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## **Stones Rolled and Rolled Away: Kerygmatic Structures in Mark 15:40-16:8**

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It was in the year 2000 that a parishioner asked me about what we were to understand as being the real ending of Mark's gospel. He had taken note that the earliest complete manuscripts of Mark ended with 16:8, and that this gospel's later manuscript history included what could be regarded to two other endings, a "shorter ending" and a "longer ending."

The former consists of what is most likely an editorial expansion of 16:8, an addition specifically intended to let any hearer of Mark know that these same women who had originally fled from the tomb in a trembling, astonished state and kept silent about what happened there eventually reported it to "Peter and those with him." It tersely tells of how "Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." (RSV)

The so-called "longer ending," versified as 16:9-20, and in some instances placed right after the "shorter ending," is a post-resurrectional filling-out of the original Markan ending whose content appears to owe not a little to the Lukan tradition. The parishioner was concerned to know if the abruptness of the original Markan ending was evidence that an original "longer ending" had perhaps been lost. I explained to him that, given the complete lack of evidence even to suggest such a possibility, it was better to focus on what Mark's original ending was doing. In other words, if the author of Mark had intended his gospel to end that way, then it was worthwhile to ask ourselves why.

If anything, this parishioner was simply reading Mark with historically literal eyes: if those women had fled from the tomb too frightened to say anything about what they had experienced there, first how could Mark have written about it, and second, how could we in turn know about it? Because he was reading the text as a piece of historical reporting, he naturally wanted to know what was going on here when Mark ends his story by telling us "And when they went out, they fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had taken hold of them, and they did not say anything to anyone because they were afraid."

I remember drawing his attention to what preceded 16:8, to the way the abruptness of the ending functioned as a way for the author to emphasize exactly what was announced at the tomb "very early on the first day of the week." At the time I assured my parishioner that Mark's literary instincts must have included a unique combination of the evangelistic and the dramatic, that a story as important and as life-changing as the one he is telling us would be better served when told in ways we would be less likely to forget. It was my way of saying that Mark—as the text stood in its original form—was exactly what the author intended and that there was no reason to consider it otherwise. Corollary

to this way of understanding the text *as we have it* is the proposition that, if Mark is telling us everything he wanted us to know, then what are we supposed to know?

In order to know what Mark is telling us, it is necessary that we hear the whole story. Thus, the basic storytelling structure of beginning-middle-ending cannot be ignored, and how those elements fit together coherently, is urgently relevant when it comes to understanding the gospel attributed to Mark. The canonical text is *his text*, that is, it contains the whole of his authoritative communication to us. We therefore have no liberty to understand its elements and details in isolation from each other because to hear with faith means to hear all of what a text contains.

In this paper I am focusing on some features contained in the way Mark's gospel ends.<sup>1</sup> These are found in the passage 15:40 through 16:8, from the point when we hear that the Galilean women had watched the crucifixion at a distance, to when the text ends with three of them fleeing from the tomb of Jesus "because trembling and astonishment had taken hold of them." The passage contains what are two conversations. The first is the three-way exchange between Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, and his centurion. The second is what occurs among the three women at the tomb and when they encounter there a certain "young man" who has something to tell them.

I am presenting these two conversations as "kerygmatic structures," and here I only seek to highlight their kerygmatic function. I am understanding kerygmatic function in terms of the ways in which the two conversations are (1) dramatically linked and have parallel aspects, and (2) how their relative sequencing is the way in which Mark structures his gospel and brings his *kērygma*, that is, his proclamatory narrative to its memorable conclusion.

Mark has a gospel attributed to him. We know that this word – gospel – is used in different ways. For example, we have four canonical gospel books in the New Testament, and, as whole books, each is a different Jesus-narrative. Each aims to tell the story of who Jesus is and what his death and resurrection are supposed to mean. Thus, one sense of the word "gospel" refers to what has become a *de facto* genre, a type of literature or a written form characterized by certain elements. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are four different "gospel" accounts of Jesus, but each one differs slightly in the way that it presents what it means to believe in Jesus as the Christ. This is what brings us to the other, broader New Testamental/Pauline sense of the word, i.e. that the gospel is—in what amounts to the most basic sense of the word—the proclaimed message that Jesus is the Christ. The easiest way to understand the difference between these two meanings of the word gospel is to think of the former kind of messaging as consisting of the formal, canonically authorized account of Jesus and his life, while the latter is the spoken/taught/lived, etc. form of belief in Jesus.

But how any story ends depends very much on how it begins. If the gospel of Mark is the story of Jesus, and, since our English word "gospel" is explained as meaning "good news," why would this word—aside from what would be plain semantic associations—be chosen as the designation for the Christian good-news message? After all, Christians did not invent the word εὐαγγέλιον. It had a pre-Christian usage in the Greco-Roman literary world, and this usage—such as we encounter it in the sources of antiquity—is consistent enough to provide a clue for its apostolic appropriation.

The Greek word εὐαγγέλιον consists of two elements. The first is the prefix εὖ-, which denotes something good or well, with the clear implication that the proximity of anything εὖ is beneficial. The second element is the noun ἀγγέλιον, which refers to a message sent to inform others. Up to a point

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Greek New Testament or Septuagint, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

we can understand why this Greek word, transmitted to us via its Anglo-Saxon rendering as *gospel*, should come to mean “good news” or “glad tidings,” but those phrases are too anodyne to capture the thrust of the classical contexts in which it occurs. Specifically, when the word εὐαγγέλιον is used by Cicero, Plutarch, or Josephus, it is to denote a military victory: how an emperor, a king, a regional military governor, or even a chieftain has triumphed over his enemies. Thus, the εὐαγγέλιον is the declaration of victory, the announcement that the king is still the king and remains the king by virtue of triumphing over his enemies. When the εὐαγγέλιον arrives either by herald or dispatch, the understanding is that the people receiving the news are to celebrate it joyfully and with gladness because it is the notice that *their* enemy has been defeated.

This was the imperial Roman context for the official, that is, both the written and the spoken use of the word εὐαγγέλιον. Thus, it had a highly specific valence, a semantic resonance, such that when people in the first century A.D. heard the word that, when used in Christian literature, we habitually translate as “gospel,” it would have had non-gospel associations. I assume that Mark would have known such things, and therefore he constructed his account of Jesus as εὐαγγέλιον, as the proclamation of how God has defeated his enemies.

English translations of Mark keep it simple. The RSV renders 1:1-3 with a straightforward faithfulness to the Greek vocabulary and syntax:

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.  
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,  
“Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,  
who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—”*

When rendered in this fashion, it is easy to reckon Mark 1:1 as functioning like a title. The phrase ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is thus a statement announcing that what you are hearing is the beginning (ἀρχή) of what is going to be the written εὐαγγέλιον about Jesus who is the Christ. The word ἀρχή is translated in the RSV et al. as a nominative-case noun and presented as such (“The beginning of...”), but what if the word is operating textually in a more verbal fashion?

This possibility hinges on reading 1:2-3 as being what forms the content of the verbal action inherent in the noun. The phrase καθὼς γέγραπται is what notifies us of this content, and, more specifically, that the content of everything that Mark is about to tell us can be traced back prophetically to what the book of Isaiah declares. It is thus that I translate Mark 1:1-3 in this way:

<sup>1</sup>*The victory declaration about Jesus as the Christ, as the son of God, begins*  
<sup>2</sup>*just as it stands written in the prophet Isaiah:*  
*“Look and see, I am sending my messenger ahead of your presence,  
he who will prepare the way for you;  
<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
‘Make ready that way the Lord will come,  
straighten out his paths.’”*

On the one hand, there is the human reality of Jesus, but, on the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the man Jesus—and what will be claimed about him—was foretold as being what God would will for the sake of our salvation. The claim is that the εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ begins, most properly, with what God himself declares about him by means of his word. The focus here is on Isaiah 40-55, and, more specifically, on the figure of the suffering servant, and thus it is no accident

that Mark's composite citation in vv. 2-3 should be attributed to the prophet Isaiah.

The dominant scriptural image throughout the New Testament is that of the Isaianic suffering servant. Everything else in the Old Testament ends up being invoked in one form or another—creation, fall, captivity, exodus, covenant, obedience, and salvation—but, when it comes to the way God's will for our salvation comes to pass, all shall depend on the *impossible necessity* of the person who

*bears our sins, and for us he is made to suffer pain,  
and we reckoned him to be distressed, afflicted, and ill-treated.  
And he was wounded on account of our sins,  
and he has been stricken due to our lawless actions;  
our lesson in peace came upon him, by his bruising we have been healed. (Isa 53:4-5)*

The four suffering servant songs occur in Isaiah 40-55, in a portion of the book that has come to be known as the "Book of Consolation" due to the way those middle chapters of the book presuppose a context of Babylonian exile: the idea is that these 15 chapters form a scriptural message of "consolation" for the chosen people of God suffering in exile. Isaiah 39 closes with the prophet's blunt pronouncement that, even though God had saved Hezekiah's Jerusalem from the Assyrian menace, the seeds of Judah's demise at the hands of the Babylonians were sown when that same king took the liberty of showing the contents of his kingdom to Babylonian ambassadors. The prophetic word is introduced in Isaiah 40:1-2 with the admonition (RSV):

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for her sins.*

The Septuagint rendering of 40:1 is *παρακαλεῖτε παρακαλεῖτε τὸν λαόν μου, λέγει ὁ Θεός*. The verb *παρακαλεῖν* is often translated as "comfort" or "console," and it is used in contexts to render—as needed—the ideas of imploring, exhorting, requesting, or asking for something, but let it be said that the more basic meaning of the word is "to make an appeal to someone." It is with this in mind that I have translated the Septuagint Greek of 40:1-3 in the following fashion to highlight the evangelistic nature of Isaiah's middle section:

*Appeal, oh appeal to my people, says God.  
You priests, speak to the heart of Jerusalem,  
appeal to her, for her humbling is complete,  
her sin has been loosed,  
for she has received from the hand of the Lord double for her sins.  
The voice of him who cries out in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way (ὁδόν) of the Lord,  
make straight the paths of our God."*

The cumulative message is a pure prophetic simplicity: Israel's lack of covenant faithfulness has placed her in exile, that is, far from the presence of God's *mišpat* (the sustaining rule of his righteousness), and how he plans to right the wrong of her situation shall be the direct reflection of his holy will, and, when it happens, it will astound all who hear of it. The following passages outline the gist of what the prophet proclaims:

For this reason my people shall know my name on that day  
because I am he who speaks.  
I am present like springtime in the mountains,  
like the feet of him who announces (εὐαγγελιζόμενου) the glad tidings of peace,  
like he who declares (εὐαγγελιζόμενος) good things,  
for I will make your salvation to be heard, saying,  
“O Zion, your God shall reign as king,”  
because the voice of those who guard over you has been raised up,  
and they shall rejoice together in one voice;  
for their eyes shall see in unison when the Lord will have mercy on Zion.  
Let the desolate places of Jerusalem burst forth with joy,  
because the Lord has had mercy on her,  
and he has rescued Jerusalem.  
And the Lord will reveal his holy arm before all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation that comes from our God. (Isa 52:6-10)

See for yourself, my servant shall understand,  
and he will be exalted, and he will be glorified greatly.  
Just as many will be astonished (ἐκστήσονται) at you,  
so shall men disparage your appearance,  
and likewise the sons of men your glory.  
So shall many nations stand in wonder of him,  
and kings will keep shut their mouths;  
for they to whom nothing was declared about him shall see,  
and the ones who did not hear will understand.  
Lord, who has believed what we made men hear?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (Isa 52:13-53:1)

For my wishes (βουλαί μου) are not like your wishes,  
nor are your ways (ὁδοὶ) like my ways, says the Lord.  
But as far away from the earth is the sky,  
so too is my way far from your ways,  
and your thoughts are distant from mine. (Isa 55:8-9)

What is to note here is the way in which the image of the ὁδός frames Isaiah 40-55. Mark 1:3 is the citation of Isaiah 40:3, the announcement that the ὁδός Κυρίου is what shall be prepared, and that the “paths of our God” (τρίβους τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν) are to be “made straight.” After all, if Israel stands in exile, there is only one reason for her condition: she has been unfaithful to the covenant. If it is God himself who is going to act, just as scripture declares him to have done in the Exodus; if the Lord is the universal God who oversees the affairs and actions of all the nations, what is certainly the prophetic vision of the deity; and if God is the only true λυτρούμενος/ῥυσάμενος Hebrew *go’el*) of his people, what the Old Testament asserts from start to finish about how God is the sole redeemer, then how God will do that is foretold in the scriptural word concerning the enigmatic figure of the suffering servant. Salvation is thus only ever a matter of what happens when God “wins,” that which constitutes scripturally the true meaning of the Hebrew *yešū‘āh*.<sup>2</sup> It is thus no accident that this middle portion of Isaiah concludes with what we find in the last verses of chapter 55:

*For as the rain or the snow comes down from the sky,*

<sup>2</sup> Paul Nadim Tarazi, *The Chrysostom Bible—Isaiah: A Commentary* (St. Paul: OCABS Press, 2013), 146-158.

and it does not return until it has watered the earth,  
and has brought forth things, and has made them to blossom,  
and has given seed to the sower, and thus there is bread for food,  
So too shall be my word (ῥῆμα), whatever goes forth from my mouth,  
It does not return until whatever I have willed is fulfilled,  
and I will furnish your ways (ὁδοῦς σου), and execute my commandments.  
For you shall go forth in gladness, and in joy will you be taught;  
for the mountains and the hills will exult in joyful expectation of you,  
and all the trees of the field shall hail you with their branches.  
And instead of the shrub there shall arise the cypress,  
and instead of nettle there shall up the myrtle;  
and the only name will be that of the Lord,  
an enduring sign that shall not fail. (Isa 55:10-13)

The prophetic ῥῆμα is the scriptural word of God. If Isaiah 40:3 declares that there shall be the voice of one crying in the wilderness because of what the Lord has planned to do in accordance with what he has devised by his own counsel (40:13-14), then vv. 4-8 tell us that its purpose is so that “all flesh” (πᾶσα σὰρξ) might see what will be the Lord’s glory on the day when he comes to execute salvation (γεῖῤ’āh/σωτήριον) not just for Israel but for all the nations:

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low;  
and the glory of the Lord will be seen,  
and all flesh will see the salvation (σωτήριον) of God,  
because the Lord has spoken it (ὅτι Κύριος ἐλάλησε).  
The voice of the one who says, “Cry out!”  
And I said, What shall I cry out?”  
All flesh is grass, and every human glory is as the flower of grass.  
The grass withers, and the flower fades away;  
but the word of our God (ῥῆμα του Θεου ἡμῶν) remains for ever. (Isa 40:4-8)

In order to understand just how Isaiah 40-55 is a “book of consolation” we have to keep in mind the calamitous condition of foreign exile prophesied by Isaiah at the close of chapter 39. If the prophetic word is going to function as a message of consolation for Israel in captivity, then it must be a declaration of what God will one day accomplish in order to end the exile of his people. In other words, the Lord’s words will serve as a *consolation* for those who “stand firm/patiently endure” in him (40:31, 49:23, 51:5) by remaining true to the core of the prophetic *appeal*. God’s saving actions will be a mixture of him presented as king, warrior, shepherd, and redeemer—images that figure prominently in the scriptural narrative of deliverance *par excellence*, that of the Exodus.

The British biblical scholar Rikki E. Watts proposes that there is an underlying thematic unity between the Exodus tradition and Isaiah, that the latter deliberately framed portions of its message in ways that invoke and/or echo what the book of Exodus tells us about Israel’s delivery from bondage in Egypt.<sup>3</sup> The shared schema consists of the sequence *deliverance*, *journey*, and *arrival* at the place where God is present (ranging from Sinai to Jerusalem/Zion, and encompassing the Jerusalem Above). It is thus possible to think of Deutero-Isaiah as the idea of the Exodus being recycled, that is, as being appropriated once again in order to cast the Isaianic message of a renewed hope in Israel’s salvation in ways deliberately evocative and allusional. Deutero-Isaiah was never supposed to have functioned

<sup>3</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 50, 81-82, 90.

as a proof (*Beweis*) for what God wishes to communicate to those listening in exile, but rather we have it as a scripturally informed (*schriftgemäß*) cornerstone of the biblical tradition, simultaneously influenced and influencing.

What sets the stage for the closing of Mark's "victory declaration" is the story of Jesus and his messianic reception in Jerusalem, his usurping of the temple and its sacrificial operations, his replacement of the latter with his personal teaching about what God wants from those who would come to sit at his table, the paschal significance of the Last Supper, and finally, his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. It is a tightly woven narrative that ultimately centers on God's relationship with the temple, that man-made structure built no less from man-hewn stone.

It is thus no accident that when Jesus executes his "cleansing" of the temple in Mark 11:15-17, in effect halting its sacrificial apparatus, that he quotes Isaiah 56:7 in Mark 11:17:

*And he taught and he was saying to them,  
"Does it not stand written, 'My house  
shall be called a house of prayer  
for all the nations?'  
And you have made of it a lair for robbers." (Mark 11:17)*

Jesus shuts down the temple and calls not so much for the reform of its operation as he does for its replacement. His teaching is the replacement, and, in classic Old Testament prophetic form, he halts the sacrifice in order to become the sacrifice. What frames the teaching of the tribulations in Mark 13 is the initial prophecy of the temple's physical destruction—how in 13:2 Jesus says that "there will not be one stone left against another (λίθος ἐπὶ λίθου), that will not be torn down," and in 13:31 he seals this vision of human transience by declaring that "The sky and the earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away."<sup>4</sup>

What should be noted here is the image of the stone, the λίθος, and how it figures in the messaging of Mark's εὐαγγέλιον. It is an obvious symbol of permanent strength and power. Men build cities and houses, temples and palaces, with the hope that they will endure. God, however, by his scriptural word reminds us that neither these structures nor the plans on which they are based are truly durable. What does endure is what the biblical text teaches us. Jesus invades the temple, and within its enclosures he proclaims the lasting validity of God's word while simultaneously pronouncing the passing of what men are wont to reckon as permanent.

Beginning in Mark 11, the two scriptural symbols for this Babel-esque impulse in man—this persistent tendency to place worldly ambition over obedience to God—are naturally the Jerusalem temple and the Roman praetorium. These two monumentally stone edifices cooperate in what ends up being the judicial murder of Jesus, and what, by many might estimate, would be the plain and simple end of the story.<sup>5</sup> Jesus dies on the cross, and what happens on Golgotha is witnessed by some women

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<sup>4</sup> There is also the lithic image of the "alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard" with which the woman anoints Jesus when he is at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany (Mark 14:3-9): she breaks the jar and pours its contents on Jesus both as a prefiguration of his upcoming burial and as an anticipation of the post-burial anointing of Jesus planned by the women who go to his tomb. The woman anoints Jesus in faithful hope (the stone is broken), while the myrrh-bearing women go to anoint him in reverent grief (and encounter what they suppose will be an unmovable stone).

<sup>5</sup> This association is most explicitly developed in John's gospel. The passage 19:12-16 tells of the final decision being made to put Jesus to death, and v. 13 describes the setting for what amounts to the joint judgment against Jesus: "When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement

in Mark 15:40-41:

*And there were also women who were looking on from afar,  
and among them were Mary the Magdalene,  
and Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses,  
and Salome,  
they who, when he was in the Galilee, had been following him  
and serving him;  
and many other women who had come up along with him to Jerusalem.*

This sets the stage for the way in which Mark structures the remainder of his text in terms of two basic settings and the conversations that occur in them. The first centers on the actions of Joseph of Arimathea, and the second tells of what the myrrh-bearing women encounter when they go to the tomb of Jesus. There is also a mirrored reversal of the directions of movement. Mark 15:43-47 begins in Jerusalem and moves to the tomb's location outside of the city, while 16:1-8 begins with movement outside the city toward the tomb and then implies a movement back into the city.

The first setting revolves around the figure of Joseph of Arimathea, who is described in the text as a “noted member of the council” (εὐσχήμων βουλευτής), meaning that he is presumably a member of the Sanhedrin (15:1). We hear that he “was himself also living in expectation of the kingdom of God,” and the phrase προσδεχόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ suggests, while perhaps not outright discipleship to Jesus as Matthew and John indicate, then at least a more sympathetic attitude toward Jesus than the rest of the council has exhibited.<sup>6</sup>

What is most significant about Mark's identification of Joseph is not so much whatever notability (εὐσχήμων) he may have possessed, but just the mere fact of his belonging to the council (βουλευτής). He may have been “living in anticipation of the kingdom of God,” but we are still left with the question of what kind of kingdom was he anticipating. Did he have any idea of what the crucifixion of Jesus was going to signify? Here I would assume that he had no idea at all, but, as a man who most likely entertained some degree of hope about Jesus of Nazareth, all of that anticipation must have been shattered when he received word of the crucifixions underway outside the city gates.

Joseph may have been βουλευτής, a member of the council, but he was not a member of the divine council. This is a *Leitmotiv* running through Deutero-Isaiah: first, that no man is privy to God's will prior to his showing it (40:13-14, 46:11), and second, that the imaginings of mere men are no match for what the Lord devises (55:8-9).<sup>7</sup> In this sense Joseph is no “counselor” (σύμβουλος) of the Lord, and, with his hope condemned to death, there would have been only one thing left to do.

He took courage (τολμήσας) and went before Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. Joseph thus represents traditional Israel caught up in transition. Knowledgeable of the law and schooled in the prophets, he had nursed messianic hope in his heart even though Judea was under Roman rule. In addition, Joseph goes to Pilate, who, because he stands for the grim reality of Roman imperial

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(λιθόστρωτον), and in Hebrew Gabbatha.” (RSV)

<sup>6</sup> The evangelist Luke indicates this more explicitly in his description of Joseph in 23:50-51: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀνὴρ ὀνόματι Ἰωσήφ βουλευτὴς ὑπάρχων καὶ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ δίκαιος — οὗτος οὐκ ἦν συγκατατεθειμένος τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῇ πράξει αὐτῶν — ἀπὸ Ἀριμαθαίας πόλεως τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὃς προσεδέχετο τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. Cf. the description of the elder Simeon in Luke 2:25 as δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβὴς προσδεχόμενος τὴν παράκλησιν Ἰσραὴλ.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 41:21-25 indicates what is necessary for inclusion in the divine council: “say to us, declare to us those future things of the end (τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου), and we will know that you are gods.” (v. 23)



domination, operates symbolically as the embodiment of Israel's stalled messianic hope. He goes to Pilate to collect the body of Jesus, who in turn had embodied—however variously—the renewed immediacy of that hope.

Their conversation, as indicated in Mark 15:42-45, proceeds schematically in this way:

Joseph: Grant to me the body (σῶμα) of Jesus.

Pilate: Is he dead?

**Centurion: Jesus is dead [let the world know that Jesus is dead].**

Pilate: You may have the body (πτῶμα).

Joseph: He silently prepares Jesus for burial.

Pilate is the obvious embodiment of Roman rule, and, as the passage opens, Joseph must seek out Pilate if the body of Jesus is to be obtained for burial. Jesus has been crucified and is now most likely dead, but Pilate must verify the latter before the body can be released. Roman punishment must be completed for the sake of Roman rule's continuity.

Mark 15:46 details the steps taken by Joseph to bury Jesus: note that when Pilate releases the "corpse" (πτῶμα) of Jesus to him, the Markan narrative no longer refers either to a σῶμα or a πτώμα, but simply as "him." Joseph places him in a tomb, "one that had been hewn out of rock (ἐκ πέτρας); and he rolled a stone (λίθος) against the door of the tomb." This first section is set in the remaining hours of Friday. Joseph's movement to the tomb coincides with the setting of the sun. Joseph places the body of Jesus in the tomb, he rolls the stone against the entrance, and entry into the tomb as well as exit from it are blocked. There is no mention of what will happen to the body of Jesus: all is silence with not a word uttered. There is now nothing but what a single stone rolled into place signifies.

Just as the Galilean women were looking on from afar at the crucifixion in Mark 15:40, so too there are the two women (Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus) who are witness to Jesus being placed in the tomb. Both 15:40 and 15:47 use the verb θεωρεῖν to describe the matter-of-factness of what the women are seeing. The verb will be used again in 16:4 when the myrrh-bearing women "see that the stone had been rolled away," but from that point on the regular verb form for seeing (ὁρᾶν) is used.

The second conversation forms the heart of what happens at the tomb "very early on the first day of the week...when the sun had risen." It is structured like this:

Women: Where is the body of Jesus?

**Young man: He has been raised (i.e. he is alive). Go and tell the others!**

Women: They say nothing because he has been raised.

Opposite declarations are at the center of each conversation: in the first, the centurion asserts that **Jesus is dead**; in the second, the young man tells the women that **Jesus has been raised**, that he is in effect alive! Both Joseph of Arimathea and the women went off to tend the body of Jesus, but the results were quite different: Joseph prepared a corpse for burial; the women wished to finish tending to the corpse according to funerary custom but they found no corpse.

Up to a point Joseph and the myrrh-bearing women represent the same frustrated but persistent hope: Joseph rolls a stone in place at the door of the tomb and thus he placed a seal of quiet finality on what had been a wild hope; the women go to the same sealed tomb, but, after worrying about who will roll away the stone and thus allow them access to the body of the crucified messiah in whom they

too had hoped, they become witnesses to the unexpected “ways” (ὁδοί) of God. Yet, by way of contrast, their action begins when the sun has risen. The women expect to find the body of Jesus still in the tomb, the large stone blocking the entrance, and no one able to move it. One by one, each of these expectations turns out otherwise: the stone has been rolled away, entrance into the tomb is possible, the body of Jesus is gone, and the young man (νεανίσκος) announces to them what has happened.

The first section ends with the women “seeing where he was laid” (ἐθεώρουν ποῦ τέθειται), that is, they saw where the body of Jesus had been placed; but central to the second section is the young man’s indication to the women “see the place where they laid him” (ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν). In other words, what was declared as final in the first section is contradicted and fantastically overturned in the second.

Who is the young man dressed in a white robe? While pious tradition is content to regard him as a comely angelic being sent to announce what is—for now, at any rate—not so much the good news as it is the improbable news, there is a more likely literary explanation both for his appearance and what he wears. He is often linked to the νεανίσκος who is mentioned in Mark’s account of the arrest in Gethsemane (13:51-52). A “certain young man” who had been following Jesus up to that point flees with the rest of the disciples once Jesus is arrested. He is dressed in nothing but “a linen cloth (σινδών) wrapped around his naked body,” a garment that Jesus’s arresters are left holding in their hands as the youth fled from the scene. When this figure reappears in 16:5, he sits on the right side of the tomb when the women enter (the opposite of flight); he is “dressed in a white robe,” a στολή λευκή, that is, what a public herald (κῆρυξ), or, for that matter, what a baptizand might wear, and thus it is a far cry from the coarser funerary wear that Joseph used to wrap the presumably unclothed body of Jesus (15:46); and now, instead of nakedly fleeing, he sits in a position of authority in order to declare that Jesus has been raised and that “he is going before you to the Galilee.”

Are these two νεανίσκοι the same character? No, for the simple reason that they function differently. If the first νεανίσκος represents well-intentioned failure (the opposite of the ὑπομονή commended by Isaiah in 40:31, 49:23, and 51:5), then the second νεανίσκος is—in contrast to the earlier necessary image of human vacillation—the declaration of God’s power and purpose.

The larger question throughout this paper has been the nature of the relationship between Mark and Isaiah. Did the author of Mark, whom—I would say—we can safely assume was familiar with the Isaiah text, deliberately construct his Jesus narrative by basing it, to greater or lesser degrees, on the figure of the suffering servant, seeing in what the prophet wrote an ancient prophesy now realized in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? To what extent did Isaiah’s fragmentary and often elusive portraits of the suffering servant supply a template for Mark in constructing his portrait of Jesus? It is impossible to say with any certainty which text guided which and in what way, but yet it should not matter one way or the other because what does count is the richly oscillating degree of intertextual resonance we can discern between the two.<sup>8</sup> Why quibble over historical, theological, or even exact lines of literary causation when we can discern echoes of Isaiah 53:6-7 in the way Mark describes the silence of Jesus before Pilate in 15:4-5?

*Like sheep we have gone astray; by himself man has gone astray;  
but the Lord has handed him over to our sins,*

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<sup>8</sup> This is what N. T. Wright means when he writes about hearing different texts “with biblically attuned ears” in *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York City: HarperCollins, 2012), 213-214.

*and even though he is ill-treated, he opens not his mouth;  
like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and just as a lamb is silent before the shearer, so too he opens not his mouth.*

*And Pilate asked him again, saying,  
“Why do you make no answer?  
See the many things of which they are accusing you!”  
And Jesus made no other answer, so that Pilate was left in wonder. (Mark 15: 4-5)*

The point is rather that, given the range of thematic links between them, the two texts stand in relation to each other in a fully *schriftgemäßig* fashion, that is, it becomes nearly impossible to understand one without reference—at some point—to the other. We can hear and/or read each one separately from the other, but in order to understand each text, it is eventually necessary to refer to the other.

Mark consciously structures the end of his “victory declaration” in the form of these two conversations. The first one announces that Jesus is dead, and the second one is the declaration that the dead and buried Jesus has been raised, that his tomb is empty, and that he has gone before his disciples to the Galilee: the οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε announced by the young man in the empty tomb in 16:6 is transformed into the ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε of 16:7.

And the final troubling detail of 16:8, namely, that “when they went out, they fled from the tomb, for trembling (τρόμος) and astonishment (ἔκστασις) had taken hold of them, and they did not say anything to any one because they were afraid,” this can be understood with reference to Deutero-Isaiah. The same word for trembling (τρόμος) occurs in 54:11-14, a long passage filled reference to stones:

*Lowly and outcast, you were not comforted;  
see for yourself, I am preparing carbuncle for your stone,  
and your foundations to be of sapphire,  
and I will make your battlements of jasper,  
and I shall set your gates in crystal stone,  
and your enclosure will be of precious gems;<sup>9</sup>  
and all your sons will be taught by God,  
and your children will live in great peace,  
and in righteousness shall you be built up;  
remove yourself from the unrighteous one, and be not afraid (μὴ φοβηθῆσῃ),  
for trembling (τρόμος) will not come near to you. (Isa 54:11-14)*

In the same way the term for astonishment (ἔκστασις) appears in Isaiah 52:13-15, the first three verses of the fourth suffering servant poem:

*See for yourself, my servant shall understand,  
and he will be exalted, and he will be glorified greatly.  
Just as many will be astonished (ἔκστήσονται) at you,  
so shall men disparage your appearance,  
and likewise the sons of men your glory.  
So shall many nations stand in wonder of him (θαυμάσονται ἐπ’ αὐτῷ),  
and kings will keep shut their mouths;*

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. the catalogue of stones that make up the building materials of the New Jerusalem’s walls and their foundations in Rev 21:18-21.

*for they to whom nothing was declared about him shall see,  
and the ones who did not hear will understand.*

If Mark tells us that the myrrh-bearing women fled in this fashion, that “they did not say anything to any one because they were afraid,” it is because Mark himself has already told us everything we need to know. The *kērygma* of Mark is complete as it stands.