Research Article

The Great Expansion: Proto-Mark and the Pro-Gentile Enlargement of Canonical Mark

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This study argues that canonical Mark is an expansion of an earlier proto-Mark, enlarged by the gospel's own author after an earlier form of the text had already branched toward Luke. The argument is probabilistic, in the manner of the statistical study that preceded it: no single observation decides the case, and the evidence is the repeated coincidence of independent marks in the same stretches of text. The added material is identified by formal criteria indifferent to its content — passages that Luke attests in neither Markan wording nor Markan sequence, forming contiguous blocks — and the identifying blocks are found to be joined to the inherited text at internal seams of a specific kind: not the author's characteristic roughness but editorial fatigue, narrative setups left unpaid and journeys left uncompleted, which a reordering repairs and which Matthew, the first reader of the enlarged gospel, in several cases smoothed away. That such seams fall where Luke's knowledge of Mark fails, and nowhere else, is the central coincidence; it is the two features together, neither alone, on which the case rests. One block — the Great Omission (6:45–8:26), minus its closing healing of the blind man at Bethsaida — meets every criterion without qualification and carries the weight of the argument. Two further blocks meet the same standard with minor caveats: the Beelzebul controversy together with the appointment of the Twelve, and the intercalated cursing of the fig tree. That all three prove to share a single pro-Gentile and anti-cultic tendency is a result of the analysis rather than a premise, and is itself among the least likely of the coincidences to arise by chance. The structure of the added material — Gentile episodes composed as counterparts to the Israelite ones Luke retains — tells against both accidental loss and deliberate Lukan omission; and the added matter is further argued to form a structured composition built on Isaiah. Proto-Mark circulated in the orbit of Paul's mission, and the expander, on four converging considerations, was its author. The statistical foundation for the wider source theory is laid in a previous study.

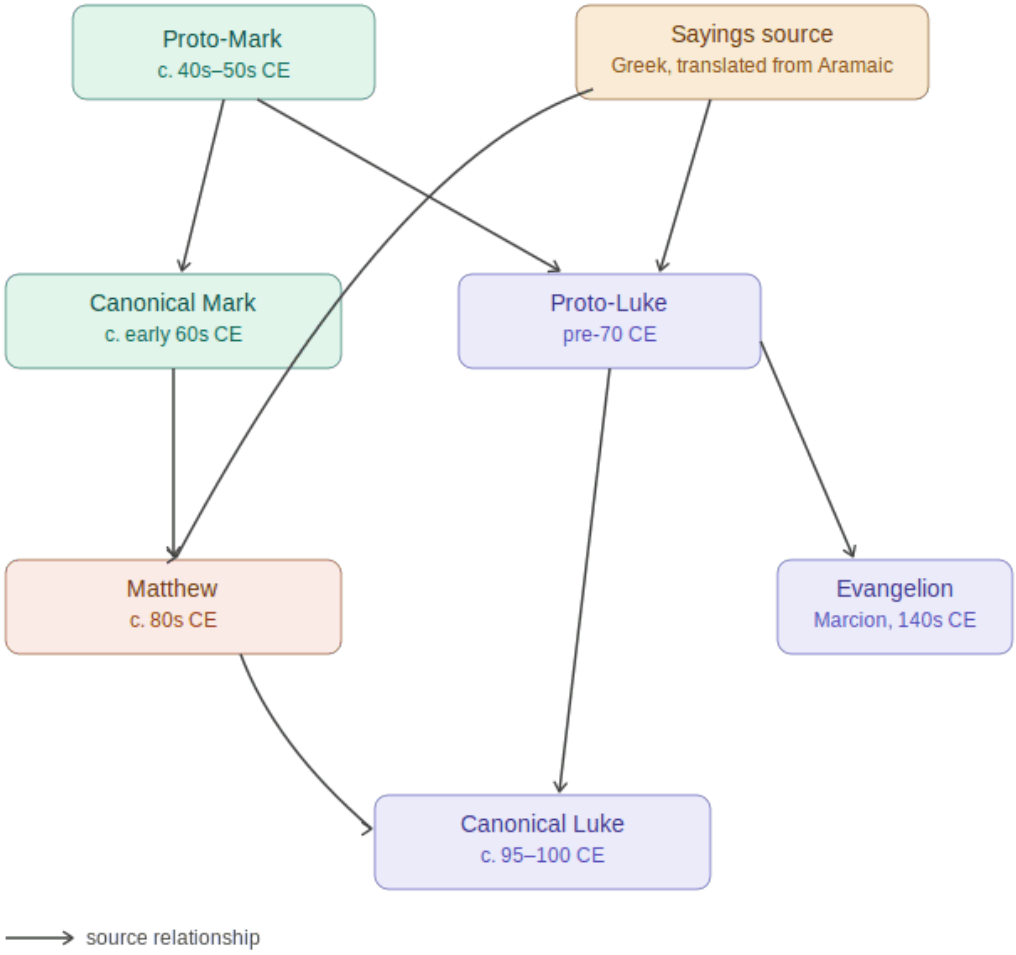
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1. Introduction

In a previous study[1] we used statistical methods to provide a firm foundation for evaluating synoptic solutions. The evidence favored the Three Source Hypothesis (3SH): that Matthew drew on Mark and a sayings source, and that Luke drew on Mark, the sayings source, and Matthew[2][3][4][5]. We then sketched preliminary arguments — allowed but not required by the statistics — for two further documents, a proto-Mark and a proto-Luke. For proto-Luke the reader can consult the previous study and the scholars who have elaborated the hypothesis. On the Marcion question we do not take the more extreme position that the Evangelion was identical to proto-Luke; rather, proto-Luke's macroscopic form resembled the Evangelion, and both canonical Luke and Marcion made independent modifications to that common ancestor — Marcion's in a de-Judaizing direction, while the expansion to canonical Luke pursued a different agenda. That expansion added the infancy chapters, the resurrection-appearance ending, and Acts, along with select material drawn from Matthew. The agenda inferred from the Jewish-origin material is an attempt to ground Jesus in his Jewish roots; the agenda inferred from Acts is an irenic one — canonical Luke was a unifier. For the argument that the Evangelion witnesses an early form of the Lukan gospel rather than representing Marcionite excision, see Tyson[6] and BeDuhn[7].[1] The present study develops the case for proto-Mark in full. The resulting picture is layered in time. At the foundation stood proto-Mark and a Greek translation of an Aramaic sayings source. In the next layer, proto-Mark was expanded into canonical Mark — the expansion whose character and purpose are the subject of the present study — while proto-Luke was composed from proto-Mark and the sayings source. Then came Matthew, drawing on canonical Mark and the sayings source; and finally canonical Luke, drawing on proto-Luke — and through it on proto-Mark and the sayings source — together with Matthew. The model thus takes one element from each of the leading solutions: from the Two-Source Hypothesis, a sayings source behind the double tradition; from its most prominent competitor, the Farrer hypothesis[8], Luke's direct use of Matthew.

The proposed documentary model is diagrammed below.



The idea that canonical Mark was preceded by an earlier form is not new; versions of a proto-Mark have been proposed since the nineteenth century[9][10][11][12][13] though these differ from one another and from the present proposal in mechanism and structure. The specific synoptic tree offered here is, to our knowledge, unique.

1.1. The Criteria

Before setting out the criteria, a word on the form of the argument, since it governs how the evidence should be weighed. The case for proto-Mark is not deductive but probabilistic — cumulative in the manner of the statistical study that preceded it. No single observation proves that a given passage was absent from proto-Mark; each criterion, taken alone, admits other explanations. The argument lies in their convergence. Where Luke shows no knowledge of Mark's wording, that alone might be abbreviation; where he shows no knowledge of Mark's order, that alone might be rearrangement; where

Mark shows an internal seam, that alone might be his own compositional roughness. But where all of these coincide, in the same passage, repeatedly, and where the passages so identified share a single theme, the question becomes what hypothesis makes so much coincidence probable at once. A proto-Mark that lacked this material — later inserted by the gospel's own author, leaving the seams — explains every one of these alignments together, and explains the shared theme as the mark of a single expanding hand. The strength of the case is the improbability of the accumulated coincidences under any other account, set against the economy of the one that resolves them all. The criteria below should be read in that light: not as a filter that mechanically yields proto-Mark, but as the independent features whose repeated co-occurrence is the evidence.

Based on the proposed synoptic tree, we argue that proto-Mark can be identified by three source-critical criteria applied on purely formal grounds, without reference to theme. First, Luke shows no knowledge of Mark's specific wording in these passages. Second, Luke shows no knowledge of Mark's ordering of them. Third, the material forms a single large contiguous block — precisely what one would expect when an author is inserting into a scroll rather than recopying from scratch, since a scroll admits new material most economically at a single splice point rather than at many distributed ones.

A fourth confirming mark is that the text shows internal seams where the material was joined. This was discovered in the analysis. The thematic character of expansion to canonical Mark is also a result of applying these formal criteria: the material turns out to be uniformly pro-Gentile, in most cases not on the surface of the text but against the scriptural substructure the following sections trace.

That the pro-Gentile sense is so often concealed rather than displayed is, we will suggest, not accidental. The meaning was not meant to be read off the page but disclosed in the telling: Mark read the narrative to his hearers while expounding its reserved sense to them. That larger thesis — Mark as a reserved text disclosing Pauline soteriology in the reading — is reserved for a forthcoming study[14]. The present study concerns itself with the form of proto-Mark and its expansion into canonical Mark.[2]

2. What the Criteria Yield

Where all three formal features converge — no knowledge of Mark's wording in Luke, no knowledge of Mark's order, and a contiguous block of material — three sections stand out. The first is the bulk of the Great Omission (6:45–8:26), excepting its closing pericope, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22–26). The second is the Beelzebul controversy (3:22–30), together with the family notice that

introduces it (3:20–21) and a redacted appointment of the Twelve (3:13–19). The third is the fig-tree intercalation (11:12–14, 20–25), whose two halves frame a lightly edited proto-Markan temple cleansing. Each is treated in turn below.

All three also carry the mark on which the argument chiefly rests (§2.6): a seam in Mark, of the kind defined in §2.7, at the join where the new material enters. And all three, as the following sections trace, prove to share a single thematic character — uniformly pro-Gentile, in most cases not on the surface but against the scriptural substructure. That passages identified on formal grounds alone should also converge on one theme is itself part of the evidence, and among the least likely of the coincidences to arise by chance under any account that does not posit a single expanding hand.

Beyond these three lie smaller candidates that meet the first two criteria but not the third; these, with one treated in a supplement, are held apart under the Tertiary Fragments (§7).

2.1. The Centerpiece of the Argument

The core of the argument is the so-called Great Omission — the block of material present in canonical Mark (6:45–8:26) but absent from Luke. The standard explanations are that Luke's copy of Mark was physically damaged at this point, or that Luke knew the material and chose to omit it. We argue for a third account: proto-Luke relied on proto-Mark, which never contained the block except for its closing pericope, the two-stage healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22–26). The block is therefore not an omission at all but an expansion — material the original author added when he enlarged proto-Mark into canonical Mark.

The thematic character of the block turns out to be uniformly pro-Gentile, and that uniformity tells against both rival explanations. Luke was demonstrably not anti-Gentile, so there would be no reason for him to selectively excise just such material. Against the damaged-scroll explanation the point is sharper still. A damaged scroll can, of course, remove thematically unified material — but only if the text already held that material in a single thematically unified span. Had canonical Mark's Gentile material been distributed through the gospel, interleaved with the rest, a random loss would have carried off a thematically mixed stretch, and Luke would be missing a miscellany. The uniformity, in short, points past accident to design — confirmed below by the still stronger fact that the clustering is not merely thematic but structural, the missing material proving to be, pair by pair, the Gentile member of doublets whose Israel members Luke retains.

The expansion's design is shown most decisively by that structure. The added material does not merely share a pro-Gentile theme; it repeatedly pairs with material already standing in proto-Mark, forming Jewish/Gentile doublets in which an inherited Israel member and an added Gentile member answer to each other. The most transparent of these pairs is the feeding of the five thousand, present in Luke — proto-Markan, Israel-facing, laden with Exodus typology — alongside the feeding of the four thousand, absent from Luke, which belongs to the expansion, faces outward to the nations, and carries the typology of Isaiah's new Exodus[15]. Material missing from Luke that turns out to be, pair by pair, the Gentile half of a set whose Israel halves Luke retains is not what accident produces; it is what composition produces. The pairs themselves are set out below; here it is enough to say that the structure they form is the signature that the block was built.

2.2. The Secondary Blocks: Beelzebul and the Fig Tree

The Great Omission is the centerpiece of the argument, but two further places meet our three criteria, each with a caveat that must be stated openly.

The first is the Beelzebul controversy along with the family notice (3:20–30). This is the largest of what Two-Source Hypothesis scholars call "Mark/Q overlaps" — passages where Luke appears to draw on both Mark and Q simultaneously. In reconstructions, Q collapses onto the text of Matthew[16]: Luke shows no independent knowledge of Mark's wording, and no knowledge of Mark's placement of the controversy; the family notice (3:20–21) has no parallel in either Matthew or Luke. The two-fold absence is clean. Immediately before this stretch in canonical Mark stands the appointment of the Twelve (3:13–19), which forms the Gentile half of a Jewish/Gentile pair — its Jewish counterpart being the sending of the Twelve (6:7–13), which stood in proto-Mark. Together, the appointment, the family notice, and the controversy constitute a contiguous block of three successive units (3:13–30), satisfying our size criterion for a large section.

The caveat here is twofold. On order: while Luke technically does not share Mark's placement, the two are close — both agree the material belongs shortly after the healing of the paralytic, which makes the order criterion weaker here than for the Great Omission. On wording: Luke shows one clear connection to his Markan source that cannot be explained through Matthew. In the disciple list, Luke and Mark read "Matthew, Thomas" where Matthew reads "Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector" — Luke agrees with Mark against Matthew at exactly this point, showing that his Markan source carried a form of the Twelve list. Our hypothesis therefore is not that the appointment was wholly absent from proto-Mark, but that

proto-Mark already carried the choosing of the Twelve and their list — the naming of Peter included — in a form Luke's tradition received, and that the canonical expansion framed it: linking it to the Isaiah 49 commission of the Servant and to the Beelzebul controversy that follows, and making the appointment the Gentile-facing counterpart to the Jewish-facing sending of the Twelve — then inserting the reframed appointment together with the Beelzebul controversy as a new block. Luke's wording agreement is with the proto-Markan list he inherited; the expansion's framing additions are what he does not attest.

The second relatively secure candidate is the cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25). Luke shows no knowledge of Mark's wording and no knowledge of Mark's order for this material, satisfying the first two criteria. The size criterion, however, requires a caveat of a different kind: the fig tree qualifies as a large section only if the temple cleansing (11:15–19) is counted as part of the intercalation it brackets. The cleansing itself stood in proto-Mark — Luke attests it (19:45–46), together with its aftermath. What the expansion added was the frame: the two fig-tree halves, absent from Luke in both position and wording, were wrapped around the inherited cleansing to create the characteristic Markan intercalation[17], in which the withered tree and the judged temple interpret one another. The insertion was a physical act of recopying — to sandwich the cleansing between the two fig-tree halves, the expander had to transcribe it anew — and it is in that recopying, we argue below, that he made at least one light interior edit: the clause "for all the nations" at 11:17, which carries the cleansing's pro-Gentile sense. Its assignment to the expansion rests on several converging grounds set out in §6.3, the source-critical one being that the clause is absent from Luke — who, of all the evangelists, would least have dropped “a house of prayer for all the nations.”

Each of these three blocks also bears an internal seam in the text of Mark, a trace that would mark it as an insertion even without Luke’s witness. The seams are developed block by block in the sections that follow.

2.3. The Tertiary Fragments

Up to this point the expansion material has been identified by source-critical means alone. When we turn to search for smaller items that may also belong to the expansion, however, the third criterion — that the material form a large contiguous block — can no longer apply. And the first two criteria alone admit too much: every unit of Mark’s that Luke lacks altogether qualifies, whether Matthew attests it or not[3]. The pro-Gentile character established for the larger blocks is therefore pressed into service as an additional criterion at this stage. We look for material where Luke shows no direct connection to Mark's wording or

order, and where the text is pro-Gentile, or at least plausibly so in the mouth of an author expounding its hidden sense. We also search for plausible seams in the text of Mark.

Two passages answer to this description, and we review them briefly below. But because none can be secured by the formal criteria that anchor the larger blocks, and because the additional pro-Gentile criterion is softer and more open to dispute, the safer course is to leave these smaller fragments out of the reconstruction as a whole, noting them as possibilities rather than incorporating them. The firm boundaries of the expansion are therefore the three sections fixed by the formal criteria above.

A further candidate is the night trial (14:55–64). This candidate was raised in correspondence after this study was first drafted and is treated at full length in a supplement[18]. The evidence — an insertion seam with resumptive stitch (14:54 → 14:66), the emptied morning slot at 15:1, the shape of Luke's hearing (22:54–71), and a mimesis argument published by Wendling in 1908 — supports the candidate in a specific form: not outright insertion but relocation and expansion of a morning hearing proto-Mark already contained, in the slot where 15:1 still stands and where Luke still holds it. The candidate is graded below the centerpiece, for its Lukan evidence is divergence rather than absence; what carries it is that the divergence falls along the seam Mark's own text marks. Among its yields for the series: the expansion, on this candidate, converted the hearing's deflection ("you say that I am," so still Luke 22:70) into the gospel's one open messianic declaration (ἐγώ εἰμι, 14:62) — a result whose weight belongs to the third study.

One refinement to the model above emerged from the supplement's candidate and is recorded here because it belongs to the tree rather than to any one pericope. The two editions of Mark did not travel in sealed containers: they circulated in the same communities within a generation, and copies of the new edition inevitably carried sporadic wording of the old, harmonized in by copyists who knew proto-Mark by ear. Matthew's copy of Mark was such a copy — canonical in structure, occasionally proto-Markan in phrasing at the points the expander had altered. The refinement is additive, not corrective: nothing in this study's arguments assumed otherwise. Its yield, argued in the supplement, is a solution to the minor agreements of Matthew and Luke with Holtzmann's pedigree and two testable distributional predictions.

2.4. The Thematic Character of the Expansion

The thematic character of the expansion is a finding, not a premise — and it is this finding that licenses the search among the smaller fragments. The expansion proves to concern two faces of a single program: the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the supersession of the temple cult that had excluded them. Its

members distribute across three groups according to how directly they display this orientation. In the first, the Gentile bearing is on the surface or nearly so: the Syrophoenician woman, the handwashing dispute over clean and unclean, the Decapolis deaf-mute, the feeding of the four thousand. In the second, it emerges only against the scriptural substructure the following sections trace: the appointment of the Twelve under the Servant's call to be "a light to the nations" (Isa 49:6). In the third, the bearing is anti-cultic and Gentile by consequence: the fig tree's "house of prayer for all the nations" framing the temple's judgment (Isa 56:7). Some members wear the theme openly; others disclose it only to a reader who follows the scripture beneath them — which is, as a forthcoming study (Gentile, 2026c) will argue, exactly the design the gospel's own esotericism would predict.

That this orientation is an output of the criterion rather than an input to it can be verified directly. The criterion excludes the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20): Luke follows Mark's wording and order there, so it does not qualify, despite being one of the more overtly Gentile episodes in the gospel. The criterion does not simply gather up everything that looks pro-Gentile. And this exclusion carries a further implication: proto-Mark was not anti-Gentile. The Gerasene demoniac shows that Gentile-positive material stood in proto-Mark from the beginning. What the expansion did was not introduce a new orientation but intensify and systematize one already present, making it the explicit program of the enlarged gospel.

2.5. A Possible Objection

An objection must be met before these criteria can do any work — one that will already have occurred to any reader who has studied the source diagram above. If Luke used Matthew, and Matthew reproduced much of the expansion material from canonical Mark, then Luke had indirect access to that material through his Matthean source. Does this not cause a problem for the model? If Luke saw the material in Matthew and declined it, why can we not conclude that he might have declined it in his Markan source too — in which case its absence from Luke tells us nothing about whether it stood in proto-Mark?

The objection dissolves once the documentary model's own structure is kept in view, for it conflates two redactional stages into one. The model posits not a single Lukan writer with multiple source-routes but a proto-Luke and a later canonical Luke, and the silence is explained differently — and without competition — at each layer. The proto-Luke author could not include the expansion material: it was not in proto-Mark, his only Markan source, and one cannot transmit what one has not received. His lack is source-absence in the strict sense, and requires no motive. The canonical-Luke redactor, by contrast, could in principle have drawn the expansion material from Matthew, whom he now had in hand — and

did not. His failure to restore it is not source-absence but decline, and there are two independent reasons for it.

The first reason turns on *how* canonical Luke used his two sources, and it is here that the objection's central assumption breaks down. The objection treats "Luke declined material in Matthew" and "Luke would have declined it in Mark" as symmetrical, but the model gives the two sources entirely different roles, and Luke reads them in entirely different ways. Proto-Luke follows his Markan source *continuously* — transcribing its narrative spine in order, as proto-Luke does with Mark throughout the gospel — so that a large connected block standing in that source would have been carried over as a matter of course; its absence from Luke is therefore strong evidence of its absence from the source. Canonical Luke, by contrast, does not transcribe Matthew; he *mines* it selectively, taking individual items that serve his purposes and leaving the great bulk of Matthew's distinctive material — special-M — untouched. His borrowings from Matthew (along with occasional coincidences) explain the minor agreements[19] and are the likely source of much of what Two-Source scholars call the Mark/Q overlaps, but they are borrowings of items, not of blocks. One would not expect such a redactor to lift a large, connected block of Markan narrative out of Matthew and splice it in; that is simply not how he treats that source. The asymmetry is the whole answer: continuous transcription of one source, selective mining of the other. Silence in a continuously-transcribed source is telling; silence in a selectively-mined one is not.

The second reason is thematic, and it turns on the character of the later Lukan redactor. That canonical Luke expanded an earlier Lukan text with Matthean material is argued in the previous study[1]; that this expansion served to re-ground the gospel in its Jewish origins, against the de-Judaizing tendency Marcion would come to represent, is argued by Tyson[6], who reads canonical Luke-Acts as a redaction shaped in that struggle. Luke's addition of the birth narratives — saturated with temple piety and Jewish expectation, and precisely the material Marcion's gospel would lack — works to the same end. His unifying aim is no less clear: canonical Luke's authorship of Acts makes its irenic, faction-reconciling theme unmistakable, and in the next study of this series[14] we argue that his soteriology, too, reads as a compromise between competing parties. His additions from Matthew were governed by this double program — to re-ground the gospel in Israel and to hold its Jewish and Gentile faces together — and what he took fits it with precision.

On the reconstruction offered here, he drew from Matthew chiefly the largest narrative pieces of the double tradition, and his selections cluster around John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus's ministry — material adjacent to the origins his own opening chapters would re-ground in Israel — together with

items serving his unifying aim, most notably the Beelzebul controversy (most plausibly for the "house divided" saying, apt to a writer preaching against faction). These two of his objectives — to re-ground the gospel in its Jewish origins and to hold its Jewish and Gentile faces together — are served by exactly these selections. A large block of Markan Gentile-mission narrative served neither: it re-grounded nothing in Israel, and a block of miracles among the nations served his unifying purpose no better than the material he had already taken. Available to him though it was, secondhand through Matthew, it was simply not what this program reached for — and so, like most of what he found in Matthew, he left it. Proto-Luke could not include the expansion material; canonical Luke, mining Matthew selectively and by a program the block did not serve, would not[4].

2.6. The Relative Weight of the Criteria

In the course of writing this study, our view of the relative weight of these criteria shifted, and it is worth stating plainly which of them bear the most load. They are not of equal force. The size of a block, and the absence of Mark–Luke agreement in wording against Matthew, each must be examined in detail, but each is typically applied with caveats; thematic fit, once a block has been identified, can do real work, but it is the most subjective of the criteria. The load-bearing pillars of the probabilistic argument are of a different kind: an internal seam in the text of Mark that coincides with Luke either placing the material in a non-Markan location or lacking it altogether. Once the kind of seam meant is specified (§2.7), these leave little room for caveat. Every major block identified in this study — together with one minor one, the anointing, which may meet them — meets them and also satisfies the slightly more flexible criteria; but it is the seams, and Luke's placement, on which the strength of the case for the existence of proto-Mark rests.

2.7. What Counts as a Seam

Since the seams are an important pillar of the argument, the word needs a definition, for Mark's narrative is rough in many places and not every roughness is a join. Three kinds of irregularity are distinguished here, and only one of them is treated as evidence of insertion.

The first is technique. Mark's characteristic device is intercalation, the sandwiching of one episode inside another so that the two interpret each other[17]: the woman with the flow of blood inside the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:21–43), the death of the Baptist inside the sending and return of the Twelve (6:7–30). An intercalation interrupts a story, and the interruption is in a sense a seam; but it does work — delay, contrast, commentary — and the surrounding narrative is composed to accommodate it. These are the

author's design, not the marks of a later hand, and the criterion does not fire on them. Luke attests both of the intercalations just named, in Markan position, which is the external check: a seam the second witness to proto-Mark carries is a seam proto-Mark had.

The second is editorial fatigue, and it is the kind the present study relies on. The term is Goodacre's[20], and the phenomenon is accepted in the field as evidence of direction whenever Matthew or Luke edit Mark: an editor begins to alter his source, lapses back into it, and leaves an inconsistency that betrays which text came first. A seam of this kind is roughness with a cost and no function — a narrative setup that is not paid off, a journey begun and not completed, a detail carried forward from a sequence that no longer exists. The test for it is threefold. Does a reordering repair it? The boat readied at 3:9 and unused until 4:1 is followed at once by its use if the intervening block is removed (§5.4); the departure for Bethsaida at 6:45 arrives at Bethsaida at 8:22 if the block between them is removed (§3.6). Did a later evangelist smooth it? Matthew, reading Mark's 3:9, dropped the dangling boat (Matt 12:15–16) and supplied one only where it is used (13:2); he also restored the temple cleansing to the day of the entry (21:12), undoing the deferral the fig tree had forced on Mark's sequence (§6.1). A first-century reader who found a roughness awkward enough to remove is a witness that it is roughness, not a modern reader's impatience. And does it fall at the edge of a stretch Luke lacks? That is the coincidence on which the study rests, and it is stated here so the reader can see that the seams are identified by their own marks before their alignment with Luke is noted. Fatigue in Matthew and Luke shows that they edited Mark; fatigue in Mark shows that Mark edited something.

The third is the gloss: a clause grammatically unattached to its sentence, or an aside that sits oddly in its scene. The parenthesis at 7:19 is the clearest instance. Such material is set aside here as a different question (§2.3, note), because its profile — absent from Matthew as well as Luke — does not fit the definition of expansion this study uses, and its identification turns on considerations the third study takes up.

Two controls show the distinction doing work. The first is Jairus: a conspicuous seam, carried by Luke, which the method correctly ignores, because the second criterion is not met. The second runs the other way. The greatest commandment (12:28–34) is absent from Luke in both Markan position and Markan wording, and it carries the expansion's theme, yet it shows no seam in Mark; it is accordingly held outside the reconstruction (§7.1). A seam without a Lukan absence does not count, and a Lukan absence without a seam does not count. The reconstruction admits only the places where the two coincide — and the burden of the study is that they coincide, in the same stretches, repeatedly, and on material of one theme.

3. The Great Omission – Not an Omission

The Great Omission is the block on which the case chiefly rests, and this section makes the formal argument for it — reserving its unified thematic character for the next. Two things are shown here. First, that the block bears the positive marks of insertion: a visible internal seam where the expansion was joined to the inherited text, still detectable in canonical Mark. Second, that the two standing explanations of the Omission — that Luke's copy of Mark was physically damaged, or that Luke knew the material and omitted it piece by piece — each founder on a feature of the evidence that the expansion account explains without strain. The formal marks and the failure of the rivals are two sides of one argument: the configuration of the evidence is what an insertion into proto-Mark would produce, and what neither accident nor deliberate omission would likely produce.

Between the feeding of the five thousand and Peter's confession, canonical Mark runs an unbroken sequence of some eighty verses — the walking on the water, the healings at Gennesaret, the dispute over defilement, the Syrophoenician woman, the Decapolis deaf-mute, the feeding of the four thousand, the demand for a sign, the discourse on leaven, and the two-stage healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 6:45–8:26). Luke has none of it. His narrative passes directly from the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10–17 // Mark 6:30–44) to Peter's confession (Luke 9:18–20 // Mark 8:27–30), as though the intervening block did not exist. This is the so-called Great Omission, and it has been explained in two principal ways: that Luke's copy of Mark was physically defective at this point, a leaf or leaves having been lost[21]; or that Luke knew the material and chose, pericope by pericope, to omit it[22]. This study argues a third account against both: that the block was never present in the text Luke's tradition received, because it did not yet exist when proto-Mark passed into the proto-Lukan line. The Great Omission is not a wound in Mark but the largest single stratum of the expansion. The premise that makes the omission diagnostic at all is Luke's well-known conservatism toward Markan order[21][23]. When an evangelist this faithful to Markan sequence simply lacks a continuous Markan stretch, the natural first hypothesis is that the stretch was not in front of him.

3.1. The First Internal Seam: Bethsaida

The first argument generally raised in favor of omission was observed by Streeter[21], and it has been a standard argument ever since. Luke, having no part of the block, nonetheless betrays knowledge of one item within it. At Luke 9:10 he locates the feeding of the five thousand at Bethsaida — "he withdrew

privately to a city called Bethsaida" — but in Mark the feeding is in a deserted place (6:31–32), and Bethsaida belongs not to the feeding but to what follows: it is where the disciples are directed as the block opens (6:45) and, at its close, where the blind man is healed (8:22). Luke's Bethsaida is attached to the wrong episode. The conventional reading takes this as a fossil proving Luke knew the whole block and dropped it[5].

The standard theory's best evidence, however, can be turned against it. The seam is real; its implication is not what the conventional reading supposes. A bleed of the name Bethsaida is evidence of contact with the Bethsaida pericope — the blind-man healing — and with nothing else in the block. It is not evidence of contact with the walking on the water, or the Syrophoenician woman, or the four thousand, none of whose locales or names surface anywhere in Luke. The economical inference is that proto-Mark carried the feeding of the five thousand and, in close proximity, the Bethsaida healing; that Luke's tradition received both; that Luke omitted the healing while retaining the feeding; and that the displaced place-name thereby lodged against the feeding. Strip the expansion away and proto-Mark reads, in effect, "... and they took up twelve baskets. He went away to pray. And they went toward Bethsaida. And they come to Bethsaida, and they bring to him a blind man..." — feeding and healing all but consecutive, exactly the adjacency a single bleeding place-name requires.

These points deserve emphasis. First, in canonical Mark Bethsaida appears at 6:45 and again at 8:22 — separated by the entire expansion block. In proto-Mark, by contrast, the departure for Bethsaida and the arrival at Bethsaida were consecutive: a coherent journey that the expansion has split apart. Second, on the standard view Luke skipped those eighty verses and the name migrated backward across that gap to attach to the feeding — a considerable displacement requiring explanation on any account. On our hypothesis no such displacement is needed. When Luke omitted the healing, the place-name found itself adjacent to the feeding and lodged there naturally. The bleed is a short step, not a long one.

This converts the opposition's strongest datum into a support for the expansion case, but it carries a debt that must be paid honestly. The Bethsaida healing becomes the one pericope within this stretch that Luke genuinely omitted — possessed and discarded — and the reader is owed a reason why this single unit was dropped while the model's general claim is that Luke's absences across the block are non-existence rather than omission. There is a principled reason, and it does not strain. The healing is a two-stage, saliva-mediated cure (Mark 8:23–25), the most physically graphic of Markan miracle techniques, and it is exactly this kind of healing the early redactors found awkward. Matthew, who plainly had the block, likewise omits this healing, and likewise generalizes away the other spittle-cure within it, the

Decapolis deaf-mute (7:31–37), into a summary notice (Matt 15:29–31). Two evangelists independently declined the same saliva-based cure. Luke's omission of the Bethsaida healing is therefore not an ad hoc rescue invented to save the seam; it is an instance of an editorial reflex demonstrable elsewhere in the tradition, and wholly in character for an evangelist who makes choices at the level of the individual pericope.

3.2. Contiguity: Against Deliberate Omission

A first-century gospel was written on a papyrus roll, manufactured by gluing prepared sheets edge to edge[24]. To insert new material into such a roll, an author could recopy the whole onto a fresh roll — an immense labor — or cut the roll and splice in additional sheets carrying the new text. The second is far cheaper, and it has a textual consequence: additions made this way cluster, because each splice admits one block, and distributing the same quantity throughout would require many cuts and many splices. Single-author expansion of a roll will therefore tend to be lumpy — a few large, contiguous insertions rather than an even diffusion of new matter.

This consideration does real work, but its limits should be conceded plainly. It does not tell against the damaged-exemplar theory at all: a lost leaf also produces a contiguous gap, so contiguity is equally at home there. Against *deliberate omission*, however, it does tell, and with some force. The block comprises eight or nine distinct pericopes — separate stories, not a single repeated unit. If Luke's grounds for omitting Markan material were specific to each pericope, as his scattered omissions elsewhere in the gospel are, then his dropping eight such units and their happening to fall in an unbroken run is a coincidence of low probability: on a rough estimate, treating the omissions as independent, the odds against eight displeasing pericopes lying contiguous in Mark, with no retained island among them, run to the order of many tens of thousands to one^{6}. Note, we are not claiming that the author Luke acted randomly, but that a priori, one would expect “Luke-displeasing text” to be randomly distributed in his source text.

The omitter has one escape, and only one. He may deny that the omissions are independent — recasting the block not as eight decisions but as a single one, a unified stretch Luke rejected as a block for some feature common to the whole (a perceived "duplicate cycle" of sea-crossing, feeding, and dispute, say). If the block is one displeasing thing, its contiguity is no coincidence and the probability argument lapses, for one cannot compute the odds of eight independent events coinciding where there were never eight independent events.

But this escape is barred by the content of the block itself. The recasting works only if the block is uniformly the kind of material Luke would wish to drop, and it is not. The Syrophoenician woman (7:24–30) is a Gentile-faith vignette of exactly the sort Luke elsewhere prizes — compare his amplification of the centurion's faith ("not even in Israel have I found such faith," 7:9) and his programmatic appeal to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (4:25–27); the Decapolis deaf-mute healing (7:31–37) ends in an acclamation Luke would have had no reason to spurn. A block containing material Luke wanted cannot be the unified, wholesale-displeasing block the escape requires — which throws the omitter back upon independent, pericope-by-pericope decisions, and it is independent decisions that the improbability of contiguity tells against. The argument is therefore not a probabilistic knockdown pressed in the abstract; it is the conjunction of two observations — that the omissions, if deliberate, must be independent, and that their falling contiguous is improbable if they are. Neither alone suffices; together they make deliberate omission an uncomfortable account of the block.

The typical rejoinder conflates individual decisions with a block decision: "Luke saw enough to dislike that he junked the whole thing." But this is precisely the conflation the conjunction defeats. If Luke saw "enough to dislike," then within the block there must be material he would have welcomed — the Syrophoenician woman being the clearest case — and a competent editor does not junk material he welcomes to be rid of material he dislikes, when omitting only the latter would cost him nothing. The "block decision" presupposes a uniformity of distaste the block does not have. Either Luke chose unit by unit (and the contiguity becomes improbable) or he discarded a block (and the welcome-able material inside it becomes improbable).

It should be granted that a pro-Gentile emphasis is not Luke's organizing principle. His gospel is an ancient *bios*, and the genre licensed selection and compression as a matter of course; Luke's governing aim is a portrait of Jesus, and the themes he favors serve that portrait rather than drive it[25]. The argument here is accordingly narrower than "Luke would have wanted this." Luke's practice with Mark's pericopes is to include them — the omissions are few and, outside this block, small — so for any given pericope the prior expectation is inclusion; and that expectation is raised, not lowered, where the material suits themes he demonstrably favored. His omitting a block that both fits his usual practice and suits his sympathies is therefore the less expected outcome under deliberate omission and the more expected one under a source that lacked it.

As with the study as a whole, the claim here is probabilistic, not absolute: Luke could have omitted the block. What this section shows is that deliberate omission is the less probable account — one

improbability among the several the following sections add to it.

3.3. The Argument from Distribution: Against the Damaged Exemplar

Against the damaged-scroll theory the decisive consideration is distribution. If Luke lacks the block because his exemplar of Mark was physically defective, the defect must be confined to Luke's copy alone — for canonical Mark has descended to us with the block intact, and Matthew plainly had it, reproducing its walking on the water, its dispute over defilement, its Canaanite (Syrophoenician) woman, and its feeding of the four thousand (Matt 14:22–16:12). The damage would thus have to fall on a single late branch while leaving the archetype that reached Matthew, and the entire surviving manuscript record, untouched — a special and unattested accident, localized exactly where the theory needs it and invisible everywhere else.

The expansion hypothesis requires no accident at all. Luke's line descends from proto-Mark, which never contained the block; Matthew's descends from canonical Mark, which did; and the manuscript tradition transmits canonical Mark. The observed distribution — Matthew has it, we have it, Luke lacks it — falls directly out of the document tree, with no appeal to physical damage anywhere. The damaged-exemplar theory must posit a defect both perfectly placed and perfectly invisible; the expansion theory derives the same facts from the relationships among the documents themselves.

It has occasionally been suggested that the abrupt ending at Mark 16:8 reflects physical damage to the gospel's autograph, and that a similar accident might explain the Great Omission. The two are not parallel, and the ending, rightly understood, tells against the analogy.

Our best early witnesses, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, both end Mark abruptly at 16:8. In the third study of this series we argue that this was the original, intended ending[18]; the longer and shorter endings found in later manuscripts are secondary additions, betraying scribal discomfort with so abrupt a close. But suppose, contrary to that view, that an original ending was lost to damage. Even then, that loss cannot be the same event that produced the Great Omission. No surviving witness preserves an original ending beyond 16:8 — the secondary endings are demonstrably not the lost original — so whatever happened at 16:8 lay behind the archetype of the entire tradition: every branch inherited it. The Great Omission is the reverse: canonical Mark and Matthew preserve 6:45–8:26 in full, and only Luke's line lacks it. The one supposed loss is universal, the other confined to a single branch. To make both physical damage requires two independent accidents at different stages — one to the archetype, inherited by all, and one to a later branch, inherited only by Luke. The two-stage story is not incoherent, but it doubles the cost: the

expansion hypothesis posits no accidents at all, while the damage account now needs two. The Great Omission and the abrupt ending stand or fall on different evidence; they are not parallel cases of damage.

A last consideration bears on the damage theory. However well a damaged exemplar might explain the Great Omission, it explains nothing else: the Beelzebul block and the fig tree each require their own account on that view, and neither can be a torn leaf. The expansion hypothesis explains all three by one mechanism.

3.4. The Seam Falls Between Stories

A further argument from Streeter[21] held that the Great Omission shows the marks of physical damage in the way Luke seems to lose contact with Mark in the middle of one pericope and regain it in another. The judgment depends, however, on where one locates the boundaries of Luke's contact and on the boundaries used to count pericopes. A closer look at the text changes the picture.

On Streeter's reading the supposed tear in Luke's exemplar fell after Mark 6:47 — Luke shows knowledge of Jesus dismissing the crowd, withdrawing to the mountain, and being "alone on the land," and this material surfaces at Luke 9:18 as "he was praying alone, his disciples were with him." On the present model the observation is granted and accounted for differently. Mark 6:46–47 is not a fragment Luke salvaged from damage; it was already in proto-Mark. It is transitional material — a brief notice that after the feeding Jesus dismissed the people and withdrew alone to pray — and some such transition had to stand in proto-Mark between the feeding and what followed it, since one pericope cannot simply abut another without a connecting sentence. Strip the walking-on-water and the rest of the expansion away, and proto-Mark reads naturally: the feeding and the twelve baskets, the dismissal of the crowd and the withdrawal to pray alone, and then they come to Bethsaida and a blind man is brought to him.

The expansion built the walking-on-the-water *into* this existing transitional space, taking the proto-Markan notice of Jesus alone and developing it into the theophany on the sea. The construction required one further change. In proto-Mark, as Luke 9:18 still reflects, Jesus prays with the disciples at hand and the party then sets out for Bethsaida together. Canonical Mark reverses the two notices — the disciples are dispatched in the boat first (6:45), and only then does Jesus withdraw to pray (6:46) — because the theophany needs the Twelve at sea and Jesus alone on the shore. Luke's disciples, present at the prayer, witness the order the expansion had to undo.

Luke received the proto-Markan transition and reproduced it; what Streeter read as the upper edge of a tear is on our model the proto-Markan bridge over which Luke crossed when he omitted the Bethsaida

healing.

The block, with this seam properly located, is not a uniform stretch but a series of relatively self-contained story-blocks linked by brief transitional sentences — typically a single sentence carrying the characters from one episode to the next. Wherever one places the proposed tear, both of its edges fall on these connecting sentences: at the upper edge, on the transition that follows the feeding; at the lower edge, on the brief notice that they came to Bethsaida and a blind man was brought to Jesus (Mark 8:22). Both edges land on transitions, not within stories.

This is improbable on a random-damage hypothesis. The transitions between stories make up a small fraction of the text; the stories themselves make up the great majority. A tear falling at random would be expected to land inside a story at each end — the abrupt mid-sentence interruption that is the normal signature of physical damage in a textual witness. For both edges of the tear to fall on the short transitional sentences, leaving the story-blocks themselves intact at both boundaries, requires either a low-probability coincidence or a torn text whose breaks have been smoothed by the copyist.

If smoothing is invoked, the damage theory loses what it most needs. Its strength has always lain in the claim that Luke transparently transmits the damage in his exemplar — that the gap in Luke is a window onto a physical defect in the text he used. The moment Luke is allowed to repair or smooth the broken edges, his text no longer transparently shows the damage, and the position becomes "Luke had a damaged copy and produced a clean text" — at which point there is no longer any evidence in Luke for the original damage at all, and the theory rests on nothing the text can support. Either Luke is the faithful witness the theory needs and the tear is improbably clean, or he is the editor the theory does not allow and the cleanness of the seam ceases to be evidence of damage.

The expansion hypothesis has no such dilemma. On our view there is no tear and no transition to smooth: proto-Mark already read continuously from the feeding through the dismissal-and-prayer transition to the Bethsaida healing, and Luke received and reproduced that continuous text.

3.5. The Cross-Reference

The block displays internal cross-reference. At 8:19–20, well inside the expansion, Jesus rehearses both feedings — the five thousand of proto-Mark and the four thousand of the expansion — pressing the disciples on the difference between the twelve baskets and the seven, and, in the Greek precisely, between the κόφινοι of the first and the σπυρίδες of the second. On our hypothesis the author has here reached back across the seam to bind his new material to the old. The cross-reference is the place where the addition

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acknowledges the inheritance it was joined to, and the seam where the two strata are visibly held together by the hand that composed the second. This by itself refutes any "doublet by accident" view of the four thousand — the view that it was an unintended scribal or transmissional duplication[26]. Combined with the arguments above that this material is expansion, it shows the expansion to be a *composed* one.

The passage also bears on the intentional-omission view. The most common form of the intentional-omission argument holds that Luke dropped the four thousand as a redundant duplicate of the five thousand. But Mark himself does not regard them as duplicates: 8:19–20 is composed precisely to insist that the two feedings differ — in their numbers, in their baskets, in their very vocabulary. An omitter who treated as redundant what Mark himself rehearses as significantly distinct would be reading the gospel against its grain. The point does not refute intentional omission as such — other motives might be supplied, and the case against those has been made above on different grounds — but it removes the easiest and most common motive a defender might offer.

3.6. The Bethsaida Gap in Mark

A further argument is available without any appeal to Luke at all. In canonical Mark the Twelve depart for Bethsaida at 6:45 and arrive at Bethsaida at 8:22. Between the departure and the arrival lies the entire expansion block. This is an oddity unique to this stretch of the gospel. Mark's other journeys do not behave this way. Where the text records a departure for a named place, it records the arrival there directly afterward, or — more commonly — the characters simply go somewhere without a separate departure verse. Mark 5:1 has them arrive at the Gerasenes immediately after departing at 4:35; the Tyre and Decapolis legs of 7:24 and 7:31 each resolve at once; the journey-to-Jerusalem sequence in chapter 10 moves in short stages. Nowhere else in Mark do the disciples set out for a destination and reach it only many pericopes later, after an unrelated chain of intervening events.

The anomaly is sharpened by what happens in the middle. The boat does not in fact reach Bethsaida on the 6:45 departure. The walking on the water intervenes, and the disciples land instead at Gennesaret (6:53) — not the destination they were set toward. The original journey is thus not only suspended but redirected: a departure for one place, an arrival at another, and only later, after further intervening material, a fresh arrival at the original destination. Whatever the literary effect intended, this is the structural fingerprint of insertion rather than of continuous composition.

The point can be put in counterfactual form. Suppose we had no access to Luke at all. Searching Mark for possible late insertions, one of the things we would look for is exactly this — a stretch where the narrative connects more cleanly without the intervening material than with it, where a departure and an arrival appear to belong together but are separated by a long detour, where the surface story has had to be re-routed to accommodate a block. The Bethsaida span supplies that signature. Combine it with the unified pro-Gentile theme of the intervening material, and we would already have sufficient grounds, internal to Mark itself, to argue for a late expansion of this exact stretch.

Luke's independent witness then becomes decisive rather than primary. The internal-Markan argument identifies the suspected expansion on structural and thematic grounds alone; Luke's lacking the same block, in the same boundaries, with no contact except at the Bethsaida seam itself, then confirms what the internal evidence already suggested. Two independent lines — the Markan structural anomaly and the Lukan distribution — converge on the same boundaries of the same block. The damaged-exemplar theory must explain both the structural anomaly and the Lukan absence, and explain them as unrelated coincidences. The expansion theory explains both as a single act: the proto-Markan departure-to-Bethsaida and arrival-at-Bethsaida ran consecutively; the expansion was inserted between them; Luke's branch never received the insertion.

3.7. A Motivated Omission

The strongest form of the omission theory is not the one answered above — that Luke dropped eight pericopes one by one — but Pettem's[22], which supplies a single motive for the whole block. On this account Luke-Acts reserves the Gentile mission, and above all the abrogation of the food laws, for the book of Acts, where it comes to Peter by revelation at Joppa (Acts 10:9–16); a Jesus who had already declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19) would make that revelation redundant and Peter's scruple ("I have never eaten anything common," Acts 10:14) unintelligible. Luke therefore cut 7:1–23 and, with it, the stretch of Mark in which Jesus works among Gentiles, keeping his ministry inside Jewish territory until the risen Lord sends the church outward. This is a block decision, not eight decisions, and it is the best alternative to a shorter Mark that the omission theory has produced. Three things tell against it.

The first is Luke's own gospel, which does not observe the reservation the theory requires. Jesus goes to Gentile territory in Luke as in Mark — the country of the Gerasenes, "opposite Galilee" (8:26), where the healed man is sent to proclaim what God has done (8:39) — and the pericope is retained in full. The Gentile centurion's faith is praised above any in Israel (7:9); the Samaritan is the neighbor (10:33) and the

one leper who returns (17:16); the nations are already at the kingdom's table (13:29); the inaugural sermon sets Elijah with the widow of Zarephath and Elisha with Naaman the Syrian (4:25–27). More pointedly, the food question itself is not held back. The seventy are told to eat whatever is set before them (10:8), and at a Pharisee's table Jesus, reproached for not washing, answers that the inside matters and "all things are clean for you" (πάντα καθαρὰ ὑμῖν ἐστιν, 11:41) — a saying that shows no contact with Mark's pericope (§4.7.1) but makes, in Luke's own idiom and setting, the very pronouncement the theory says Luke was withholding. An evangelist reserving the purity revolution for Acts 10 did not reserve it; he restated it, in his own setting, without Mark's controversy. What he lacks is not the teaching but the Markan pericope — which is what a shorter Mark predicts and a motivated omission does not.

The second depends on the model of these studies, and is offered for those who accept it. The block is absent not only from canonical Luke but from the proto-Lukan line: the Evangelion lacks it[7], and on the stemma of §1 proto-Luke was composed before Acts existed. A motive drawn from the design of Luke-Acts cannot explain an omission already made in a gospel that had no Acts to defer to. Nor can the Evangelion's lack of the block be laid to Marcion's own editing, for 7:15–19 — Jesus abolishing a commandment of the Law — is the last passage Marcion would have removed. Whichever way one runs the relation between Luke and the Evangelion, the block was missing before the Luke-Acts program could have been the reason.

The third is the evidence already set out. Pettem's motive bears on 7:1–23; the other seven pericopes fall as collateral, and the theory must therefore explain why an evangelist who elsewhere salvages what he omits — the salt saying, the fig tree, the divorce ruling, each kept in some form after its Markan setting is abandoned — salvaged nothing from this block: not the Syrophoenician woman's faith, which he would have prized, not the four thousand, not the walking on the water. And the positive evidence of §§3.1 and 3.4 stands against any omission from canonical Mark, motivated or not: Luke's text at the block's edges matches not the Markan text he is supposed to have cut around but the proto-Markan form beneath it — the single Bethsaida, the disciples present at the prayer, the order the walking on the water had to transpose. An evangelist excising a block from canonical Mark could not have reproduced the shape of a proto-Markan text he never saw.

3.8. Conclusion — a Composed Expansion

The arguments against the two omission theories now converge, and they converge from two independent directions — the internal structure of Mark itself, and the distribution of the material across

the synoptic tradition.

From within Mark, two features mark the block as inserted. The Bethsaida span is structurally anomalous: the disciples depart for Bethsaida at 6:45 and arrive only at 8:22, with the whole block between, and with a redirected landing at Gennesaret in the interim — a departure-and-arrival broken apart in a way no other Markan journey is. And the cross-reference at 8:19–20, in which the author rehearses both feedings and insists on their distinction, shows the block to be built rather than accumulated, and binds the new material to the old across the seam. These features, combined with the unified pro-Gentile expansion this study argues, would suggest a late expansion of this exact stretch even if Luke did not exist.

From the distribution, the same boundaries are independently fixed. The block is present everywhere but Luke's line — Matthew has it, the manuscript tradition transmits it — as the stemma requires and as physical damage cannot economically explain. The Bethsaida seam, long the omission theory's best evidence, marks Luke's contact with a single proto-Markan pericope, the blind-man healing, rather than with the block; strip the expansion away and proto-Mark runs continuously from the departure for Bethsaida to the arrival there. The two references are consecutive.

The two lines meet on the same block with the same boundaries. The economics of the papyrus roll make a single spliced section the natural form a single author's expansion would take; a run of independently dropped pericopes would not be expected to fall in an unbroken row; and the material Luke would have welcomed, standing inside the block, forbids recasting the omission as one wholesale rejection. Damage must treat the Markan structural anomaly and the Lukan absence as unrelated accidents; intentional omission must supply a motive the content withholds and an editorial clumsiness Luke does not elsewhere display. The expansion hypothesis treats both as a single act — proto-Mark ran continuously from feeding to Bethsaida healing; the author inserted the block between them; Luke's branch, descending from proto-Mark, never received it.

4. The Pro-Gentile Orientation of the Great Expansion

What remains to be shown is the thematic unity that the internal argument has already invoked — the sustained narration of a mission turning from Israel toward the nations. Before turning to it, a word on why this thematic demonstration belongs to the source-critical case rather than standing apart from it. The formal criteria of §§1.1–2 identify the expansion material on grounds indifferent to content: wording, order, contiguity, seams. That the passages so identified should then prove to share a single, sustained

theme is not a further assumption but a discovered fact — and it is a fact that bears directly on the probability argument. Passages selected by purely formal marks have no reason, on any account of accidental loss or piecemeal Lukan omission, to converge on one coherent program; that they do is among the least likely of the coincidences the rival explanations must absorb, and among the most naturally explained by a single expanding hand working to a purpose. Establishing the theme, and its unity, is therefore not a digression from the argument but one of its load-bearing legs. To that demonstration the following sections turn: the Jewish/Gentile pairings will show the expansion to be not a heap of added episodes but a single articulated program.

4.1. The Two Feedings: The First Composed Pair

If the Great Omission is a composed stratum rather than a damaged one, the two feedings are where the composition is easiest to see, because here the expansion has left its method on the surface. Mark narrates the same miracle twice — a multiplication of loaves and fish for a crowd in a deserted place, with surplus gathered into baskets — and the modern reader's first instinct, that one is a clumsy doublet of the other, is precisely the instinct the text was built to correct. The two are not redundant. They are a matched pair, the first set in Jewish terms and inherited from proto-Mark, the second set in Gentile terms and supplied by the expansion, and the gospel itself, at the climax of the sequence, stops to insist that the difference between them is the point.

4.1.1. The Inherited Member: The Five Thousand

The feeding of the five thousand (6:30–44) is proto-Markan. Luke retains it in the Markan position (9:10–17), as the source-critical rule of this study would predict for inherited material. Its furniture is Israel's. The crowd is Jewish, gathered in Jewish territory on the western side of the lake, and Jesus sees them "as sheep not having a shepherd" (6:34), the language of Israel leaderless (Num 27:17; Ezek 34:5).

The scene is built on the wilderness manna, and its numbers carry the echo. In the manna economy of Exodus 16 the bread falls in a fixed measure for five days, a single omer for each person; on the sixth day a double portion falls (16:22), and on the seventh, the sabbath, none (16:26) — five standard units and one doubled. The first feeding answers to that ration: five loaves and two fish, five units of food at the standard measure and a doubled portion of food beside them, the wilderness allotment that fed Israel reproduced in the hand of Israel's Shepherd. The typological frame is set before the numbers are counted — the deserted place (ἔρημος…τόπος, 6:35), the shepherdless sheep of Moses' prayer for a successor (6:34;

Num 27:17), the fragments *gathered up* in the manna's own idiom (6:43), and the superabundance that recalls the gathering in which none lacked and none had too much (Exod 16:18). What the wilderness gave Israel through Moses, the Shepherd now gives directly: the manna ration itself, in its very measure, set in his hands.

The leftover then fixes the reference to Israel entire: the fragments fill twelve baskets (κοφίνων, 6:43) — twelve, the number of the tribes, the bread of the whole people gathered up. The κόφινος itself is the basket of Jewish association, the hamper the Roman satirists mocked the Jews of the city for carrying[27]. The whole of the first feeding faces inward — wilderness bread, the manna measure, the tribal number — and the force of its twelve emerges fully only against the seven of the Gentile feeding, to which it is the deliberate foil.

4.1.2. The Added Member: The Four Thousand

The feeding of the four thousand (8:1–10) falls within the block Luke never received. Its furniture is turned outward. It follows immediately upon Jesus's journey through Gentile country — the region of Tyre and Sidon, then the Decapolis (7:24, 7:31) — and the crowd it feeds is, in narrative context, a crowd of those regions. Mark marks the difference in a phrase: some of them, Jesus says, "have come from far off" (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, 8:3). The idiom is not idle. "Those who are far off" is the standing designation in Isaiah and the Septuagint for the nations beyond Israel, and it is the idea Paul takes up to name the Gentiles brought near in Christ (Isa 57:19; Eph 2:13, 17)[7]. Where the five thousand are Israel gathered, the four thousand include those the prophets placed outside the covenant and the gospel now feeds. The Gentile reading of the second feeding is a common view in the commentaries,[28][27][29], and the present study assumes it rather than argues it; what it adds is the stratification — Luke has the Israel member and not the Gentile one — and an account of why the pair was built[8].

The numbers shift with the theme. Seven loaves are multiplied, not five, and the surplus fills seven baskets — but the basket is now a different word, σπυρίς (8:8), not the Jewish κόφινος. Mark's vocabulary is deliberate, and he will shortly prove it so. The number seven, against the twelve of the first feeding, has been read since antiquity as the number of the nations, whether as the seven peoples of Canaan whom Israel dispossessed (Deut 7:1), recalled in just these terms in the early mission preaching (Acts 13:19), or as the seventy nations of Genesis 10; on either reckoning the nations are counted in sevens. Where twelve baskets gathered the bread of the tribes, seven gather the bread of the nations. The second feeding is not

a duplicate of the first; it is its Gentile counterpart, deliberately differentiated at every point where the first was Jewish — territory, crowd, number, and even the word for the basket.

4.1.3. The Author Names His Own Pattern: Mark 8:19–20

That this differentiation is authorial design and not the accident of a transmitted doublet, Mark removes from doubt. A few verses after the second feeding, still inside the expansion block, he stages a scene whose only function is to make the disciples — and the reader — count. In the boat, rebuking their failure to understand, Jesus asks: "When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They say to him, "Twelve" (δώδεκα). "And the seven for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of fragments did you take up?" And they say, "Seven" (ἑπτά) (8:19–20). The two feedings are set side by side and their numbers held apart: twelve against seven, and — in the Greek, precisely — κόφινοι against σπυρίδες, the catechesis preserving the very lexical distinction the two narratives drew.

The boat scene carries, besides, the mark of the gospel's larger esoteric structure[30][31], and it is worth registering here though it belongs fully to another study. The disciples are made to recite the numbers and still are told they do not understand: "Do you not yet perceive or understand?... Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" (8:17–18). The data are in their possession — they produce twelve and seven on demand — and the meaning is still withheld from them. This is the characteristic Markan move, in which the inner circle holds the facts and misses the secret, and it falls, significantly, on the very pattern that encodes the turn to the nations: those nearest Jesus can count the baskets and cannot read what the count discloses. The feeding pair thus does double duty. It is the clearest specimen of the expansion's compositional method, and it is already an instance of the gospel's reserve of its true meaning for those given to understand it. The meaning is clear if explained, and a thesis of a forthcoming study[18] is that Mark explained his scroll as he read it.

4.1.4. Summary of the Feedings

The two feedings are the first and plainest of the expansion's Jewish/Gentile pairs. The five thousand is proto-Markan and Israel-facing — shepherdless sheep, the wilderness manna in its very ration of five and a doubled portion, twelve tribal baskets; the four thousand is expansion and nation-facing — Gentile territory, those "from far off," seven loaves and seven baskets of the nations, the basket-word itself changed. That the contrast is authorial and not the residue of a transmitted doublet is established by

8:19–20, where the gospel rehearses both feedings and holds their numbers and their very vocabulary apart. Here the expansion shows its hand: it does not merely add a Gentile episode beside a Jewish one, but composes, across the seam between its strata, a scene that teaches the reader to read the two together.

4.2. The Twelve: Sending and Appointing

The next two paired structures concern the Twelve themselves, and it is the pair in which the expansion's governing scripture comes most clearly into view. Mark twice constitutes the Twelve: he appoints them on the mountain (3:13–19) and he sends them out (6:7–13). Read together, the two acts carry the program of the whole expansion. The sending dispatches the Twelve to Israel — the inherited mission, Jewish in scope. The appointment reconstitutes that same body under a different sign: twelve still, for the tribes of Israel, yet commissioned now, by the logic of the Servant-scripture the scene invokes, to reach beyond Israel to the nations. The inherited act sends the Twelve to the tribes; the added act makes them, in Isaiah's own terms, a light to more than the tribes.

4.2.1. The Sending: The Inherited Member

The sending of the Twelve (6:7–13) is proto-Markan, retained by Luke in the Markan position (9:1–6). Its frame is the first Exodus and the mission to Israel. The Twelve are sent out to the towns of Galilee, to Israel's own; they are to take nothing for the road — no bread, no bag, no money — but they are to wear sandals and carry a staff (6:8–9). The provisioning is precise. The staff and the sandals are the gear of the Passover and the wilderness: Israel was to eat the Passover "with sandals on your feet and a staff in your hand," ready to travel (Exod 12:11), and after forty wilderness years Moses recalls that "your sandals have not worn out on your feet" (Deut 29:5). The Twelve are dressed for the Exodus journey — traveling light, ready for the road, trusting to be fed as Israel was fed. They go to "the lost sheep," in the idiom the tradition will make explicit, of the house of Israel; their number is itself the number of the tribes, a body of twelve sent to the twelve tribes. The sending is the gathering of Israel by Israel's own, the restoration mission in its first and inward sense.

4.2.2. The Appointment of the Twelve Under the Servant's Call

The appointment of the Twelve (3:13–19) is, on the present reconstruction, the Gentile-facing member of the pair. It constitutes that same body under a different scripture: not the wilderness mission to Israel but the Servant's commission of Isaiah 49, whose declared scope is the nations. The two acts are a single

body given two commissions, the inward and the outward, the gathering of Israel and the light to the Gentiles.

The appointment's language is the language of constitution, not of mere selection. Jesus "made twelve" (ἐποίησεν δώδεκα, 3:14), the idiom of constituting a body rather than choosing men. Luke, our second witness to proto-Mark, has the plainer "he chose twelve" (ἐκλεξάμενος, 6:13). Where canonical Mark and Luke diverge here, canonical Mark is the reworked witness and Luke the proto-Markan one: the constituting verb is the expansion's, added over a proto-Mark that had only a choosing of twelve.

Nor does Luke's appointment carry "to be sent out to preach." Canonical Mark has the phrase twice — in the appointment (3:14) and in the sending (6:7, 12) — but Luke has it only in the sending (9:1–6), not in his appointment (6:12–16). By our two witnesses, then, proto-Mark carried the phrase in the sending alone; its appearance in canonical Mark's appointment is the expansion's addition. And the addition is a revealing one, for it shows the technique by which the expansion binds its new material to the old. The expansion wanted its appointment to pair with the inherited sending, and it secured the pairing by reaching across the seam and echoing the sending's own language in the appointment it composed. Luke, witnessing the unstitched proto-Mark, preserves the phrase in its single original place; canonical Mark shows it copied forward into the new pericope, the seam still visible in the doubling.

That the commission is one of *preaching* draws the appointment toward the Servant a second time. The Servant of Isaiah 49 is above all equipped for utterance: "he made my mouth like a sharp sword... he made me a polished arrow" (49:2), the prophet fashioned as an instrument of speech, sent to proclaim. The Twelve, made and sent to preach, are furnished for the same task — the Servant's word carried now by the body constituted in his manner. Where the calling and naming (below) cast the Twelve in the *form* of the Servant's commissioning, the charge to preach casts them in its *function*: the mouth made sharp, the arrow made ready, the word sent out.

The Twelve are given "authority to cast out demons" (3:14–15); the inherited sending carries the same language (6:7, 12). It is the mark of an appointment modeled on the sending it pairs with, the one act drawn in the terms of the other. And the grant of exorcism authority does further work, for it plants the very power whose source the Beelzebul controversy will at once contest and defend (3:22–30): the appointment gives the Twelve authority over demons, and the controversy that follows adjudicates by what authority demons are cast out — one reason the appointment and the controversy stand together as a single composed block.

Isaiah 49 opens with the Servant recounting his commission in two acts: "The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother he named my name" (ἐκάλεσέν με… ἐκάλεσεν τὸὄνομά μου, 49:1). Calling and naming together constitute the Servant's vocation — he is appointed by being summoned and named. The connection to Mark's appointment is not a verbal lock: Isaiah's verb for naming (ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα) is not Mark's (ἐπέθηκεν ὄνομα). It is conceptual and structural. Mark's appointment reproduces the Servant's pattern of vocation — a calling (προσκαλεῖται, 3:13) joined to a naming (ἐπέθηκεν ὄνομα, 3:16–17) — and so casts the constitution of the Twelve in the form of the Servant's own commissioning. The Twelve are made as the Servant was made: called and named.

And to be named in the Servant's manner is to be named into the Servant's commission — a commission whose declared scope is announced at the center of the same Song — the reason the appointment belongs to the Gentile expansion at all. Isaiah 49 does not leave the Servant's task within Israel. Having recounted his calling and naming, the Servant is told that the restoration of Israel is too small a thing to be the whole of his commission: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations (φῶς ἐθνῶν), that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6).

This is the verse that gives the appointment its direction, and it is what distinguishes the appointment from the sending it is paired with. The pairing is therefore not juxtaposition but development: the expansion takes the inward mission of the proto-Markan sending and sets over it an appointment whose governing scripture declares that mission, by itself, insufficient.

That the Markan naming was a marked and weighted act, and not incidental list-keeping, is confirmed by what Matthew does with it. Working from canonical Mark, Matthew dissolves the act of conferral. Where Mark has Jesus *impose* the name, Matthew writes only "first, Simon, the one called Peter" (Σίμων ὁ λεγόμενος Πέτρος, 10:2) — the participle λεγόμενος treating "Peter" as a label Simon already bears, an identifier rather than a name conferred in the scene. The naming has been de-eventalized: an act has become an epithet. This is not, however, because Matthew found Petrine naming uncongenial. He has instead *relocated* and rebuilt it, giving Peter his renaming in a scene of Matthew's own composition and on Matthew's own terms — "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (16:18) — where the name founds the institution. The contrast is sharp and revealing. Mark confers the name, within a list, as one of two namings — the second of which, Boanerges, 'sons of thunder,' is never used again. Matthew strips the conferral from the list and makes a single Petrine renaming the cornerstone of the church. Each evangelist's handling fits his program: Mark's naming is vocational and distributed, the Twelve

constituted as the Servant's called-and-named; Matthew's is institutional and focused, the one renaming that establishes Peter's primacy. The Markan naming theme is real enough that Matthew had to do something deliberate with it — and what he did was take it out of the list and build his own house on it.

Luke, for his part, has a single naming in the plainest form — "Simon, whom he also named Peter" (ὃν καὶ ὠνόμασεν Πέτρον, 6:14) — and lacks Boanerges, because, as we argue, he never saw it. The doubled, weighted conferral of canonical Mark survives in Luke as a single unstressed notice, which is consistent with Luke's having received the appointment through a source that carried the naming without the full expansion frame.

That this reading is not imposed on a reluctant text is confirmed by the use the earliest Gentile mission made of the same verse. When Paul and Barnabas turn from the synagogue to the Gentiles, they justify the turn with Isaiah 49:6 on their lips: "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light for the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:47). The verse was already, in the first-generation mission, the charter of the turn to the Gentiles. The expansion's placing of the Twelve's appointment under Isaiah 49 reads that charter back into the constitution of the Twelve themselves: the body appointed on the mountain is the body whose commission Acts will cite to authorize the Gentile mission.

It must be granted plainly that the Gentile scope of the appointment is carried by the Isaiah 49 frame and not by anything on the surface of 3:13–19. The claim is not that the appointment narrates a mission to the nations — it does not — but that the expansion has cast the Twelve under the one Servant Song whose declared reach is the nations, joining its calling and its naming and its preaching to a scripture whose center is "a light to the nations." The surface is Israel; the scripture beneath it is the Gentile commission. This is the mode in which the expansion characteristically works.

4.3. The Sea: Storm and Walking, the First and the New Exodus

The third pair takes the same structure — an inherited episode and an added one — onto the water, and its axis is the disclosure of who Jesus is. Here the expansion does not supply a Gentile counterpart to a Jewish scene, as the feedings did; it escalates the Christology of the inherited miracle from the first Exodus to the new, and by the logic of the new Exodus's own scripture, established at the Twelve, carries the gospel's reach toward the nations. The pair's primary axis is Christological; its Gentile bearing is consequent upon that, not independent of it.

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4.3.1. The Storm: The First Exodus

The stilling of the storm (4:35–41) is proto-Markan, retained by Luke at the Markan position (8:22–25). It is a first-Exodus scene. Jesus commands the wind and the sea as YHWH and his agent commanded the waters of the Reed Sea — rebuking the chaos, stilling it at a word, delivering those with him from drowning. The categories are those of the first deliverance: a wonder-worker, a prophet like Moses, mastering the waters on Israel's behalf. The disciples' closing question is the right one and an open one: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41). They have seen the power; they have not yet been given the name. The storm-stilling poses the question of Jesus's identity and leaves it standing.

4.3.2. The Walking on Water: The New Exodus and the Divine Name

The walking on the water (6:45–52) falls within the block Luke never received, and it answers the storm's open question in God's own voice. Its controlling scripture is the new-exodus oracle of Deutero-Isaiah, and the mapping is close. Isaiah 43 proclaims the God "who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters" (43:16), and then turns from the first deliverance to a greater one: "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (43:18–19). Every element of this is enacted or echoed at the sea. The way through the waters is Jesus walking upon them. The "new thing" that the former things must be forgotten to perceive is the new Exodus now breaking in. And the question "do you not perceive it?" is answered, in Mark, by the disciples' failure to perceive: they think they see a ghost, they are terrified, and "their heart was hardened" (6:52).

That hardening carries a double scriptural charge. It is the language of Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened against the first Exodus, now transferred to the disciples, who cannot perceive the new one even as it passes before them — those nearest Jesus placed, astonishingly, in Pharaoh's position of non-perception. It is at the same time the hardening of Isaiah's blind Israel, "seeing they do not see" (Isa 6:9–10), the text Mark has already invoked for those outside the secret (4:12) and will invoke again in the boat after the second feeding (8:17–18). The disciples fail to perceive the new thing precisely because they remain within the first Exodus, looking for the restoration of Israel and missing that it was always to overflow its banks.

At the center of the scene stands the word and the gesture that make it a theophany. Mark says that Jesus, walking on the sea, "meant to pass by them" (ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς, 6:48). In the Septuagint the verb is

the verb of divine self-disclosure: God "passes by" Moses in the cleft of the rock and proclaims his name (Exod 33:19–23), and "passes by" Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:11). The passing-by is not flight or avoidance; it is the form a theophany takes. And what Jesus says as he passes is the divine name itself: "Take heart, ἐγώ εἰμι, do not be afraid" (6:50). The words can be heard flatly, as "it is I" — but within an episode saturated with Isaiah 43, they are the Deutero-Isaianic self-identification, the "I am he" or conventionally "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) by which YHWH declares himself through that prophet again and again (Isa 43:10, 25; 51:12), the name first given at the burning bush (Exod 3:14). The theophanic "passing by" is what lifts ἐγώ εἰμι out of the ordinary; the two together leave no doubt that the walker on the water is identifying himself in the words of Israel's God.

4.3.3. The Pair as a Single Argument

So the two sea-miracles, read as the expansion intends, mount a single ascending claim. In the storm, Jesus is the Moses-figure of the first Exodus, commanding the waters for Israel, and the disciples' question — who is this? — hangs unanswered. In the walking on the water, the answer is given: he is the one who says ἐγώ εἰμι, who passes by in theophany, who enacts the new Exodus of Deutero-Isaiah, doing the new thing that the hardened of heart cannot perceive. The first miracle shows the deliverer of Israel; the second shows that the deliverer is YHWH himself, and that the deliverance he enacts is the new Exodus — which, by the declaration of the Servant Song under which this gospel has already placed the Twelve, was never the restoration of Israel alone, but salvation reaching to the ends of the earth. The expansion has taken an inherited wonder and set beside it a disclosure: the God who made a way through the sea is present, walking on it, and the way he is making now runs out to the nations.

4.4. The Senses: Sight and Hearing, Israel and the Nations

The last of the paired structures concerns the opening of the senses — a blind man given sight, a deaf man given hearing — and it divides along the proto-Mark/expansion line as cleanly as the feedings, once the two members are correctly assigned. The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22–26) is proto-Markan: Luke had it in his source and omitted it, as argued above, from discomfort with its two-stage, saliva-mediated technique, the displaced place-name surfacing at Luke 9:10 as the trace of his contact with it. The healing of the deaf man of the Decapolis (7:31–37) is expansion: Luke never received it. The inherited member gives *sight*; the added member gives *hearing*; and the distinction between the two senses carries, in compressed form, the whole salvation-historical claim of the expansion — that Israel saw and the nations hear.

4.4.1. The Children and the Dogs: Israel's Bread and the Nations' Crumbs

Between the two healings, and immediately before the deaf man, stands the episode that turns the gospel outward and supplies the logic the senses pair depends on. A Gentile woman, a Syrophoenician, asks Jesus to heal her daughter, and is answered with the hard saying: "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (7:27). The children are Israel, fed first; the dogs are the Gentiles, outside the table — and if the epithet sounds unflattering, that is the scene's design rather than its lapse. The word is the conventional Jewish idiom for the nations, and the expander places it in Jesus's mouth precisely so that the woman can take it up and win on its own terms: the priority of the children is conceded — the Jew first, as Paul has it (Rom 1:16) — and then shown not to exclude the dogs. The harshness is the premise the pericope exists to overturn. The woman's reply accepts the order and turns it: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). What falls from Israel's table is not lost; it feeds those beneath it. On the strength of that word her daughter is healed — the first Gentile healing of the gospel, won by the argument that the bread refused or dropped at the table reaches the dogs.

The placement is the expansion's own commentary on its program. The children are fed *first* — Israel has the priority, the historical presence, the bread set on the table before them. But the saying already contains the overflow: what the children do not take, or let fall, the dogs receive. This is the schema, in a sentence, that the two feedings narrated in their numbers and the two senses will narrate in their organs: the bread comes first to Israel and passes, in the refusing or the surplus, to the nations. The deaf man healed in the verses that follow is the first to eat the fallen crumb.

4.4.2. The Blind Man: Israel's Sight, Given by Halves

Israel *saw* Jesus. This is the mode of Israel's encounter with him — presence, the historical figure walking in Galilee, seen with the eyes. The inherited healing gives sight, and gives it in a way that judges the seeing. The blind man of Bethsaida is healed in two stages: at the first touch he sees men "like trees walking," and only at the second does he see all things clearly (8:24–25). The half-sight is deliberate, and its position fixes its meaning. The healing stands on the threshold of Peter's confession (8:27–30), where Israel's representative *sees* who Jesus is — "you are the Christ" — and in the next breath does not see, rebuking the prediction of the passion and being called Satan for it (8:32–33). The blind man's partial sight is the figure of Peter's partial sight: Israel begins to see, and does not yet see fully, and what it half-

sees it is prone to reject. Sight is Israel's mode, and Israel's sight in this gospel is real, incomplete, and turned at the last toward refusal.

4.4.3. The Deaf Man: the Nations' Hearing, Made Whole

The Gentiles did *not* see Jesus. They were not in Galilee; they had no historical sight of him. Their mode of encounter is hearing — the gospel reaching them by proclamation, by report, by the word preached after the fact. The added healing gives precisely this: in the pagan Decapolis, the territory of the dogs, a deaf man is made to hear. He is brought immediately after the Syrophoenician woman has won the children's crumb, the next beneficiary of the bread now passing under the table; and where Israel's sight was given by halves, the Gentile's hearing is made whole at once — "his ears were opened... and he spoke plainly" (7:35). The nations, who could not see, are given to hear, and to hear completely.

The scripture beneath the scene is the new-Exodus oracle of Isaiah 35, and Mark's vocabulary points to it with a precision that is hard to credit to accident. The man is called μογιλάλος, "speaking with difficulty" (7:32) — a word whose one secure home in the Greek Old Testament is Isaiah 35:6[9], the verse of the deaf unstopped: "then shall the ears of the deaf hear, and the tongue of the stammerers (μογιλάλων) shall speak plainly." The crowd's acclamation completes the citation: "he has done all things well; he makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (7:37), the catalogue of the senses restored when God comes to save his people — here breaking out beyond Israel's borders, in Gentile country, on a Gentile man.

And the hearing fulfills a summons the gospel planted earlier and left waiting. In the parable discourse — proto-Markan, retained by Luke (8:8) — Jesus twice issues the refrain "let anyone with ears to hear, hear" (4:9, 4:23), a call addressed to those who do not yet understand, a summons to a hearing not yet given. The expansion pays it off. The one who literally could not hear is given ears, and given them in the territory of the nations: the deaf man of the Decapolis is the answer to the proto-Markan call, the one who at last has ears to hear. That the expansion reaches back across the seam to fulfill an inherited refrain is, like the rehearsal of both feedings at 8:19–20, a mark of composition — the added material completing a motif the older layer had set in place.

4.4.4. The Pair as Jew and Gentile Perceiving the Gospel

The two healings, taken together, state the expansion's understanding of how Israel and the nations come to Christ, and they assign the senses to each with care. Israel saw — saw the historical Jesus, in the flesh, with the priority of the children at the table — and saw by halves, and in its representative

confessed and then rejected. The nations did not see; they hear, after the fact, by the word that falls to them as the crumb falls to the dogs, and their hearing is made whole. Sight is presence and partial perception and the temptation to reject; hearing is absence and report and the faith that comes by what is preached. This is the Pauline order of salvation read into the senses: to the Jew first, who saw; then to the Greek, who hears — "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

It must be marked that this salvation-historical schema — Israel saw and rejected, and so the gospel passed to the nations who hear — is the theology the expansion imports, not a doctrine the deaf-man pericope states on its surface. The pericope shows a Gentile healed of deafness in pagan territory; the reading of sight and hearing as the modes of Israel and the nations, and of the turn between them as Israel's rejection overflowing to the Greeks, is the Pauline frame under which the expansion sets the scene — the same Pauline architecture that governs the feedings, the seas, and the constitution of the Twelve. Within that frame the senses pair is the most economical statement of the whole: Israel saw the Lord and saw in part; the nations did not see, and have been given to hear.

4.5. The Pairs as Proof of Composition

With the four pairs before us, the argument they jointly carry can be stated plainly, for it is the strongest evidence that the expansion was composed rather than lost or excised. In three of the four, the inherited Israel member survives in Luke's gospel while only the added Gentile member is absent: Luke has the five thousand but not the four thousand, the storm but not the walking on the water, the sending of the Twelve but not the framing of the appointment under the Servant's call. The material missing from Luke is therefore not a thematically random stretch, nor even simply a pro-Gentile stretch, but the *Gentile member of a matched set whose Israel members Luke continues to attest*.

No accident produces this. A lost leaf removes whatever text occupies a span of the roll; it cannot single out the four thousand while sparing the five thousand, or the new-Exodus sea-crossing while sparing the first, for a tear does not know which member of a pair is the Jewish one. Nor does deliberate omission account for it, except by crediting Luke with exactly the pair-by-pair surgery the hypothesis attributes, in reverse, to Mark's expander: a Luke who recognized each doublet and struck only its Gentile half, while retaining its Israel half in place. The one process that *does* produce a series of Gentile members built upon inherited Israel members is the process this study has described: an author expanding proto-Mark, composing for each retained Israel episode a Gentile counterpart. It is Luke's retention of the inherited

members that makes the design legible; without the surviving Israel halves we could not see that what Luke lacks is, every time, the half that turns to the nations.

The fourth pair, the two healings of the senses, stands slightly apart and must be stated carefully, for here Luke attests neither member directly: the deaf-mute (the nations' hearing) belongs to the expansion and is absent, while the blind man (Israel's sight) belongs to proto-Mark yet was dropped by Luke — recoverable in his text only as the displaced place-name Bethsaida, the trace of a pericope he received and declined for its two-stage, spittle-mediated cure. The senses pair thus shows the expansion's hand — but it cannot show it in the way the other three do, by the survival of the Israel member alongside the absence of its Gentile twin.

4.5.1. The Pairs are Found, not Selected

Before the pairs are read for their content, one objection must be met: that a reader looking for Israel/Gentile doublets could assemble them from a gospel large enough to supply the parts. The objection fails on a plain feature of Mark — it is conspicuously *poor* in repetition. When it comes to doubled sayings, Matthew doubles his material more than twenty times and Luke ten while Mark has but a single clear instance — a scarcity long noted as peculiar to the gospel[32]. There is no wide field here to select from; for the central cases there is scarcely a field at all. And Mark pairs in three distinct ways, each of which yields a closed set the present argument did not construct.

It pairs by *repeated event*. Mark feeds a multitude twice — five thousand, then four thousand (6:30–44; 8:1–10) — and crosses the sea by miracle twice — the storm stilled, then the walking on the water (4:35–41; 6:45–52). These are the only two feedings and the only two sea-miracles the gospel contains, and in each the first is Israel-facing and the second turns to the nations.

It pairs by *doubled constitution*. The Twelve are established twice: appointed and named on the mountain (3:13–19), and sent out on mission (6:7–13). Again the set is closed — Mark constitutes the Twelve in these two scenes and no other — and again the inherited member faces Israel (the mission to the lost sheep) while the added member is keyed to the Servant sent to the nations.

And it pairs by *shared singular technique*. Twice, and only twice, Jesus heals with saliva: the blind man of Bethsaida, spittle on the eyes (8:23), and the deaf-mute of the Decapolis, spittle on the tongue (7:33). No other healing in Mark uses the method; these two alone do, and they fall on the two senses — sight and hearing — that the expansion makes the modes of Israel and the nations. That the two belong together is confirmed from outside the gospel: Matthew, working from canonical Mark, declines both, dropping the

Bethsaida healing and reducing the Decapolis one to a summary — the two spittle-cures removed as a pair.

Four pairs, then, and in every one the second member, not found in Luke, is the outward-turning member. None is selected from a field of candidates, because in each case Mark supplies exactly two of the thing and no more. The scarcity of such candidates is itself the argument: the gospel's few pairings run, without exception and without selection, in a single direction.

4.5.2. The Pairs as Tradition: Achtemeier and Fowler

A second objection comes from the opposite direction. The doublets of Mark 4–8 have been noticed before, and a standard account of them attributes the pairing not to the evangelist but to his sources. Achtemeier[33][34] isolated two pre-Markan miracle catenae, each built on the same pattern — a sea miracle, three healings, a feeding — the first running from the stilling of the storm through the five thousand (4:35–5:43; 6:34–44, 53), the second from the walking on the water through the four thousand (6:45–51; 8:22–26; 7:24b–30; 7:32–37; 8:1–10). On that account Mark inherited two parallel collections and set them side by side; the pairs are the residue of transmission, and no author built the second to answer the first. Fowler[35] argued the reverse of the direction argued here: that the four thousand is the traditional feeding and the five thousand Mark's own composition, modeled on it and heavier with Markan vocabulary and theme.

Both accounts were framed without reference to Luke, and it is Luke's witness that bears most on the choice between them and the present one. Achtemeier's second catena lies wholly within the Great Omission: Luke carries the first catena entire and nothing of the second. On the catenae theory this is a fact about Luke's editing, to be explained by whatever motive the omission theory can supply (§§3.2, 3.7); on the present model it is predicted, because the second catena is not a collection Mark inherited but the material his author added. The theory also pays a price the present model does not. To make the second catena fit the pattern, Achtemeier must have Mark relocate the Bethsaida healing from inside the collection to its end; here the Bethsaida healing stands where proto-Mark put it, and the expansion was inserted before it (§3.1) — the seam the catenae theory must explain by a transposition is, on this model, simply the join.

Fowler's direction fares no better against Luke's witness. If the five thousand is the secondary composition and the four thousand the traditional story, then the gospel Luke's line received contained the composition and lacked the tradition — the wrong way round for any sequence in which tradition

precedes redaction, unless Luke omitted the tradition, which is the thing under test. On the present model the sequence is the natural one: the five thousand was written first, in proto-Mark, and the four thousand composed later against it. Fowler's observation that the five thousand carries the heavier freight of authorial design is not disputed; what he read as marks of a later hand — the shepherdless sheep, the ordered companies, the twelve baskets — are, on the reading of §4.1, the Israel-facing furniture of the original, which the expansion's leaner counterpart was written to answer.

What neither account explains is that the second member of each pair is differentiated from the first at exactly the points where the first is Jewish, and the differentiation is cross-referenced inside the gospel (8:19–20). Two independently circulating catenae do not produce a change of basket-word keyed to the other collection's basket. That is the work of one author with both stories before him.

Again, the argument is a probabilistic one. Any of these scenarios are possible. But the seam in Mark, matching the absence in Luke, combined with the consistent Gentile facing of each pair's second member, argues that a proto-Mark lacking the second members, enlarged by a single author, is the most probable explanation.

4.6. The Isaian Architecture of the Expansion

The four pairs have been read each on its own terms, but they share a scriptural substructure that becomes visible only when they are set side by side, and that substructure is the strongest evidence that the expansion is a single composed program rather than an accumulation of Gentile-friendly episodes. In each pair the inherited, proto-Markan member is keyed to the *first* Exodus — to Moses, the wilderness, the deliverance of Israel — and the added, expansion member is keyed to the *new* Exodus of Isaiah, the restoration that Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah declare will reach beyond Israel to the nations. The expansion does not merely add Gentile material; it adds material drawn from one identifiable region of scripture, and it sets that material against the Mosaic typology of the layer it was joined to.

The distribution is consistent across the pairs. In the feedings, the five thousand (proto-Mark) is the manna of Exodus 16, Israel's wilderness ration in its very measure, gathered into the twelve baskets of the tribes; the four thousand (expansion) feeds those "from far off" (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, 8:3), the designation by which Isaiah names the nations gathered from the ends of the earth (Isa 49:12; 57:19). In the constitution of the Twelve, the sending (proto-Mark) provisions a mission to Israel's lost sheep in the manner of the wilderness; the appointment (expansion) constitutes the Twelve under the second Servant Song, called and named as the Servant is called and named (Isa 49:1), and so under the declaration that to raise up the

tribes of Jacob is "too light a thing," the Servant being given as "a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6). In the sea-miracles, the stilling of the storm (proto-Mark) is the mastery of the waters in the mode of the first deliverance; the walking on the water (expansion) is the new Exodus of Isaiah 43 — the way through the sea, the "new thing" that the hardened of heart cannot perceive, and the ἐγώ εἰμι by which Isaiah's God declares himself (43:10, 16–19). In the senses, the blind man of Bethsaida (proto-Mark) gives Israel its halting, partial sight; the deaf man of the Decapolis (expansion) gives the nations their hearing, in the words of Isaiah 35, the man named μογιλάλος after the rare word that, in the sense of a healed impediment, is distinctive to Isaiah 35:6.

To these four the fig-tree pericope, treated below, adds a fifth instance of the same hand. The cursing of the temple's fruitless tree (expansion) frames the temple's judgment with the one prophetic oracle of Gentile worship — "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations" (Isa 56:7) — the universalist clause that Matthew declines to preserve, and that Luke never saw. Across five expansion units, then, the controlling scriptures are Isaiah 35, 43, 49, and 56: a single body of prophetic material, and not a random sampling of it.

That this body is coherent, and that Mark's selection from it is principled rather than opportunistic, is the point on which the whole architecture turns, because the obvious objection is that Isaiah is long and rich in nations-material, so that a verse can be found to suit any pericope. The objection is answered by what the chosen texts have in common. They are not scattered across Isaiah; they cluster in the new-Exodus complex — the second half of the book together with the proto-apocalyptic chapter 35 that anticipates it — and within that complex they are precisely the passages in which the restoration of Israel overflows into the inclusion of the nations. That complex is not a unit defined here to fit the argument; it is a recognized division of the book, identified by Isaiah's interpreters on grounds internal to Isaiah and without reference to any question about Mark. Isaiah 49 makes the gathering of Jacob "too light a thing" and turns the Servant to the Gentiles; Isaiah 56 admits the foreigner and the eunuch to the house of prayer for all nations; Isaiah 43's new thing is the new Exodus whose telos, in the Servant Songs that surround it, is the ends of the earth; Isaiah 35's healed senses are the signs of God's coming to save, breaking out, in Mark, on a Gentile.

The decisive point is not merely that the expansion clusters, but what it clusters *away from*. Isaiah's nations-material is not all of one kind: the book is equally full of oracles *against* the nations — the judgment cycle of chapters 13 through 23, Babylon and Moab and Tyre arraigned and destroyed — and that material is nations-language in abundance. The expansion draws on none of it. It confines itself,

without exception, to the texts in which the nations are *gathered in* rather than judged. An author reaching at random for nations-language would have caught some of the judgment, for there is at least as much of it; this author caught only the ingathering. The principle of selection is thus single and visible, and doubly so: the expansion draws on the Isaian texts in which Israel's new Exodus is declared to be for the world, and it leaves untouched the equally available texts in which the world is condemned.

Two honest qualifications keep the architecture within its limits. First, the first-Exodus/new-Exodus division between the layers is a strong tendency, not an exceptionless law: the inherited blind-man healing latently shares the Isaiah 35 frame that the added deaf-man healing makes explicit (the same oracle opens both eyes and ears), and the storm-stilling draws as much on the Psalter's mastery of the sea (Ps 107:23–30) as on the first Exodus proper. The claim is that the expansion *systematically makes explicit and verbally anchors* an Isaian new-Exodus reading, against a proto-Markan layer that is Mosaic in its typology and only latently Isaian — the expansion intensifying and systematizing an orientation already present in the earlier text. Second, "Deutero-Isaiah" and "Trito-Isaiah" are modern designations; Mark knew Isaiah as one scroll, and the claim is not that he cited a recognized division but that he drew, with evident deliberateness, on the thematically unified new-Exodus-and-nations material that modern scholarship locates in the book's later chapters and in chapter 35.

Within those limits the conclusion stands, and it is the capstone of the case for the pairings. The expansion is not a series of separately motivated additions that happen to favor the Gentiles. It is a single Isaian program: against the first Exodus of the inherited gospel — Moses, manna, the gathering of the tribes — the expansion sets the new Exodus of Isaiah, in which the God who made a way through the sea does a new thing, opens the ears of the nations, and gives his Servant as a light to the ends of the earth. The Gentile telos of the expansion is not imported by the modern reader; it is Isaiah's own, and the author of the expansion has built his additions upon it.

4.7. The Rest of the Great Expansion

We now turn to the non-paired parts of what we will now call the “Great Expansion”.

4.7.1. Clean and Unclean: The Theological Preparation for the Gentile Mission

The dispute over the traditions of the elders (7:1–23) is the theological preparation for everything that follows in the block, and its placement is deliberate. The dispute moves from the Pharisees' challenge over handwashing, through a sustained critique of the Corban tradition that turns the charge of

transgressing tradition back into a charge of transgressing the commandment, to a general principle delivered to the crowd under the summons to hear: "there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him" (7:15). That principle is the pericope's load-bearing sentence. It dissolves the food boundary by itself, and the narrative confirms the reading at once: the next verse after the explanation sends Jesus into the region of Tyre (7:24), the first Gentile ground in the gospel. The pivot is the expander's commentary on his own principle.

A word on the parenthesis that caps the private explanation, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα — "thus he declared all foods clean" (7:19). Its participle famously agrees with nothing in its sentence, and it has been read as an editorial intrusion since the grammar was first pressed; it is absent from Matthew's parallel (15:17) and from Luke altogether. Either it belongs to a later hand working within the expander's block, or it is the expander's own and was lost from Matthew's exemplar in the manner the supplement to this study describes, or Matthew dropped it. On none of these accounts is it secure expansion text, and the present argument rests nothing on it. The private explanation it caps belongs, moreover, to a figure — the saying delivered openly, the disciples apart in the house, the narrower explanation given — that recurs in this gospel and is examined in the next study of this series[14]. What the gloss does show, whoever wrote it, is how the principle of 7:15 was read by its earliest reader to leave a mark on the text: as abolishing the food boundary outright. That is the reading this study attributes to the expander, confirmed from the far side.

The clean/unclean boundary is the boundary that separates Jew from Gentile at table and in the household, and its dissolution is the theological precondition for the Gentile mission the expansion narrates. Without it, the Syrophoenician woman cannot eat the children's bread, the Decapolis crowds cannot be fed, and the four thousand cannot receive the loaves from Jewish hands. The sequence is therefore not incidental: the boundary is dissolved in 7:1–23, the first Gentile healing follows in 7:24–30, and the first Gentile feeding follows in 8:1–10. The expansion has ordered its material so that the theological preparation precedes the narrative enactment.

The Pauline resonance is direct. The clean/unclean question is precisely the issue at the Antioch incident (Gal 2:11–14), where table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers is the contested point, and Paul's ruling that "nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom 14:14, οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι᾽ ἑαυτοῦ) is the same principle Mark's Jesus states at 7:15. Whether the dependence runs from Paul to Mark or from a common tradition into both, the theological move is the same: the clean/unclean boundary is abolished as the condition of the Gentile mission.

Luke does not carry this pericope.[10] What he has is a different thing wearing a similar opening: a Pharisee's surprise that Jesus did not wash before dinner (11:37–38) introduces a saying about vessels — you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish; did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? (11:39–41). That is not Mark's pericope in another setting. It is a saying about the inside and outside of *vessels*, and of the men they figure; it reaches a pronouncement of cleanness by its own road, and shows no contact with Mark's wording, Mark's setting, or Mark's argument. Its natural home is the sayings source, from which Luke's line received it with the handwashing occasion attached. Luke's tradition, in short, preserves a purity *saying*; it nowhere preserves the Markan *pericope* — not the Pharisees' charge, not the Corban argument, not the principle of 7:15.

The absence is telling, because Luke is the last evangelist who would have suppressed it. Matthew had the pericope — he used canonical Mark — and kept it entire, charge, Corban, and principle. Luke never had it at all: not from his proto-Mark source chain, which lacked the pericope, and not, in Mark's form, from Matthew, since what he took from Matthew's line was the sayings form he already held. The confirmation that Luke would have welcomed it, had he seen it, is his own gospel: the evangelist who opens with Simeon's "light for revelation to the Gentiles," who cites the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian as the paradigm of God's reach beyond Israel, and who ends with a mission to all nations, is not an evangelist who suppresses the abolition of the purity boundary. His silence is not suppression; it is source-absence. The theological move that clears the path for Gentile inclusion is one more piece of the expansion that Luke's branch never received.

4.7.2. The Remaining Units: Brief Notes

The demand for a sign (8:11–13) and the leaven discourse (8:14–21) close the block. The Pharisees demand a display-sign; Jesus refuses and departs; in the boat the disciples fail to understand the loaves. The Pharisees serve here as an introduction to the disciples' non-perception, which is the discourse's true target: Jesus rehearses both feedings — the κόφινοι of the five thousand and the σπυρίδες of the four thousand — and the disciples still do not see or hear. The closing counterpoint of the block is thus made: those who demand proof receive nothing, while the Gentiles of the Decapolis and the four thousand have been fed without demanding any; and those nearest Jesus, who have witnessed both feedings, fail to perceive what they have been given. The connection to the Gentile orientation is thematic and indirect — it belongs to the pattern of insider-non-perception the expansion develops throughout, whose fuller significance is taken up in the future study on Mark's esotericism. For present purposes it is sufficient to

note that the block ends on the same terms it has sustained throughout: the new thing is given to those outside and withheld in its meaning from those who should have seen it first.

5. The Beelzebul Block: Controversy and Appointment

The second of the secure expansion sections is the Beelzebul controversy (3:22–30) together with the appointment of the Twelve (3:13–19), which form a single block. Both belong to the expansion by the three criteria. Together they constitute the expansion's narrative defense of the Gentile mission against the objection that Jesus operates by alien power, and they pair the Jewish-facing sending of the Twelve (6:7–13, proto-Markan) with a Gentile-facing constitution of the same body under Isaiah's Servant call.

5.1. The Criteria

The Beelzebul controversy meets the position criterion strictly. Luke has the corresponding material at 11:14–23, in the travel narrative — the long central section (9:51–18:14) into which Luke gathers his non-Markan material from the sayings source and from Matthew. This is the part of Luke's gospel where Markan material does not live, and the placement of the Beelzebul material there is positive evidence rather than mere absence: it stands precisely where material drawn from Matthew or the sayings source would be expected to land, and conspicuously not where it would land had Luke been following his Markan source. The Markan position at 3:22–30 is not merely unattested by Luke; the controversy is located in his gospel at a position that betrays its non-Markan source.

The appointment of the Twelve meets the position criterion more loosely. Luke 6:12–16 places the appointment close to where Mark 3:13–19 has it — both fall shortly after the healing of the paralytic. The slight difference in placement is intelligible on our model, and is best shown by setting the reconstructed sequences side by side.

On our model, proto-Mark ran roughly: the paralytic is healed; the Twelve are called; Jesus departs with them to the sea; the crowds press in; a boat is made ready; unclean spirits are rebuked; he enters the boat and teaches from it; true family is those that do the will of God, then he departs by boat.

Luke, following that inherited structure, runs: the paralytic is healed; the Twelve are called; Jesus goes down with them to a level place; the crowds gather; unclean spirits are rebuked; he teaches at length; and — after the intervening material Luke has gathered here — we have the “true family” and he departs by boat at 8:22. The chief structural change is that Luke sets the teaching on a plain rather than in a boat. (The stretch of Lukan material between the teaching and the boat departure is considerable; what the

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parallel claims is a shared *skeleton* — paralytic, Twelve, crowds, healings, teaching, family, boat — not an unbroken adjacency.)

Canonical Mark, we suggest, reworked the inherited sequence at this point: the paralytic is healed; (the old call of the Twelve is crossed out); Jesus departs with the Twelve to the sea; the crowds press in; a boat is made ready; unclean spirits are rebuked; and here the expansion is spliced in — the reframed appointment of the Twelve and the Beelzebul controversy and Jesus's true family as a frame to Beelzebul — after which he enters the boat, teaches from it, (the old "true family" sentence is crossed out)[11] and departs by boat.

The appointment is, on our model, the inherited calling of the Twelve, moved slightly and reworked into a formal constitution of the body; the constituting language and the Servant-naming are treated in §4.2.2. What concerns the criteria here is how the block divides under the wording test — and it divides, along the line between what the expansion added and what it inherited.

Luke shows no knowledge of canonical Mark's wording of the Beelzebul controversy itself. He agrees with Mark only where Mark and Matthew themselves agree; at every point where the two diverge, Luke follows Matthew or supplies his own wording. The one apparent exception proves on inspection to be none. Mark has blasphemy against "the sons of men" forgiven and against "the Holy Spirit" not (3:28–29); Matthew renders this twice, first with a plain "Spirit" (12:31) and then in a second saying contrasting "the Son of Man" with "the Holy Spirit" (12:32). Luke has only the second form (12:10). His "Holy Spirit" therefore agrees with Matthew 12:32, not with Mark against Matthew — and his "Son of Man," the secondary reading Matthew produced from Mark's "sons of men," shows him on the far side of Matthew's redaction, not on Mark's side of it.[12]

In the appointment Luke does not attest the expansion's framing additions — the imposed names, "Boanerges," the whole weighted conferral; he retains only a single plain naming (6:14). Yet at one point he agrees with Mark against Matthew: the disciple list pairs "Matthew" and "Thomas" in the same order in Luke and Mark, against Matthew's own "Thomas and Matthew the tax collector." The two facts fit together on our reading. What Luke lacks is precisely the expansion's frame; what Luke preserves — the bare list, in its Markan order — is precisely the proto-Markan substrate the expansion built upon. Luke's silence falls on the added frame, his agreement on the inherited core. The wording criterion is thus satisfied for what the expansion added, while the received list survives in Luke as its proto-Markan base.

For size, the criterion is met without caveat: two successive pericopes form the contiguous block — and they are not merely adjacent but thematically interlocked, the appointment's grant of exorcism authority (absent from Luke) setting up the Beelzebul controversy that defends it (§4.2.2).

5.2. The Synoptic-Problem Argument

The synoptic-problem case for treating the Beelzebul controversy as non-Markan is set out in our previous study[1]; here it is enough to recall its result and its bearing on the present reconstruction. The difficulty the passage poses for the Two-Source Hypothesis is that it must be handled as a Mark–Q overlap, yet the Q reconstructed for it turns out to reproduce Matthew's own wording — so that "Q," in this passage, becomes indistinguishable from Matthew, and positing it explains nothing that Luke's direct use of Matthew would not. The plain reading of the evidence, taken by itself, is a simple chain: Mark, then Matthew, then Luke.

What matters for the expansion hypothesis is the coincidence that any Luke-had-canonical-Mark account must absorb. On such an account Luke, in this one passage, departed from both Mark's order and Mark's wording at once, when he could have done either alone. The proto-Mark reconstruction dissolves the coincidence rather than absorbing it: there was no Markan version for Luke to depart from, because the controversy was not in the Mark his line received. His dual silence — no Markan position, no Markan wording — is then not a double editorial choice but a single fact about his source, and it is exactly the silence the expansion hypothesis predicts. Luke has done everything he possibly could to tell us he never saw this material.

5.3. The Blasphemy Saying

A further detail confirms the source-chain. Both Mark (3:28–30) and Matthew (12:31–32) follow the Beelzebul controversy with the saying on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; Luke omits it from the Beelzebul context, where it would have followed 11:23, but has the saying later, at 12:10. A form of it also appears in Thomas 44, consistent with its circulation in the sayings tradition independently of the narrative Beelzebul setting. On our model the explanation is straightforward: the saying already stood in the proto-Luke spine at 12:10, drawn from the sayings source, before Matthew's Beelzebul material was worked in. Incorporating that material into his framework, Luke reached the blasphemy saying and, finding it already present in his existing text, passed over it rather than duplicating it. He is following

Matthew's text until he meets a unit already fixed in his spine — and the omission marks exactly the seam between his two sources.

5.4. A Second Internal Seam: The Boat

The Bethsaida gap is not the only internal-Markan trace of the expansion. The Beelzebul block displays the same structural fingerprint. At 3:9, immediately before the expansion block begins, Jesus instructs his disciples "to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they should crush him." The boat is prepared, and the narrative reason for the preparation is explicit: the press of the crowd by the lakeshore. Then the expansion intervenes — the appointment of the Twelve on the mountain (3:13–19), the family scene and Beelzebul controversy (3:22–30) — none of which involve the boat or the lakeshore at all. The mountain is the wrong location, and the controversy with the scribes and his own family takes place in a house. When the narrative returns to the lake at 4:1, the boat is at last used: Jesus gets into the boat and teaches from it because the crowd is too large to gather around him on shore.

The setup and the payoff belong together. Read continuously, proto-Mark connects 3:9 directly to 4:1: "and he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they should crush him… and a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea." The intervening material in canonical Mark — the mountain appointment, the indoor family scene, the controversy — has displaced the boat preparation from its narrative payoff, just as the expansion displaces the departure for Bethsaida from the arrival at Bethsaida. The pattern is the same. Strip the expansion away and the boat instruction is followed directly by the boat being used; leave the expansion in and the instruction is given, the narrative wanders for about 23 verses, and the boat is used only after a long delay.

As with the Bethsaida case, this argument requires no appeal to Luke. Searching Mark for possible late insertions, one of the things we would look for is exactly this — a stretch where a narrative setup waits for its payoff across intervening material that has nothing to do with the setup. The Beelzebul block supplies that signature, and supplies it on the same pattern as the Great Omission. Luke's independent witness then converges on the same boundaries: the appointment of the Twelve at near-Markan position (the proto-Markan inheritance Luke received), the Beelzebul controversy displaced to the travel narrative where Luke's non-Markan material lives (the expansion content Luke never had in Markan form), and the parables discourse resuming after the block in Markan position and wording (proto-Markan inheritance again).

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Two independent boat seams in two independent expansion blocks — the Bethsaida journey broken at 6:45–8:22, and the boat instruction broken at 3:9–4:1 — is more than coincidence. It is the recurring trace of a hand inserting material into a continuous narrative, leaving the original setups and their delayed payoffs as the scars of the insertion. The expansion has not just added material; it has interrupted ongoing journeys and waiting boats, and the interruptions can be read off the surface of Mark itself before any synoptic comparison is undertaken.

5.5. The Pro-Gentile Reading

The controversy, read within the expansion, addresses the question that haunts the whole Gentile mission: by what authority does Jesus cross the boundaries the Torah and the Pharisaic tradition have set? The opponents' answer is that he does so by demonic power — "he has Beelzebul, by the prince of demons he casts out the demons" (3:22). Jesus's reply turns the charge inside out. He is not Satan's agent but Satan's conqueror: "no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man" (3:27). Far from operating by the prince of demons, Jesus has *bound* him and is despoiling his house — and in the Pauline frame the expansion works within, the house the strong man held is the domain of the nations, long under the power of the adversary and now being plundered back. (Paul names exactly this conquest: God "disarmed the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them," Col 2:15; the risen Christ sends Paul to turn the Gentiles "from the power of Satan to God," Acts 26:18.) The reply closes with its sharpest edge — that to attribute the Spirit's work to demonic agency is the one unforgivable blasphemy (3:28–30), the charge turned back on the accusers. The reading of the plundered house is the program's, not the surface's — the saying speaks of a strong man and his goods, not of the nations — but it is of a piece with everything the expansion elsewhere makes explicit. The Markan setting confirms the direction: the controversy is intercalated between the family's coming to seize him as "out of his mind" (3:20–21) and the redefinition of family as those who do God's will (3:31–35), so that natural kin who reject him are set against the new family of those who follow — the very shape of the Gentile mission, rejected by his own and acknowledged from outside. The Beelzebul controversy is thus the expansion's narrative defense of the mission: the boundary-crossing is not the work of a foreign spirit but the plundering of the strong man's house, and the new family it creates is the mission's fruit.

The companion piece is the appointment of the Twelve under Isaiah 49 — treated in a previous section — which constitutes the body whose Gentile commission the controversy defends. Together they form

the second secure block of the expansion, the Beelzebul controversy answering the objection and the appointment naming the commission.

6. The Cursing of the Fig Tree

The cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25) is, with the Beelzebul block, the second of the two relatively secure expansion sections beyond the Great Omission, and it qualifies with a caveat of its own. The first two criteria are cleanly met: Luke shows no knowledge of the cursing in either Markan position or Markan wording — he has no enacted cursing of a fig tree at all. What he has is his own fig-tree pericope, the barren tree given a reprieve (13:6–9), and he places it among his non-Markan material, not in Markan sequence.

The third criterion — that the material form a large contiguous section — is met only if the temple cleansing (11:15–19) is counted within it, for the cursing is not a single block but two halves wrapped around the cleansing: the tree is cursed on the way in (11:12–14), the cleansing occupies the center (11:15–19), and the tree is found withered on the way out (11:20–25). This is the characteristic Markan intercalation, in which frame and filling interpret one another[17]. Matthew retains the cursing but flattens the intercalation, the tree withering at once under Jesus's word (Matt 21:18–22), consistent with his dependence on canonical Mark.

The content of the cleansing at the center is proto-Markan, well attested in Luke (19:45–46); but to intercalate the fig tree the expander had physically to recopy it, writing the first half of the cursing, transcribing the cleansing, and adding the second half as one continuous insertion. The cleansing thus passed through his hand as he composed the block, and we argue below that he did not transcribe it untouched: the universalist clause "for all the nations" is a light edit he made to the inherited center as he wrote it into its new frame (§6.3).

Luke has no enacted cursing at all, and nothing in the Markan slot; his barren-fig-tree parable, different in genre and mood, sits elsewhere, among his non-Markan material. This is what we should expect on the present model. Luke's Markan source, proto-Mark, contained no cursing; whatever fig-tree material Luke had reached him by other routes, and the enacted cursing he could have met only at second hand, in Matthew.[13] The simplest account of his silence, on our model, is that the cursing was not yet present in the Mark he knew.

6.1. A Third Internal Seam: The Jerusalem Sequence

The Bethsaida gap and the boat at 3:9 are not the only internal-Markan traces of the expansion. The fig-tree intercalation has left a still more conspicuous seam in the geography of Mark 11, visible without any appeal to Luke. The sequence as canonical Mark presents it sends Jesus and the Twelve in and out of Jerusalem in a way that makes sense only if the fig-tree frame is present; remove the frame, and the journeys collapse into a single coherent visit.

In canonical Mark the triumphal entry brings Jesus to Jerusalem and to the temple, where, surprisingly, he does nothing: he "looked around at everything" and, "since it was already late," withdrew to Bethany with the Twelve (11:11). The next morning, leaving Bethany, he curses the fig tree (11:12–14); the party returns to Jerusalem and he cleanses the temple (11:15–19); in the evening they go out again; the following morning they pass the fig tree, find it withered, and only then — at 11:27 — re-enter Jerusalem to face the chief priests.

Three things in this sequence are strained, and all three are relieved at once by removing the fig tree. The first is the flatness of the entry's climax. A triumphal procession builds toward a deed at its destination; this one arrives at the temple, observes, and withdraws — the note that “it was already late” (11:11) having the air of a writer accounting for a deferral he has himself introduced.

The second is the cleansing's displacement to the following day. The natural shape would put the cleansing on the day of the entry; the expander could not, because his frame required the tree to be cursed immediately before the cleansing, in order to enclose it. The sequence had to be: entry, fig tree, cleansing. So the cleansing was pushed to the second day and the late hour invented to cover the gap. Matthew's handling points the same way: working from canonical Mark, he restored the cleansing to the day of the entry (Matt 21:12) and set the fig tree after it as a standalone sign, withering at Jesus’s word the next morning (21:18–19). The intercalation that strains Mark's narrative is precisely what the next redactor undid.

The third strain is the plainest, and the hardest to explain any other way. The journey of the third day exists for no purpose but to walk the travelers past the tree a second time: out of the city in the evening, back the next morning to find it withered (11:20), after which "they came again to Jerusalem" (11:27). Nothing else happens on that circuit. Strip the fig tree away and the disciples have no reason to leave the city or to return; the entire out-and-back movement is an artifact of the need to view the tree twice.

Read continuously without the frame, proto-Mark gives a single day in Jerusalem: the triumphal entry, the immediate cleansing, and the confrontation with the chief priests, all in one visit. The three-day structure of canonical Mark is entirely an artifact of the fig tree — the evening withdrawal and morning return exist only to curse the tree on the way in and find it withered on the way out. Remove the tree and the days collapse with it: there is no reason to leave Jerusalem and return, and the authorities who resolve to destroy him at the cleansing (11:18) confront him directly (11:27), on the same day, with nothing intervening. The strains are not in that narrative; they appear only once the fig tree is woven through it. As at Bethsaida and at the boat of 3:9, the expansion is detectable in the surface of Mark itself — the deferred action, the manufactured explanation, the redundant journey are the scars of an insertion the text still bears. Three independent internal seams, in three independent expansion blocks, are far harder to dismiss as accidents of literary structure than any one would be.

6.2. The Old Testament Background

That the fig tree carries a symbolic charge is not a premise this argument must defend; it is the consensus reading of the passage. The fruitless or withered fig tree is standard prophetic shorthand for Israel under judgment for covenant failure (Jer 8:13; Hos 9:10; Mic 7:1; Joel 1:7), and the flourishing vine-and-fig-tree is the corresponding figure of covenant peace (Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; 1 Kgs 4:25). The enacted-judgment reading of Mark 11 — the barren tree as a prophetic sign-act against a fruitless Israel — is the mainstream interpretation.[14]

The one feature of the text that has troubled interpreters, Mark's parenthetical "for it was not the season for figs" (οὐ γὰρ ἦν καιρὸς σύκων, 11:13), tells in favor of the symbolic reading rather than against it. On any horticultural construal the curse is arbitrary, even unjust: the tree is condemned for lacking fruit out of season. The note functions precisely to block the literal reading and to redirect the reader toward the sign it enacts. The episode is not about a tree.

6.3. The Intercalation as Expansion Construction

The fig-tree halves, absent from Luke in both position and wording, were wrapped around a cleansing that already stood in the proto-Markan text, converting a freestanding temple demonstration into an intercalation. And the conversion is interpretively decisive, for Markan intercalation makes the frame and the filling read each other. The barren tree, cursed for bearing no fruit, becomes the figure of the temple, and the temple, judged at the center, becomes the meaning of the withered tree. The fruitless tree is the

fruitless cult; the tree withered to its roots (11:20) is the temple under sentence. This reading of the intercalation is not novel — it is the mainstream interpretation of the passage — but on the present reconstruction it is also the expansion's own construction: proto-Mark had a cleansing that provoked the authorities to seek Jesus's death; the expansion made that cleansing the center of a sign-act pronouncing the temple barren.

The temple so judged is judged, in Mark's text, under a particular scripture. At the heart of the cleansing Jesus states the charge: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations' (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν)? But you have made it a den of robbers" (11:17), joining Isaiah 56:7 to Jeremiah 7:11. The first citation is the one prophetic oracle that envisions the temple as a place of Gentile worship — Isaiah 56 admits the foreigner and the eunuch to the house of God — and it is the universalist clause "for all the nations" that carries the cleansing's pro-Gentile sense.

The clause "for all the nations" is most economically assigned to the expansion, for three reasons. First, it bears the expansion's distinctive theme — the inclusion of the nations — in the expansion's distinctive idiom, the Isaian Gentile-oracle, the same register that supplies "a light to the nations" at the appointment of the Twelve (Isa 49:6) and the gathering of those "from far off" at the feeding of the four thousand. Second, it forms a single editorial gesture with the fig-tree frame: the brackets turn the cleansing into a temple-judgment, and the clause makes that judgment specifically a judgment of the temple as the house of prayer for all nations that it failed to be. Third, the clause is absent from Luke — and that absence, on our method, is itself evidence of its origin. Had "for all the nations" stood in proto-Mark, proto-Luke would have carried it over, and it would stand in canonical Luke today; its absence there indicates it was not in the proto-Markan text. The one alternative — that Luke received the clause and deliberately dropped it — we can exclude, for Luke is the most Gentile-minded of the evangelists, given to enlarging rather than suppressing the welcome of the nations (2:32; 4:25–27; the whole trajectory of Acts). He is the last writer who would strike out "a house of prayer for all the nations" had he found it. His silence is therefore not omission but source-absence, and source-absence places the clause in the expansion[15].

One further datum corroborates the clause's expansion. Matthew, who on the present model worked from canonical Mark, had the full quotation before him and altered it: Matthew 21:13 reads simply "a house of prayer," striking "for all the nations" while keeping the "den of robbers" charge from Jeremiah. The removal is selective, not an abbreviation — he retained one half of Mark's paired citation and cut only the other, the universalist half — which marks it as targeted.

The sayings appended after the withered tree (11:22–25), where Luke also shows no direct knowledge of the Markan text, and on our model part of the expansion, describe what stands in the temple's place: faith in God, the casting of "this mountain" into the sea, prayer that needs no sacred precinct, and mutual forgiveness as the condition of being heard. "This mountain," given the setting, is plausibly the temple mount itself, though the phrase is not decisive. This is a portable, non-cultic piety: access to God by faith and prayer rather than by sacrifice or sacred place. Read against the program of this study, it sketches in miniature the community that the Gentile mission presupposes — one whose standing before God does not run through the temple or its law. The consonance with Pauline theology, access by faith apart from the cult, is a claim of theological affinity rather than literary dependence, and it has a respectable place in the scholarship that reads Mark as broadly Pauline in sympathy[36].

6.4. Fig Tree Conclusion

The fig-tree intercalation, visible in Mark's internal seams, thus belongs to the expansion's anti-cultic strand, in which the Gentile orientation appears by way of the temple's supersession rather than on the narrative surface. The cult that had excluded the nations — the court of the Gentiles given over to the traders Jesus drives out — is pronounced barren, and pronounced barren under the scripture that had named it a house of prayer for all nations. The temple's failure is its failure toward the Gentiles, and the withered tree is the sign of it. The sayings that follow then describe what comes after — faith, prayer, and forgiveness as the standing of a community that does not need the temple — sketching in miniature the Gentile-inclusive community the expansion as a whole envisions. That the pro-Gentile sense is delivered through an anti-cultic judgment, legible only against Isaiah 56 beneath the text, is characteristic of the expansion's manner, and is taken up in the account of the gospel's esotericism reserved for a forthcoming study.[18]

7. The Fragments

Beyond the firm blocks, two smaller passages invite suspicion as expansion material, with a third covered in a supplement to this study[16]. Neither of the two treated here forms a large contiguous block, so neither can satisfy the third criterion. They differ on the matter of internal seams: the greatest commandment (12:28–34) shows none, while the anointing (14:3–9) may. This makes both more tenuous than the secure sections, and we do not formally include them in the reconstruction; we review them here only to indicate where the expansion's program may have left smaller traces.

7.1. Mark 12:28–34 — The Greatest Commandment

This candidate is the one where the source-critical picture is richest. First, we can note that Luke has this at a non-Markan location, satisfying one criterion. Next, we can note that Luke shows no agreement with Mark's wording against Matthew. The double love-command is shared by all three Synoptics, but the form in which Luke carries it (10:25–28) shows no dependence on Mark — it is built, rather, from Luke's other sources, the Septuagint, the sayings source (through proto-Luke), and Matthew. Two features establish this. The first is the framing. In Mark the questioner is a scribe (γραμματεύς) who approaches sympathetically, having seen that Jesus "answered well," and whom Jesus commends as "not far from the kingdom" (12:28, 34). In Matthew he is a lawyer (νομικός) who comes "testing" Jesus (πειράζων, 22:35), and the commendation is gone. Luke's questioner is likewise a lawyer (νομικός) who stands up "to test" him (ἐκπειράζων, 10:25) — the title and the hostile intent agreeing with Matthew against Mark, not with Mark. The second is the wording of the commandment itself. The Septuagint of Deuteronomy 6:5 names three faculties; Mark expands them to four, "heart, soul, mind, and strength," a fourfold form unknown to any Old Testament text; Matthew keeps three, "heart, soul, and mind." Luke has four — but his fourth element is exactly what the conflation of his sources would yield: "strength," which the Septuagint supplies and Matthew (and likely the sayings source) lacks, joined to "mind," which Matthew supplies. That Luke's order inverts Mark's — "strength, mind" where Mark has "mind, strength" — is the tell. A writer copying Mark would have small reason to transpose the pair; a writer assembling the list from the Septuagint and a Matthew-like source, neither of which presents the four in Mark's sequence, naturally arrives at a different order. Luke's commandment is a conflation of his sources, not a memory of Mark's. Thus, the first two criteria that govern the secure blocks apply: Luke attests neither its Markan position nor its Markan wording[17].

What singles this pericope out as expansion material is its uniquely Markan coda. The scribe's rejoinder (12:32–33) does not merely affirm the two commandments but ranks loving God and neighbor "more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" — a subordination of the cult that Matthew and Luke alike lack, and that states the expansion's anti-cultic program almost as a thesis. A small touch sharpens it. Repeating the command back, the scribe does not echo Jesus's word but alters it: where Jesus said "mind" (διάνοια, 12:30), the scribe says "understanding" (σύνεσις, 12:33) — comprehension, insight, the faculty of putting things together. The substitution is Mark's, and it is pointed: the one who grasps that love outranks sacrifice is marked as one who *understands*, and understanding is, in this gospel, the faculty of those who perceive what the cult does not. On the surface the saying speaks only of love over sacrifice;

read within the program the expansion has by now disclosed, the anti-cultic insight is of a piece with the turn to the nations — the sense Mark's surface conceals and his telling would have supplied.

This pericope also bears on the relationship between canonical Mark and the sayings source, and here the evidence runs deeper than the criteria alone. On the model argued here, canonical Mark did not originate the love-command; he took a simpler form of it from the sayings source and elaborated it for his own ends — the same borrowing traced elsewhere in this series[18], where Mark takes a saying the source supplied and drives it to the anti-cultic conclusion his program required. Two facts about Marcion's Evangelion support this. The first is that the pericope is attested there at all, in what our model takes to be its proto-Luke form: the sayings-source version, reaching Marcion through proto-Luke and owing nothing to Mark. The second is more pointed. Marcion's text does not attest "neighbor" here — it carries the love of God without the love of neighbor joined to it. That is precisely the form we posit for the sayings source, before canonical Mark's expansion welded the two commands together and set them above the cult. A Marcion presence is stronger evidence than a Marcion absence, since Marcion abridged but did not compose; that the pericope stands in his text, and stands there in the God-only form our stratigraphy predicts, is as close to confirmation as this kind of reconstruction affords.

The document tree then reads as follows:

Stage 1 – Proto-Mark does not have this pericope.

Stage 2 – The sayings source has a pericope like this. But it is only about love of God and not neighbor. Its wording is Matthew's "heart, soul, and mind", and it does not contain the scribe's reply or the subordination of the Temple cult.

Stage 3 – Canonical Mark utilizes this for his own purposes. He adds the language of "neighbor" and "burnt offerings and sacrifice" and "understanding" and "strength".

Stage 4 – Proto-Luke is based only on the sayings source.

Stage 5 – Matthew works from canonical Mark and the sayings source. He shows features of both. He has Mark's order, and Mark's "neighbor". Matthew retains the sayings source's "heart, soul, and mind", and drops Mark's subordination of the Temple cult and "understanding".

Stage 6 – canonical Luke has the sayings source version through proto-Luke, and has access to Matthew. He adds "neighbor" here based on Matthew's version. And he conflates the attribute list in his sources with the list from the Septuagint. He brings over Matthew's lawyer who tests Jesus, as a framing.

Stage 7 – Marcion reflects the text of proto-Luke (and thus the sayings source).

This is a complex history, and one we need not have correct in every detail for the pericope to make its point. What it shows, on our model, is canonical Mark drawing a saying from the sayings source and turning what he found toward the subordination of the cult — the scribe's "more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" being the expansion's own addition, not the source's. That canonical Mark should borrow from the sayings source in this way is not unique to this passage, a point taken up in the next paper of this series[18].

As a candidate for the expansion the pericope answers two of the formal criteria and carries the program; it falls short of the secure blocks only in being a single pericope rather than a large one, and in showing no internal seam of its own. On that basis it is the strongest of the smaller candidates, though it is held outside the formal reconstruction — not because its expansion status is in doubt, but because the secure list is confined to the large, seamed blocks.

7.2. Mark 14:3–9 — The Anointing

Luke's anointing scene (7:36–50) is a different episode in a different place, so the pericope satisfies both halves of the "no knowledge of Mark" criterion: Luke attests neither its Markan position nor its Markan wording. It is also absent from Marcion's Evangelion. Marcion is an imperfect witness — he abridged his text in places on his own account — so a single absence is corroboration rather than proof; but here it is consistent with the pericope's having been lacking in proto-Luke, and — as the criteria independently indicate — absent from proto-Mark.

The woman's significance lies in the anti-cultic key the expansion sounds in the fig tree and the greatest commandment. What she performs is an *anointing* — and anointing is a priestly act, the rite by which kings and priests and the holy things were consecrated. Though the scene names the act a preparation for burial (14:8), the gesture itself carries the older resonance: the Messiah — the "anointed one" — is anointed not in the temple and not by a priest but by an unnamed woman, a layperson, in a private house, and the house of a leper at that, a place of ritual impurity. The true consecration of the Christ takes place entirely outside the cult. The expander's placement makes the point unmistakable. The pericope is set into the passion plot — the chief priests conspiring just before (14:1–2), Judas going out to betray just after (14:10–11) — so that the temple authorities' plot to kill the Messiah stands on either side of an outsider's act of consecrating him. The legitimate cult conspires; the marginal woman anoints. It is the same reversal the fig tree enacts against the temple, here compressed into a single scene.

On this reading the closing saying is the expander's signature rather than an isolated universalism: because the true anointing is freed from the temple, what the woman has done "will be told in the whole world, wherever the gospel is preached" (14:9). The extra-cultic act has worldwide scope — the Gentile reach following from the supersession of the cult rather than standing on its own. The reading is offered as affinity, not as a datum the pericope announces. The unit satisfies the first two criteria, sounds the program's anti-cultic note, and even shows a possible seam, interrupting the passion plot; but it forms no large block, and it is held outside the reconstruction accordingly.

8. The Author and His Moment

If the expansion carries the program described here, something follows about the hand that made it, and something narrower about when. Neither can be established with the security of the source-critical results; both are offered as inference from them.

That the expander was the gospel's own author, and not a second hand working on another's book, rests on four considerations, none decisive alone. First, the expansion is built on an understanding of the base that a reader does not have and an author does: each Israel-facing scene of proto-Mark is answered at exactly the points where it is Israel-facing — territory, crowd, number, the word for the basket, the Exodus furniture of the first feeding — and the answers are cross-referenced inside the text (8:19–20). Whoever did that knew what the first feeding was for. Second, the expander works in the base author's own idiom. Intercalation is the signature Markan technique, and proto-Mark has it with Luke as witness (Jairus and the woman, 5:21–43; the sending and the Baptist's death, 6:7–30); the expansion uses it in the same way, wrapping the cleansing in the fig tree and the Beelzebul charge in the family's alarm. Third, the vocabulary does not split. In the statistical study that opened this series, the Markan categories Luke never carried — which is where the expansion lives — behave no differently from the Markan categories he did. The sharpest instance is Mark's own vocabulary on either side of the divide: Markan words in passages Luke carries predict Markan words in passages he does not (121 → 021) at a corrected significance indistinguishable from zero ([1], see the full results table in the supplements). A fifth of the gospel written by another hand is where that profile would divide, and it does not. Fourth, the enlarged gospel replaced the shorter one without a trace of dispute. Communities do not quietly let a stranger's revision supplant their gospel; they let the author's. The one earlier form in this model that did survive separately — proto-Luke, in the Evangelion — is a different case, for canonical Luke presents itself in its prologue as a new work drawing on earlier ones, and so did not need to pass as its predecessor. Taken

together these make proto-Mark's own author the probable expander; a close associate working with his knowledge and in his manner would explain the same facts, nearly as well, and nothing here depends on choosing between them.

The author stood in the Pauline mission. This is not an argument from later tradition but from the expansion itself, whose theology is Paul's at the points where Paul is most himself: the abolition of the clean/unclean boundary as the charter of table-fellowship (7:15; Gal 2:11–14; Rom 14:14); the Gentiles as those "far off" now brought near (8:3; Isa 57:19; Eph 2:13, 17); the Twelve constituted under the Servant's commission to be "a light to the nations" (Isa 49:6), the verse Paul and Barnabas cite to justify their turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47); and the order of salvation — to the Jew who saw, then to the Greek who hears — that is the architecture of Romans (Rom 10:17). An author who built his additions on these texts stood where Paul stood.

So, on the present reading, did the author of the base. That Mark's theology is Pauline in shape is not a novel claim — Marcus[36] has argued it at length, and the affinities are widely recognized — and the third study of this series presses it further, finding in proto-Markan material a reserved statement of Pauline soteriology, justification by participation in Christ, built on the salt of Leviticus 2:13 and Paul's idiom of the body presented as an acceptable sacrifice[14]. The expansion's Paulinism is thus not a new orientation laid over an older gospel but the enlargement of one the base already carried, now turned outward to the question of the nations — which is what the same-author argument above would predict.

The Mark of the Pauline letters and of Acts — John Mark, companion of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25; 13:5; Phlm 24; Col 4:10) — is a more natural candidate for such work than the interpreter of Peter of the later tradition. That tradition (Papias, in Eusebius[37], *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15; cf. 1 Pet 5:13) is not neutral testimony on the question; why it should be weighed as a report from within the controversy the expansion engages, rather than as evidence standing above it, is argued in the study that follows[14].

One earlier proposal for a two-stage Mark should be set beside this one, because its best observation survives and its division does not. Trocmé[13] argued that chapters 1–13 were an early gospel from the Hellenist mission, hostile to the Jerusalem leadership, the Twelve, and Jesus's family, to which a passion narrative was later joined by another hand. The division has no witness — Luke carries the passion, and on the criteria of this study it is proto-Markan — and the method used here rejects it on the same grounds on which it accepts the blocks above. But the polemic Trocmé found is real, and its evidence is instructive: the family that thinks Jesus beside himself (3:20–21), the hearts hardened after the loaves

(6:52), the incomprehension over the leaven (8:14–21). Every one of those passages falls in the expansion. Trocmé saw the edge rightly and, lacking Luke as a stratifying witness, assigned it to the base. The present reconstruction keeps his observation and moves it to the layer where its texts actually sit — which fits his own setting for the author better than his division did, since the program against the Temple that the expansion carries is what the Hellenists of Acts 6–8 were accused of.

The moment is fixed relatively by the model itself: the expansion was made after proto-Mark had branched toward the proto-Lukan line and before Matthew drew on the enlarged gospel. Within that window its absolute date is the date of canonical Mark, on which the present study takes no independent position; the material it assigns to the expansion — the Gentile mission argued episode by episode, the temple pronounced barren under the oracle that had made it a house of prayer for all nations — is compatible with a date on either side of the war, and readers who date Mark from chapter 13 will place the expansion accordingly. What the expansion's character does show is that the question of the nations was, for its author, still a question: a gospel that presses the case so insistently is the product of a time when the case still needed pressing. The fuller shape of that dispute is the subject of the next study.

9. Conclusion

The case for a proto-Mark advanced here does not begin from the theology of the expansion but arrives at it, and it rests not on any single observation but on the convergence of several, repeated across independent blocks. The blocks were isolated by formal criteria indifferent to content — material that Luke attests in neither Markan wording nor Markan sequence, and large enough to suspect block insertion into a scroll. An additional criterion was discovered in the analysis: the expansions are all marked in canonical Mark by internal seams where the inserted matter was joined. This fourth criterion, internal seams, when combined with Luke's apparent lack of knowledge of the same material provides the strongest of probabilistic arguments in favor of the existence of proto-Mark.

Three blocks meet this standard securely: the Great Omission of 6:45–8:26, excepting the Bethsaida healing that closes it; the Beelzebul controversy together with the appointment of the Twelve; and the intercalated cursing of the fig tree. That all three should prove, on inspection, to share a single pro-Gentile and anti-cultic tendency is a result of the analysis, not a premise of it — and it is this order of discovery that separates the present argument from a thematic reading in search of its own confirmation.

The force of the case is cumulative, and it can be counted. For the three secure, multi-pericope blocks the record is complete on both marks: three of three carry an internal Markan seam, and three of three share the pro-Gentile theme. Relaxing the size criterion to admit single-pericope candidates that meet the other tests brings the total to seven — the three secure blocks, two smaller fragments treated here, the night trial of the accompanying supplement, and the secret-seed parable examined in the study that follows. Of these seven, six show a seam in Mark, and all seven fit the theme. Each alignment, taken alone, might be explained away: a given seam as Mark's own roughness, a given omission as Lukan abbreviation, a given theme as coincidence. But the question the accumulation poses is not about any one case. It is what hypothesis makes it probable that formally-identified blocks should, six times in seven, fall on a Markan seam, and, seven times in seven, converge on one theme. Accident and deliberate omission must treat each alignment as a separate stroke of luck; the expansion hypothesis explains them all at once, as the trace of a single hand adding themed material to a scroll and leaving seams where it joined.

Two alternative accounts of the same data fail where the expansion hypothesis succeeds. Accidental loss — a damaged exemplar behind Luke — cannot explain why the missing matter should be, pair after pair, the Gentile member of a doublet whose Israel member Luke retains: a torn leaf removes a span of text, but it does not excise the four thousand while sparing the five thousand, or the walking on the water while sparing the storm. Physical damage does not select one side of a thematic pair. And the pairing aside, neither damage nor excision can explain why all the blocks should share one tendency; a tear has no thematic preference, and Luke was demonstrably not anti-Gentile. Deliberate omission by Luke also founders on a dilemma: the excised material is at once too contiguous to have been removed pericope by pericope and too useful to have been discarded wholesale, since it contains precisely the Gentile-facing episodes — the Syrophoenician woman, the feeding of the four thousand — that Luke's own program would have welcomed. Only an expansion of Mark, made after proto-Mark had already branched toward Luke, accounts for material present in Matthew's Mark, absent from Luke's, and coherent in its design.

That design is the positive burden of the study. The added matter is not a heap of congenial episodes but a structured composition built on Isaiah: the paired feedings with their twelve κόφινοι and seven σπυρίδες and the self-citation that counts them; the sending and the appointing of the Twelve — its commissioning recast through the servant sent to the nations of Isaiah 49; the stilled storm and the walking on the water as the first and the new Exodus, sealed by the ἐγώ εἰμι; the blind man of Bethsaida and the deaf-mute of the Decapolis answering to the μογιλάλος of Isaiah 35; the declaration that cleanses

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all foods; and the withered fig tree set against the temple that was to have been a house of prayer for all the nations. The coherence of this program across otherwise unconnected blocks is itself evidence that one hand added them, and added them to a purpose.

The reconstruction claims only what the criteria secure. Smaller fragments that share the program's tendency but not its formal marks — the scribe's subordination of sacrifice to love among them — have been left outside it, lest a thematic judgment be smuggled in where a formal one is wanted. What the criteria do secure is considerable: a proto-Mark circulating in the orbit of Paul's mission, expanded by its own author into the gospel Matthew knew, while an earlier form passed through proto-Luke to Luke.

The statistical foundation on which this rests was laid in a prior study[1]. The further claim — that the expansion not only carries its program but veils it, reading its scroll aloud while expounding a hidden sense to those prepared to receive it — belongs to the study that follows[14], where Mark as a reserved text disclosing Pauline soteriology in the reading will be the main focus and the salt of Mark 9:50 will be the centerpiece.

A full reading-text reconstruction of the proposed proto-Mark — drawing on this study together with its companion pieces, and so extending beyond the three blocks secured here — is available at https://www.davegentile.com/synoptics/protomark.html. It is offered as illustration rather than as part of the formal argument: it shows how the proposed proto-Mark reads with the expansion removed and its seams rejoined, though its wording is conventional and some of its judgments go beyond what the present criteria establish.

Statements and Declarations

Use of Generative AI

Claude (Opus 4.8) was used for copyediting, drafting and condensing expository passages. All scholarly and interpretive judgments are the author's own. The author reviewed and verified all AI-assisted material and takes full responsibility for the content of the study.

Footnotes

[1] The existence of a proto-Luke is not essential to the thesis of this paper; the reader may read "proto-Luke" as simply "Luke" throughout. It strengthens the confirmation offered in §7.1, but none of the

arguments for proto-Mark presented here depend on it.

[2] A unit Luke relocates while keeping wording that agrees with Mark against Matthew is not expansion material but proto-Markan material Luke possessed and redactionally moved. Dispersal with Markan agreement is the signature of possession; joint absence in position and wording is the signature of source-absence. Only the second satisfies the criterion.

[3] For material Matthew attests, the question is at least a clean one — it stood in canonical Mark before Matthew, and is either proto-Markan material Luke passed over or expansion. For Sondergut Mark, attested by neither, a further possibility opens. Some of it is proto-Markan material that both later evangelists passed over: 14:51–52 and 9:49 are examples, and their placement is argued in [14]; the details at 1:41 and 1:43 may be examples as well, though we do not pursue them. And a small residue of glosses and framing asides may be later than either layer: the κατὰ μόνας of 4:10, the private-explanation notice of 4:34b, and the house-settings of 7:17–18 (with the parenthesis at 7:19) and 10:10–12. Sorting that residue turns on the character of the asides themselves and is left to the third study[14]; it is not attempted here.

[4] If the reader rejects the notion of a proto-Luke, the argument reduces to a plain observation about the canonical text: Luke reproduces Mark almost in full, but takes only selected material from Matthew. It is that difference in his handling of his two sources — near-complete fidelity to the one, selective borrowing from the other — on which the point here depends, and it holds whether or not a proto-Luke stood behind the canonical Gospel.

[5] The geographical awkwardness of Bethsaida in this stretch — sent toward Bethsaida at 6:45, yet the feeding located near Bethsaida at Luke 9:10 — has generated a range of harmonizing proposals: that πρὸς Βηθσαϊδάν at 6:45 is a scribal intrusion, for which, however, there is no manuscript support[38], or that two settlements named Bethsaida stood on either side of the Jordan inflow, for which there is no evidence beyond inference from the gospel texts. See France[39] and Marcus[27] for the state of the question. Theissen[40] reads the geographical difficulties of this part of the gospel — Bethsaida here, the route from Tyre through Sidon to the Decapolis at 7:31, the unlocated Dalmanutha at 8:10 — as the marks of an author writing at some distance from Galilee and arranging his itinerary by theological rather than topographical logic. The present argument does not turn on resolving the geography.

[6] The figure is order-of-magnitude only; it holds across any reasonable division of Mark 1–9 into units and any reasonable count of Luke's other omissions, since the probability that eight independently chosen units fall in one unbroken run is small on all of them.

[7] The link is thematic, not verbal — Isa 57:19 / Eph 2:13, 17 has μακράν and Isa 49:12 LXX has πόρρωθεν.

[8] Fowler[35] rejects the numerical symbolism, in part on the ground that a reader could hardly be expected to puzzle it out. The difficulty is real; the present series meets it by arguing that Mark performed his text and expounded it in the telling[18]. Fowler also does not consider the correspondence of the five loaves and two fish to the manna week of Exodus 16, argued in §4.1.1 above.

[9] The word appears also, in some witnesses, at Exodus 4:11, of Moses's impediment, which God made and did not heal.

[10] In our forthcoming study[18] we examine the overlap between canonical Mark and the sayings source in more detail. One example is also treated here in §7.1 below.

[11] This accounts for what would otherwise be a difficulty: Luke has the "true family" pericope (8:19–21) but it does not frame the Beelzebul controversy in Luke. On our model that is an expected result — Luke inherited the family sentences in its proto-Markan position, before the boat departure, while the copy canonical Mark relocated to bracket the Beelzebul controversy is the expansion's own. Luke's family material is the inherited unit, not a trace of canonical Mark's frame; its proto-Markan position is what Luke attests.

[12] The previous study[1] treated this agreement as a residual exception explained by Lukan style; on closer inspection there is no exception to explain, since Luke's form is Matthew 12:32's.

[13] The fig-tree material may be a further instance of the pattern examined in a forthcoming study[18], in which canonical Mark's expansion elaborates simple sayings drawn from the source; the faith to move a mountain (11:23) may be another. Both are attested in Marcion, and so stood in the proto-Lukan line independently of Mark. Another example is examined in this paper, §7.1, below.

[14] The enacted-judgment reading is developed at length in Telford[41] and shared by major commentators; see France[39], Marcus[42], and Hooker[43], who read the withering as an enacted prophecy against the temple.

[15] Our two witnesses to proto-Mark, Luke and canonical Mark, diverge at many small points besides the one treated here (e.g. 'the seats of those who sold pigeons,' 11:15) — minor differences of wording and detail that carry no thematic or structural weight. We do not claim the method resolves these, nor that every divergence marks an expansion seam; where a difference is inert — bearing on neither the expansion's program nor its narrative construction — we leave open which witness preserves the earlier

reading. The method is invoked only where absence from Luke converges with thematic fit and an internal seam, as it does for the clause "for all the nations."

[16] A reader may ask about Mark 10:1–12, which has a similar surface profile — Luke lacks the controversy at Mark's position and carries only the bare ruling (16:18), in a form kin to Matt 5:32 and attested in the Evangelion, while Matthew carries both — but it is not a candidate. The pericope belongs to proto-Mark. Why Luke's line nevertheless passed over it, preferring the sayings-source form, is a question of a different kind from the one this study asks, and it is taken up in the third study alongside the adjacent salt saying (9:49–50), which Luke treats the same way[18].

[17] The Septuagint of Deut 6:5 reads καρδία, ψυχή, δύναμις. Mark's fourth term, and Luke's third term, is not δύναμις but ἰσχύς, and this agreement of Luke with Mark in a single vocable against both Matthew and Deuteronomy requires comment. It does not indicate Markan contact. The same Deuteronomic formula recurs in the Septuagint with ἰσχύς in place of δύναμις at 4 Kgdms 23:25 (= 2 Kgs 23:25), where Josiah turns to the Lord ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶἐν ὅλῃ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ ἰσχύι αὐτοῦ; the formula circulated in Greek in both forms, and a writer supplying "strength" from the Septuagint could arrive at ἰσχύς without Mark. That Luke sets the term in a different position from Mark — third, before "mind," where Mark has it fourth — is the surer sign that he did.

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