic conclusion to the introduction in the same context in which it inaugurates a new stage in the spatio-temporal program of the Marcan narrative.

Mark 1. 14-15, therefore, is a literary segment that emerges out of an intersection of impulses from Graeco-Roman memorabilia literature that thematically organizes the teaching and action of the philosopher-teacher and a biblical narrative that presents a spatio-temporal account of a prophet’s confrontation of people with a message from God. The intersection of traditions causes these verses to function transitionally between the introduction and the first major section of the Gospel. The transitional function emerges when Jesus’ summary of the gospel of God, a natural conclusion to the introduction, is placed in the context of a spatio-temporal reference that inaugurates the active ministry of Jesus.

MARK 1. 16-18: INTERACTION WITH THE FIRST TWO DISCIPLES

The second portion of the unit (1. 16-18) exhibits the essential direction of Jesus’ activity – to convince people to follow his system of thought and action. Jesus goes to two fishermen casting a net in the Sea of Galilee and summons them to follow him. The scene features Jesus commanding the disciples (‘come after me’), promising to make them into something they now are not (‘I will make you become fishers of men’), and gaining a response from the two men he encounters (‘and immediately they left their nets and followed him’).

The command, promise, and response in the second portion of the unit represent a merger of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions. On the one hand, the language and structure of the encounter are similar to Yahweh’s encounter with Abram. Much as Mark 1. 14-15 resembles Elijah’s announcement of the Lord at the beginning of the Elijah/Elisha cycle, so Mark 1. 16-18 resembles the scene that opens the Abram story in the book of Genesis. The Abram story begins with an encounter between Yahweh and Abram that sets the story in motion much like Jesus’ encounter with Simon and Andrew inaugurates the successive stages of interaction between Jesus and his disciples in the Gospel of Mark. Both the call of Abram and the call of Simon and Andrew contain a promise that the people ‘will be made into something different from what they now are’, and in both instances the
people respond immediately to the call. As a result, even some of the language of the LXX account of the call of Abram parallels the language of the Marcan account of the call of Simon and Andrew. The language and structure of the LXX version of the Abram story in Gen. 12. 1–4 is:

(a) καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Άβραμ,
(b) Ἐξέλθε ... καὶ (δεύτε)...
(c) καὶ παύσας σε ... 
(d) καὶ ἐπορεύθη Άβραμ καθάπερ ἔδηλησεν αὐτῷ κύριος.

The language and structure of the Simon and Andrew story in Mark 1. 16–18 is:

(a) καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς,
(b) Δεῦτε ... 
(c) καὶ παύσας ἦμα ... 
(d) καὶ ... ἄκουσέν τε αὐτῷ.

As Yahweh commands Abram to leave his present circumstances so that he can make him into something he now is not, so Jesus commands Simon and Andrew to come away from their present work and he will make them into something they now are not. In both instances, the men respond obediently to the command and promise. In other words, Yahweh is the major personage who makes promises and attains responses to commands in biblical tradition. In contrast, the Gospel of Mark presents a person from Galilee who issues commands and promises that call forth the responses of people.

In Graeco-Roman tradition, commands and promises regularly emerge from the lips of philosopher-teachers as they challenge people to become their student-disciples. This tradition is well characterized by Socrates as he speaks about the sophists' ability to attract young men to them:

... this seems to me to be a fine thing, if one might be able to teach young people, as Gorgias of Leontini and Prodicus of Ceos and Hipplas of Elis are. For each of these men, gentlemen, is able to go into any one of the cities and persuade the young men, who can associate for nothing with whomsoever they wish among their own fellow citizens, to give up the association with those men and to associate with them and pay them money and be grateful besides (Apologety 198).

Even though Socrates distinguished himself sharply from the sophists, he himself was characterized as a leading sophist in Aristophanes' The Clouds, first produced in 423 B.C. In this play, the scene between Strepsiades and Socrates caricatures the sophists and their student-disciples. The scene reveals the language and dynamics of the teacher/disciple relationship in 5th century B.C. Greek tradition.

Socrates: Put off your cloak.
Strepsiades: Why, what have I done wrong?
Socrates: O, nothing, nothing: all go in here naked.
Strepsiades: Well, but I have not come with a search-warrant.

In this scene, imperative mood on the lips of Socrates and the occurrence of ἀκολουθεῖν (to follow) and δεύτε (to come) reflect the dynamics of the first encounter between teacher and student-disciple. To become a student-disciple is to submit to the will and goals of the teacher. Acceptance of the role of student-disciple naturally evokes the image of following someone on a venture which leads down new, unknown paths, and this image was well-established in Greek tradition in the late 5th century B.C.

The dynamics of teacher and student-disciple are prominent and vital in Greek tradition from the 5th century B.C. through the third century A.D. Moreover, the initial moment in the relationship between a teacher and a student-disciple may be recounted to characterize the entire relationship between a teacher and a student-disciple. When Diogenes Laertius (ca. 200–250 A.D.) wishes to characterize Xenophon as a loyal disciple who defended the reputation of his teacher Socrates by composing the Memorabilia, he considers the essence of that relationship to be present in Socrates' summons of Xenophon. The similarities of the account with Jesus' call of Simon and Andrew are notable:

The story goes that Socrates met him [Xenophon] in a narrow passage, and that he stretched out his stick to bar the way, while he inquired where every kind of food was sold. Upon receiving a reply, he put another question, 'And where do men become good and honourable?' Xenophon was fairly puzzled: 'Then follow me (ἐπομενον τοιων)', said Socrates, 'and learn.' From that time onward he was a disciple (ἀκολουθησα) of Socrates (Lives II 48).

In contrast to Jewish circles of tradition, Graeco-Roman circles prefer the word ἐπομενον for following rather than ἀκολουθεῖν. Nevertheless, the meaning is the same. The purpose for following is to become something a person now is not. As in the Marcan story, so in the encounter between
Socrates and Xenophon, the teacher uses the verb γιναμαι to express the purpose for following. As Socrates says in the encounter with Xenophon, individuals follow for the purpose of becoming good and honourable (καλοί καγαθοί γίνονται δίκαιοι).

Therefore, while command and response is characteristic of first encounters between Yahweh and mortals in biblical tradition, as early as the 5th century B.C. philosopher-teachers are portrayed in a similar role vis-à-vis student-disciples. The Christian account of Jesus’ call of Simon and Andrew, written in Greek during the last half of the first century A.D., represents a merger of the two traditions. Dimensions of the preceding biblical tradition influence Jesus’ call of Simon and Andrew in such a manner that Jesus’ function is analogous to the function of Yahweh himself during Israel’s earlier history. Yet Jesus’ function does not derive directly from the Yahweh tradition alone. The function of both itinerant prophets and autonomous philosopher-teachers has provided the cultural matrix for the portrayal.

A still more precise delineation of the coalescence of traditions in the Marcan account of the call of Simon and Andrew is possible if we compare Mark 1. 16–18 with Elijah’s call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19. 19–21. The language and structure of the LXX version of the call of Elisha has been cited regularly as the precedent for the dynamics in Mark 1. 16–18,10 because the phrasing and the structuring of the story bear a resemblance to the Marcan account:

(a) And he [Elijah] departed from there (καὶ ἀφῆκεν ἐκεῖνον) and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, and he was ploughing with oxen, twelve oxen before him, and he was with the thirteenth, and Elijah passed by to him and cast his mantle upon him.
(b) And Elisha looked on the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, ‘I will kiss my father and follow after you (καὶ ἰδὼν ὀρέα καὶ μένοντα ἐν πρόσωπε Ἰσραήλ ἐγκαλεῖται ἐν μέρεσίν).’ And Elijah said to him, ‘Go back again; for I have done a thing for you.’
(c) And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered to him (καὶ ἀκολούθησεν ὅπου ἤκολοθυνεν Μαξαθῳ καὶ διδαχότατα αὐτῷ).

In the LXX version of the story the response of Elisha is recounted with the verb ἀκολούθησεν and the preposition ὅπου in a context where the one who responds is engaged in his daily vocation. These features are duplicated in Mark 1. 16–18. A closer comparison, however, reveals that the Elisha story lacks a number of features that are present in the Simon and Andrew story.19 First of all, the biblical story of Elijah’s call to Elisha features no command from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah simply casts his mantle upon Elisha (19. 19). Secondly, Elijah has no intention that Elisha should follow him. When Elisha begins to follow, Elijah tells him to return, because he has already done the thing commanded to him by Yahweh. In other words, the biblical story lacks the dynamics of a teacher calling a student-disciple into a teaching/learning relationship. Thirdly, after Elisha says the oxen, gives it to the people to eat, and goes to join Elijah, the purpose is for Elijah to work for Elijah as a servant (19. 21). The story does not suggest a relationship whereby Elisha will be sent out while Elijah is still alive to extend the kind of work in which Elijah is engaged. Fourthly, there is no promise by Elijah to make Elisha into something he now is not. Whatever change is to take place in Elisha happens at the time the mantle is cast upon him. This action alone is an anointing that makes Elisha able to take Elijah’s place after he is gone (1 Kings 19. 16).

It is understandable that teacher/disciple dynamics are not contained in the biblical account of Elijah’s call of Elisha, since neither the terminology nor the concept of the teacher/disciple relation exists in biblical tradition prior to the Hellenistic period.20 The term μαθητής, which is common in Greek literature and the gospels, does not occur once in the earliest Greek version of the Hebrew bible, and the term διδάσκαλος occurs only once (Esther 6. 1). During the Hellenistic period the teacher/disciple tradition made inroads into Jewish thought. The Alexandrine recension of the LXX reveals the infiltration of the terminology into the books of Jeremiah and Daniel,21 and the concept and terminology are present in the literature of the Qumran community, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, the gospels, and rabbinic literature. But different Jewish circles appropriated teacher/disciple traditions in different ways. When Philo appropriated the concept, he emphasized the role of God as the teacher of true wisdom and virtue and referred concomitantly to the role of Abraham and Moses as disciples of God.22 The Qumran community, early Christianity, Josephus, and the Tannaim referred regularly to important human personages in their heritage as teachers, but each appropriated teacher/disciple traditions in its own way in the context of Hellenistic culture.

Both Josephus’ account of Elijah’s call of Elisha and the Marcan account of Jesus’ call of Simon and Andrew were written during the last half of the first century A.D., and both display the intersection of Graeco-Roman teacher/disciple traditions with Jewish traditions in a text written in Greek. Like the author of Mark, Josephus lived in a Hellenistic cultural context informed by teacher/disciple traditions. For this reason, Josephus transforms the biblical account of the Elijah/Elisha story into an encounter in which Elijah intends to lure Elisha into a student-disciple role:

Elijah . . . returned to the country of the Hebrews and came upon Elisha, the son of Saphates, as he was ploughing and some others with him, who were driving twelve yokes of oxen, and going up to him (προσελθόντας), he threw his own mantle over him. Thereupon Elijah immediately began to prophesy (εἰπών προφητεύς ἐνηργῶς), and, leaving his oxen (καταλαμβάνοντας τοὺς βόσκους), followed Elijah (προφητεύοντας Ἐλια). But he asked to be allowed to take leave of his parents, and when Elijah bade him (καλεύοντας) do this, he parted from them and then went with the prophet; and so long as Elijah was alive he was his disciple (μαθητής) and attendant (διδάκτου) (Antiquities viii. 354).
Since Josephus portrays the call of Elisha through a framework of understanding informed by the dynamics of a teacher who gathers disciple-companions, his account contains greater similarities than the LXX account with the call of Simon and Andrew in Mark. The shorter version of the account, the use of participial constructions, the presence of ἔθεσαν and ἔρχομαι with the infinitive, and the presence of the verb ἀκολουθέω and the term μάθησις bring the account closer to the Marcan portrayal of Jesus’ call. Still, a major difference distinguishes the portrayal of Elijah’s call and the portrayal of Jesus’ call.

Elijah remains clearly subordinate to God in the Josephan story. God tells Elijah to anoint Elisha, and Elijah anoints him without issuing any commands or promises to him. In contrast, the Marcan account has Jesus go to Simon and Andrew without any instructions from God. Moreover, Jesus issues a command and promise to Simon and Andrew that is analogous to Yahweh’s command and promise to various people in biblical tradition. There is no parallel command in Josephus’ account of the call of Elisha. In other words, in the Marcan account Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions have merged in a manner somewhat different from the Josephan account. Jesus receives more of an autonomous role as a teacher than Elijah. In contrast to the prophets, Jesus is not instructed by God before every venture he undertakes. In fact, one of the most telling comments in the Gospel of Mark occurs when the narrator says that Jesus chose ‘those whom he himself wanted’ (οὓς ὁ ὑιόν αὐτοῦ: 3. 13) as his disciples.23 Jesus rather than the Lord God himself decides who will be called into discipleship, and Jesus rather than the Lord God himself issues the commands and promises characteristic of that call.

When Jesus calls Simon and Andrew in Mark, he promises to make them become ‘fishers of men’. The dynamics of this promise are best understood as a merger of traditions characteristic of Yahweh and of philosopher-teachers such as Socrates. First, the promise ‘to make them become something different from what they are’ is associated not only with Yahweh (Gen. 12. 2) but also with philosopher-teachers (Plato, Protagoras 310D–319A, 328B–E; Xenophon, Memorabilia Iii. 2–3, 48–52). Second, while fishing for men in biblical tradition usually refers to an act of judgment by God,24 fishing in Greek literature is a well-established metaphor for teaching and learning in relation to philosopher-teachers.25 The appropriate context for understanding the role of ‘fishing for men’ in Mark lies at an intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions. Jesus himself is regularly called ‘teacher’ even by his disciple-companions in Mark.26 The task of those who follow will be to embody the system of thought and action Jesus himself teaches and does. The disciples are to preach repentance (6. 12), heal (6. 13), and accept the system of thought and action whereby they are willing to lose their lives for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (8. 34–38). In other words, fishing for men derives both from God’s action of snaring for judgment (preaching repentance) and the philosopher-teacher’s action of embodying and teaching a particular system of thought and action. In Mark, becoming ‘fishers of men’ is a matter of acquiring the ability and responsibility of gaining adherents to the system of thought and action introduced by Jesus in the narrative, i.e. preaching ‘the gospel’ to all nations in the context of the eschatological action of God (13. 10).

To become a fisher of men is to learn a mode of living that combines prophetic preaching with a system of thought and action that is understood as discipleship. Again, therefore, the meaning of the Marcan statement results from a merger of prophetic and apocalyptic traditions with Graeco-Roman teacher/disciple traditions.

In summary, therefore, Jesus’ call of Simon and Andrew in Mark 1. 16–18 represents a merger of Graeco-Roman traditions with biblical and Jewish traditions. From the standpoint of biblical and Jewish traditions, the transfer of autonomous authority from Yahweh to Jesus himself is striking. From the standpoint of Graeco-Roman tradition, however, this autonomous role is not remarkable for a teacher calling student-disciples to follow him. In other words, in this Christian document the Messiah Jesus takes over functions of Yahweh by means of the well-established social role of the autonomous philosopher-teacher in Graeco-Roman culture. In this context, Jesus’ promise to make Simon and Andrew fishers of men is a promise to bring them to a stage of development where they are able to take the gospel to all nations by means of a system of thought and action that will not allow them to falter when they are delivered up to councils, beaten in synagogues, and taken before governors and kings (Mark 13. 9).

The function of Jesus in the scene is not only that of an eschatological prophet who confronts people with the commands of God but also that of a teacher who gathers student-disciples for the purpose of introducing a system of thought and action that he himself embodies. Only through an extended period of association with this teacher before his death do these student-disciples attain the possibility of manifesting this system of thought and action in their own lives.

MARK 1.19–20: THE LANGUAGE OF SUMMONS IN THE MARCAN NARRATIVE

In contrast to the first two scenes in this unit, the final scene contains no direct speech by Jesus. The calling of James and John is presented to the reader by means of narrational comment alone. Comparison of the narrational structure and terminology of the call stories in Mark reveals the impulse at work in the context. Only this final scene contains the verb
This kind of three-part sequence is also present in two units between 1. 14–20 and the central section that contains the three passion predictions, i.e. 3. 7–19 and 6. 1–13. After an initial scene that explicitly mentions the presence of the disciples with Jesus as he moves from one place to another (3. 7–8; 6. 1–3), Jesus interacts with people in an intermediate section (3. 9–12; 6. 4–6), and this interaction leads into a final unit that begins with a narrational comment containing προσκαλέωμαι that portrays Jesus summoning his disciples (3. 13–19; 6. 7–13). Then, as the narrative continues after the central section that contains the three passion predictions, this kind of three-part rhetorical sequence seems to influence the portrayal of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem (10. 46–48, 49–52; 11. 1–11) and Jesus’ discussion of the future with Peter, James, John and Andrew (13. 1–2, 3–4, 5–37). The final portion of these units contains commands that summon the disciples to go out and do special kinds of activities that relate to Jesus’ thought and action. These units divide the narrative into sections that present Jesus as an itinerant prophet-teacher who calls student-disciples and systematically teaches them his system of thought and action before his death. The summoning and sending in the final part of each unit creates a systematic call to adopt the thought and action embodied by Jesus in the narrative.

The particular socio-cultural function of Jesus’ calling of people becomes evident when this dimension of Mark is compared with the portrayal of rabbis in Tannaitic literature. A systematic search through Tannaitic literature reveals that rabbis do not go to people to persuade them to become talmidim. Rather, a person who wishes to become a disciple seeks a rabbi and attempts to convince the rabbi to accept him as a disciple.29 In contrast, the narrator of Mark portrays Jesus as a teacher who calls and commands with authority and autonomy that combines the function of Yahweh in biblical tradition and the function of Graeco-Roman teachers in secular tradition. Like Graeco-Roman teachers, Jesus gathers disciple-companions, and like Graeco-Roman teachers, he selects those disciples ‘whom he himself’ wants. As Jesus engages in this activity, he is portrayed as a personage who calls, commands, warns, and promises people with authority delegated to him by Yahweh himself.

In summary, therefore, the scene in which Jesus calls James and John reveals narrational terminology that plays a special role in the Marcan narrative. The activity of Jesus in 1. 14–15 and 1. 16–18 leads to a scene in which a narrational comment designates Jesus’ confrontation of people as a ‘call’ to respond to his system of thought and action. In only one scene in Mark is this calling terminology placed on the lips of Jesus (2. 17). In all other instances, the language of calling is found in narrational material that interprets Jesus’ confrontation of people as a call to discipleship. The importance of the calling terminology in 1. 20 emerges from its relation to
the calling terminology in the final portion of three-part units throughout the narrative. This calling terminology systematically occurs as a narrational comment that introduces scenes where Jesus calls people to action. This dimension of the Marcan narrative exhibits a particular combination of biblical and Graeco-Roman traditions that characterizes the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is portrayed as an autonomous, itinerant teacher who gathers disciple-companions and calls people to action with the authority of Yahweh himself.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mark 1. 14–20 is a three-part literary unit related to other three-part units in the narrative. These units end with a scene in which Jesus calls his disciples into action. Interpretation of this unit at the intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions reveals that Jesus’ role in the narrative results from a merger of Jewish prophetic/apocalyptic traditions and Graeco-Roman teacher/disciple traditions. This kind of merger is not unusual in the syncretistic cultural sphere of Mediterranean culture during the first century A.D. The particular merger of traditions, however, exhibits a blending of traditions about Yahweh and traditions about mortal teachers that can be informative for understanding the success of early Christians as they insisted that the Jewish Messiah had come in the form of an itinerant teacher. Analysis of Mark 1. 14–20 that glean insights from both Jewish and Graeco-Roman literature displays the socio-cultural environment of the Mediterranean world that aided the early Christians in the presentation of their founder as the Messiah who called people to action as an autonomous prophet-teacher and who possessed authority that surpassed anyone else in the cultural setting (cf. Mark 1. 22).

NOTES


[7] Quotations from Graeco-Roman texts in this article are taken from the most recent LCL edition.

[8] While most current analysis of the Gospels is informed by the relation of tradition to redaction, comparative analysis that investigates the Gospels at the intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions is often informed by the relation of narrative to discourse, a distinction more widely accepted in the field of literary criticism.


[11] After the entrance of Jesus in Mark 1. 9, the author tends to use ἀρχεῖον in the narrative that begins a new section: see 1. 14; 3. 7; 6. 4; 8. 27; 10. 47; 13. 2. Cf. Gerhard Hartmann, Der Aufbau des Markusevangeliums (NTAB VII, 2–3; Münster: Aschendorf, 1936), pp. 36–58.


[13] See Acts 7. 2–3 where Stephen’s account of Israel’s history begins with God’s call of Abram. Also, see Philo Judaeus, De Migratio[][12] 74, where the call of Abram is associated with following God (i.e., ἀκολουθεῖν) on the straight path (ὁδός) in which He leads those who are truly wise.


[16] Rengstorff, ibid.


Similarities have occasionally been noted between the so-called 'High Priestly Prayer' of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and the 'Lord's Prayer' as found in Luke and, more particularly, in Matthew and the Didache. Raymond E. Brown, for example, says of the High Priestly Prayer:

There are definite parallels to the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: compare the petition ‘May your name be glorified [hallowed]’ to the themes of glorification of the Father and the use of the divine name in xvii 1, 11-12; the petition ‘May your will be done’ to the theme of completing the work that the Father gave Jesus to do in xvii 4; the petition ‘Deliver us from the Evil One’ to the theme expressed almost in the same words in xvii 14.4

Such parallels almost inevitably suggest the possibility of some type of literary relationship, either direct or indirect, between the two prayers. Thus, Graham Smith, for example, maintaining that early Christians would have felt free to incorporate materials from one prayer which was attributed to Jesus into another such prayer, particularly if the two prayers shared a common context in Christian worship, argues that two of the three Matthean ‘additions’ to Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer may have been prompted by petitions in the High Priestly Prayer and in Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, since all three prayers were regarded as ‘authentic words of the Lord Himself, addressed to the Father’, and the three shared a common context in early Christian worship, namely, ‘corporate prayer in the Name of Jesus and the eucharistic/paschal commemoration’.5

Smith’s hypothesis is interesting, but it obviously presupposes that both the High Priestly Prayer and the Gethsemane prayer in its Lukan form antedate Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, and this is hardly likely, particularly in the case of the High Priestly Prayer, since it is widely recognized that this prayer is the composition, if not of the Fourth Evangelist himself, at least of the author of one of his primary sources, and there is no reason to believe that the author of Matthew knew the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, it is generally assumed that the direction of influence, if any, ran in the opposite direction: that is, that the Fourth Evangelist knew one or more of the Synoptic Gospels or, at least, some of the same traditions, or the same types of traditions, drawn upon by the other Evangelists. Moreover, it is intrinsically probable that a short prayer intended to serve as a model for the disciples, such as the Lord’s Prayer, would have been much